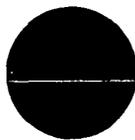
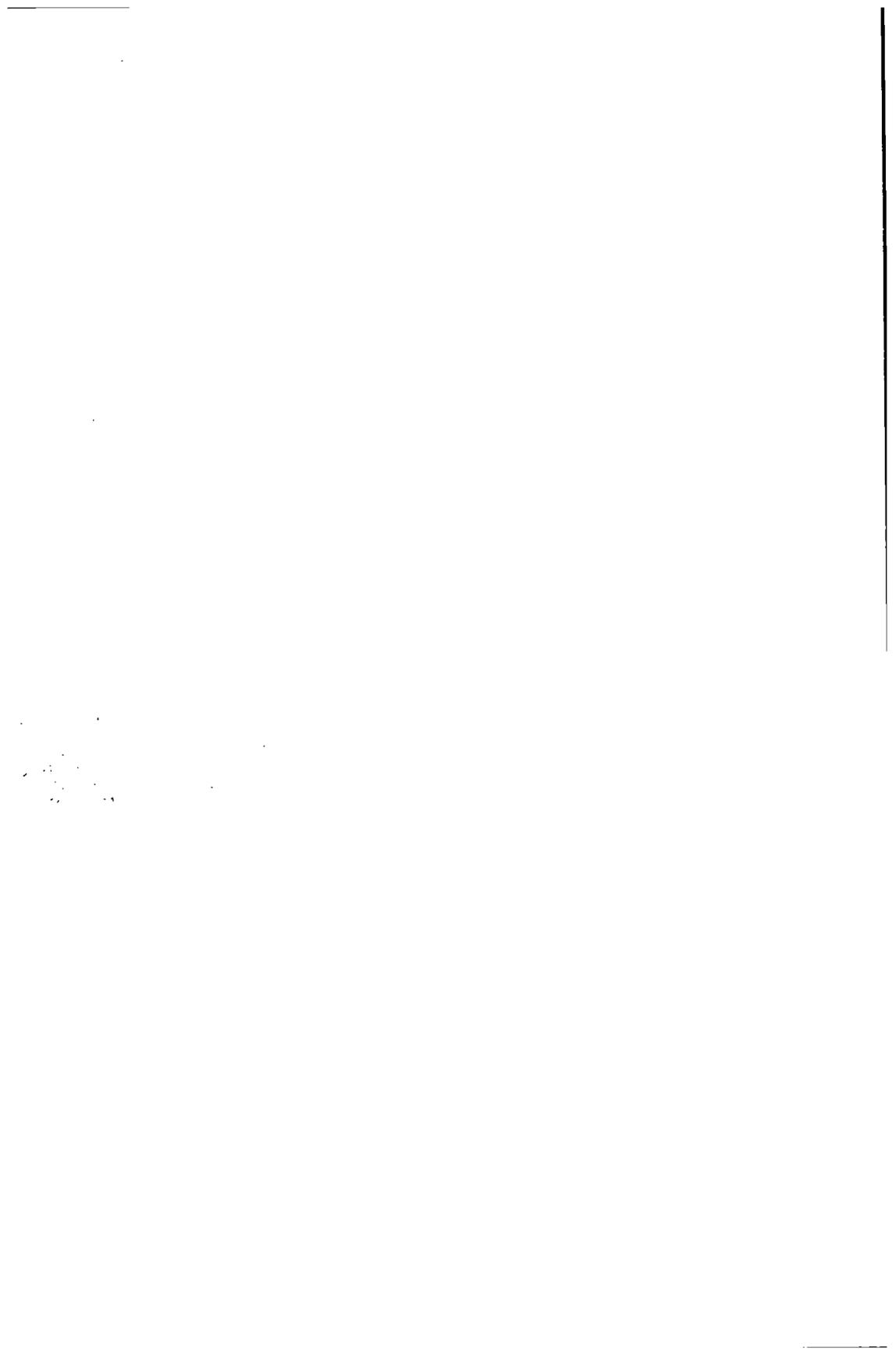


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Tools for Building Effective  
Community Corrections

Leaders'  
Perceptions of  
Intergovernmental  
Issues



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The Center for  
Community  
Corrections

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National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)  
Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000

# Leaders' Perceptions of Intergovernmental Issues

By Mary K. Shilton with Margot Lindsay

CCC: A public-private partnership promoting an effective system of community corrections  
October, 2000



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This project is dedicated to the following propositions:

- ★ That successful community corrections depends on intergovernmental collaboration which recognizes the needs and promises of each level of government;
- ★ That successful community corrections demands a genuine partnership with the community;
- ★ That the optimum use of community corrections requires public officials and a public who understand its purpose and are willing to support its programs;
- ★ That small, relatively inexpensive changes in the right places can do much to increase the likelihood of successful community corrections.

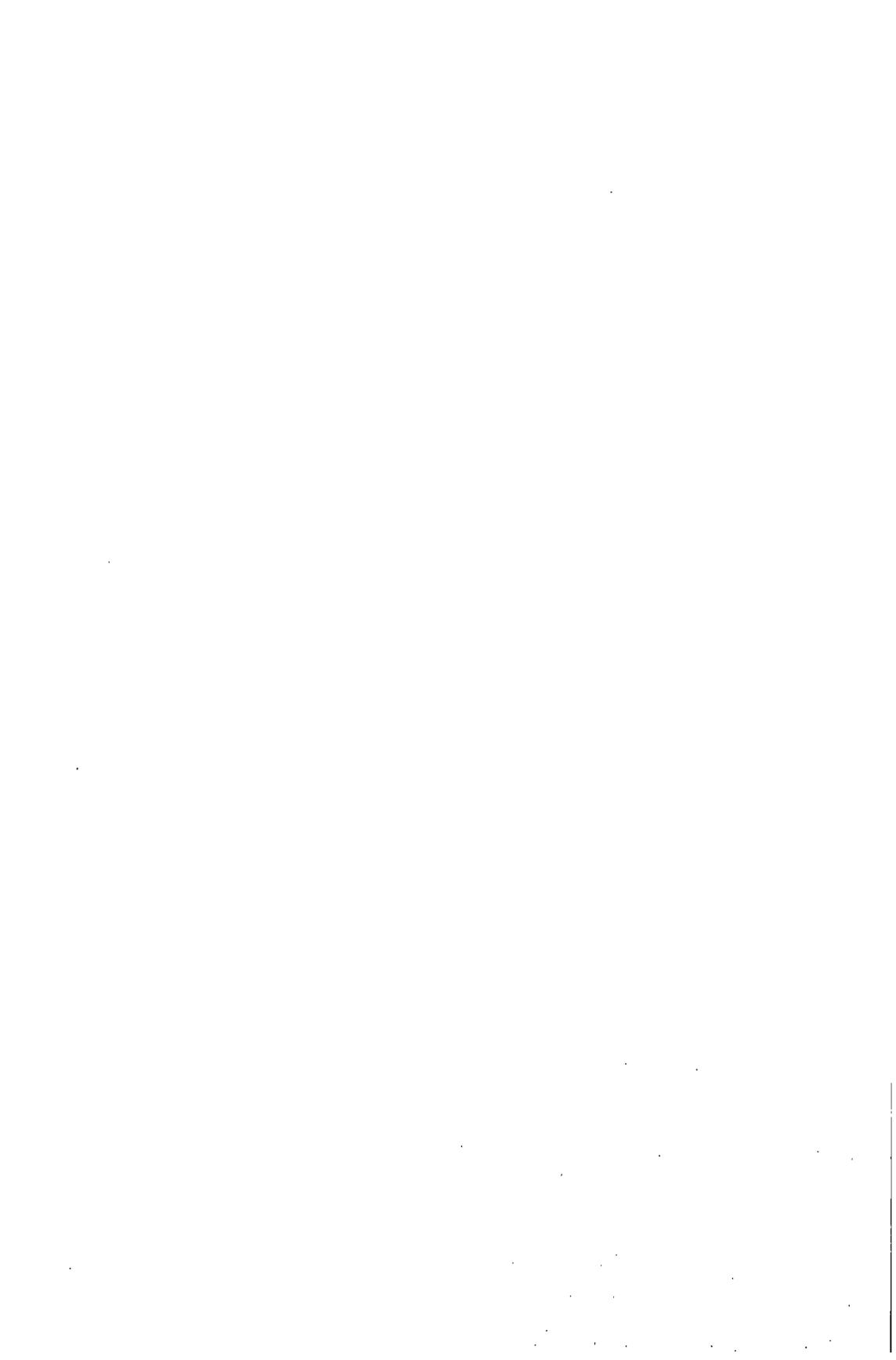
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*"The message is clear. Ask prisoners, taxpayers, victims, correctional officials, or politicians who are willing to tell you the truth: they will all answer you that our criminal justice system is not working.*

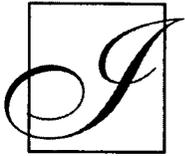
*I think it's high time we faced the real facts about the criminal justice crisis in America. We need prisons for dangerous offenders—but nearly half the people who are in prison today are there for nonviolent offenses."*

Charles Colson  
Dan Van Ness

**In *Convicted: New Hope for Ending America's Crime Crisis*, Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1988.**



## Elected Officials and Community Corrections



In their 1988 book, Charles Colson and Dan Van Ness offered

encouragement for addressing the crime crisis. They stressed the importance of community programs, rather than prison for the nonviolent offenders. Colson and Van Ness advocate programs that work and a different approach toward crime, victims, offenders and communities. They urge citizens to demand constructive solutions and not rhetoric from politicians and other leaders.

The Center for Community Corrections ("Center") wanted to study the views of elected officials and criminal justice decision makers concerning their roles and such new approaches as community corrections. Recent findings of a January 2000 survey conducted by the Center offer encouragement—leaders and elected officials stress the need to share information, collaborate and increase awareness about improving public safety. Leaders note that suc-

cessful programs for those under community corrections supervision require a range of services to reduce rates of re-offending. This article outlines suggestions from the survey, literature and the experience of the field about how such goals could be achieved.

The Center's survey of key elected officials and criminal justice leaders, and discussion groups with key leaders in the community corrections field and legislators, explored ways that community corrections can help to increase public safety. Our respondents outlined issues and experiences in focus groups and surveys. They identified gains in community corrections and obstacles encountered. We asked them about their sources of information and views on promising approaches in the field.

The results of the Center's survey of elected officials and criminal justice professionals across the nation stressed the need to build bridges

with treatment professionals, victims, communities and law enforcement. Across all disciplines and regions, participants were committed to:

- preventing crime,
- addressing the needs of youthful and adult offenders,
- working closely with courts, and
- improving offender case management, information systems and treatment programs.

In short, respondents proposed using every available tool and technique to improve public safety and prevent recycling of offenders into jails and prisons.

## THE VIEWS OF ELECTED OFFICIALS ABOUT IMPROVING COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS



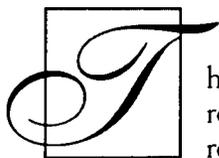
lected officials are critical to effecting change. They are uniquely capable of spanning boundaries and making changes to reduce crime in their communities. When asked about improvements in the justice system, many gave examples of involvement across government agencies and systems. They work closely with criminal justice professionals of many dis-

### ABOUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

This monograph provides information based on questionnaire responses from 91 state and local criminal justice leaders and elected officials in January 2000. This was designed to provide input from key informants and leaders from elected groups and other criminal justice professionals. The legislative and county commissioner respondents were members of the Justice Committee of the National Conference of State Legislators and the Justice and Public Safety Committee of the National Association of Counties. District Attorneys were selected from Community Corrections Acts states. Correctional leaders from probation, parole and private community agency providers were also contacted. Judges from community corrections states were also surveyed. Additionally, representatives of business, clergy, education and volunteer organizations were included. Responses for each question were recorded and then clustered by categories. The study was designed to be a sample of key informants and leaders in various sectors of criminal justice affecting community corrections. The survey does not represent a random national sample, but rather a sample of individuals in a dozen states where community corrections activities are ongoing. A copy of the survey questions and response data can be obtained upon request from the Center.

ciplines to provide leadership. County officials are responsible for local health, education, safety and probation budgets. They mentioned concerns about neighborhoods that are most impacted by crime. State legislators oversee state budgets for mental health, substance abuse, statewide probation and parole, corrections, court systems, education and other human services. Some described involvement in criminal code and review of sentencing policies and practices. Judges were often seen as key players in improving correctional programs.

## THE CONTEXT FOR JUSTICE SYSTEM CHANGES



The Center's survey results noted interest in recent reforms involving victims and citizens. During the past decade, elected officials, citizens and criminal justice leaders have embarked on many reforms that have transformed the criminal justice system. Such reforms are characterized by collaboration and use of new technologies to improve communication and inform decision making. A problem-solving approach to crime and punishment has been another characteristic of emerging reforms. Simultaneously, many communities have engaged in debates about

restorative justice, an approach that emphasizes harmony, reparation and justice for all parties. Restorative or community justice also emphasizes repaying society and victims for harms resulting from crime.

An overwhelming majority of respondents were concerned about funding, costs and resource issues. Corrections expenditures have grown faster than education budgets in many states as more persons are sent to prison for more lengthy terms than in recent years. Additionally, there has been a moderate increase in resources devoted to prevention of crime through engagement of communities and education and treatment of offenders to reduce recidivism. Several professional subspecialties have grown from innovations such as drug courts, community policing, drug testing, information technologies, job training and placement and other issues related to offender management. Yet despite this growth in the field generally, per capita expenditures for community corrections have barely kept up with increased correctional populations every year.

Focusing funding on innovations such as drug courts or community policing may be undercut when jurisdictions do not have an infrastructure to support them. Participants in our focus groups noted that a concerted effort is

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needed to improve relations between responsible agencies because conflict sometimes results due to turf issues, disagreement on policies, enforcement priorities or daily procedures for operating programs. For example, elected officials listed an array of concerns about obstacles to improved interagency and intergovernmental relations when queried about their experiences. Juveniles placed in adult insti-

tutions, lack of residential programs for probationers who need a place to live, mental health programs that will take mentally ill offenders were mentioned as problems where infrastructure is needed. Many of the respondents perceived lack of state and local problem solving as the reason why they are stymied. Similar concerns were offered in response to open-ended questions across all groups and jurisdictions.

## Leadership Views About Improving Intergovernmental Relations

**R**espondents raised many examples of successes that could be tried in other locations. Generally, they were concerned about who is responsible to follow through on making improved intergovernmental collaborations happen. Most responses were positive about getting justice components to work together. Several mentioned accomplishments through partnerships between public and private agencies.

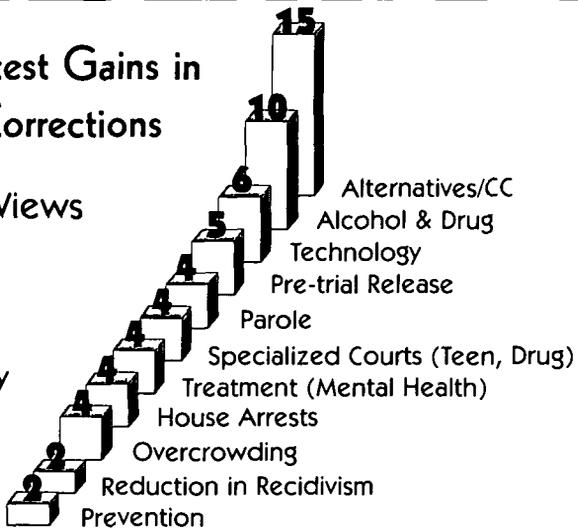
### RECOGNIZED GAINS

**R**espondents frequently listed one or more items when asked an open-ended question about the biggest gains with respect to their community corrections system. Figure 1 notes that expanded community corrections alternatives were the most frequently mentioned

**FIGURE 1. Greatest Gains in Community Corrections**

Leaders Views

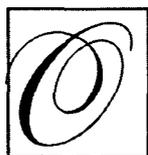
SOURCE: 1999 Survey by Center for Community Corrections



gains. The second most frequently mentioned gain was alcohol and drug programs for offenders. Other gains recognized as major advances in the individual jurisdictions included technology, prevention, parole and probation services, specialized courts, treatment, house arrest, relief of overcrowding, reduction in recidivism and pre-trial release.

The wide range of significant gains is consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of community corrections. It stretches from juveniles to adult populations, from pre-trial release through parole, from new technologies to better agency management and specialized courts. All of these reported gains were seen as significant advances for public safety in respondents' communities.

## OPINIONS ABOUT SOURCES OF INFORMATION

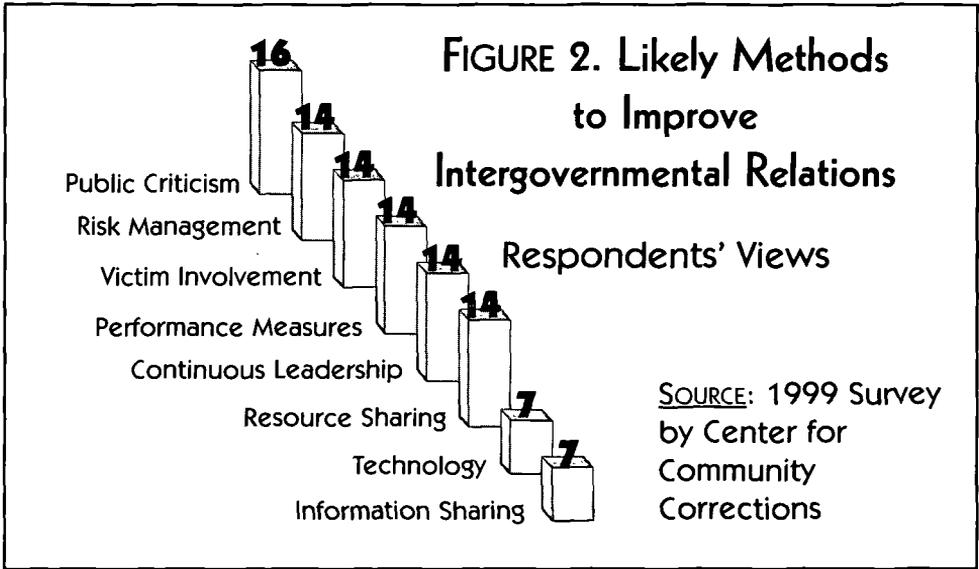


Over half of those surveyed were most likely to get reliable information about community corrections programs from corrections agencies and probation (36%) and other non-criminal justice government publications (19%). Several noted the importance of associations in providing information concerning community corrections.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents, noting various information sources such as the media (21%), professional journals (9%), citizens (1%), other (7%). Community corrections information is thus available from a variety of sources, and information is used by elected officials to inform their decisions concerning improved community corrections programs and services.

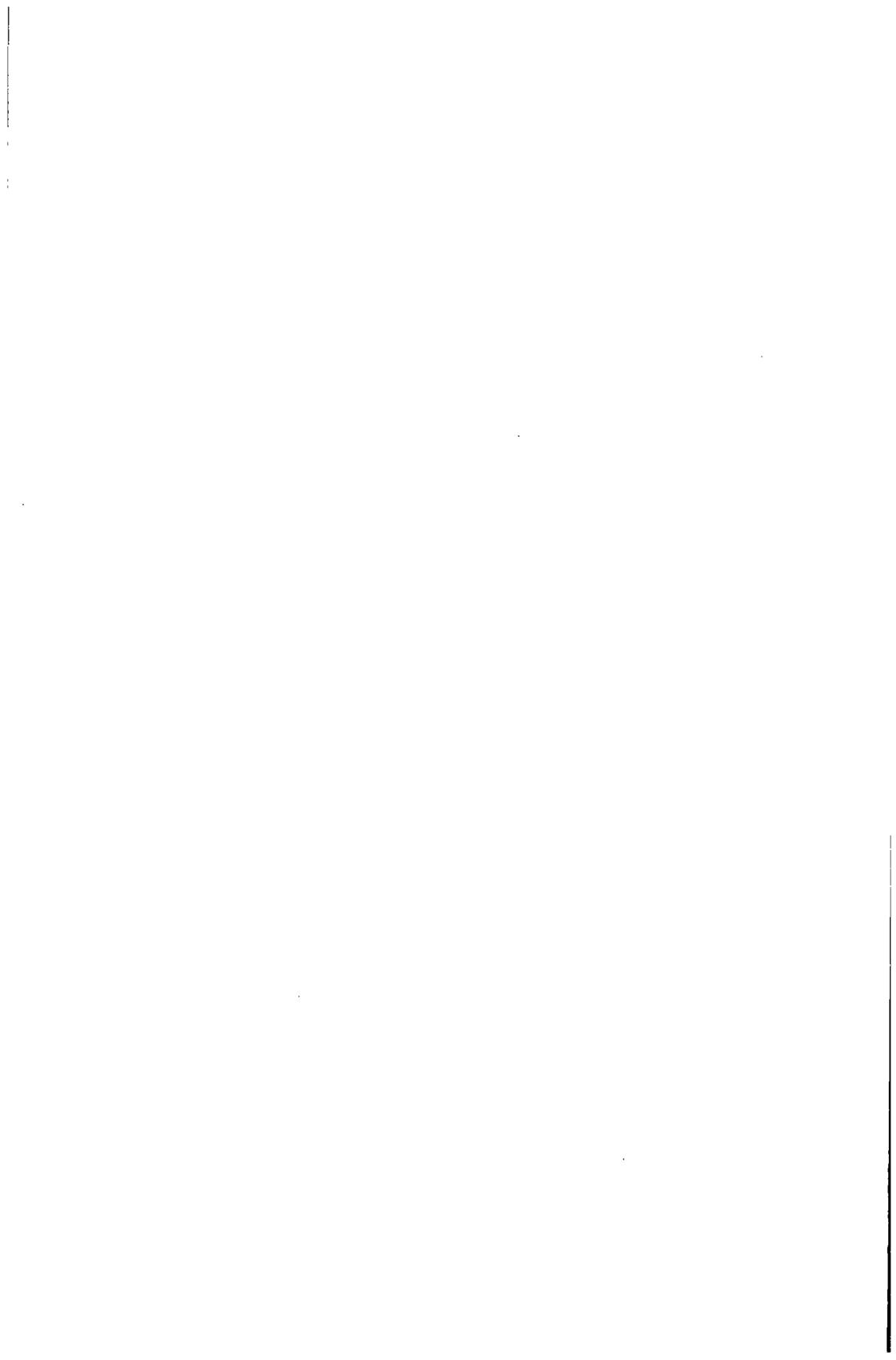
When asked to rate the level of awareness of their peers about community corrections, most elected officials with positive assessments of their peers tended to view other similarly elected officials in a favorable light. (Local elected officials were more likely to view other local officials favorably.)

Those with more negative assessments of their peers tended to view non-elected and non-criminal justice professionals as less aware of community corrections issues. For example, business, community, religious, volunteer and educational groups were more likely to be viewed as less well informed. Those with more positive views had more positive views toward business, education, community, volunteer and religious groups, but they were generally seen as less well informed than professionals or elected officials. In focus groups, criminal justice professionals commented on the need to better inform such citizen groups. So there

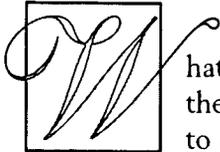


is a general perception that the public and even its most informed con-

stituent groups are barely aware of community corrections.



# Common Concerns



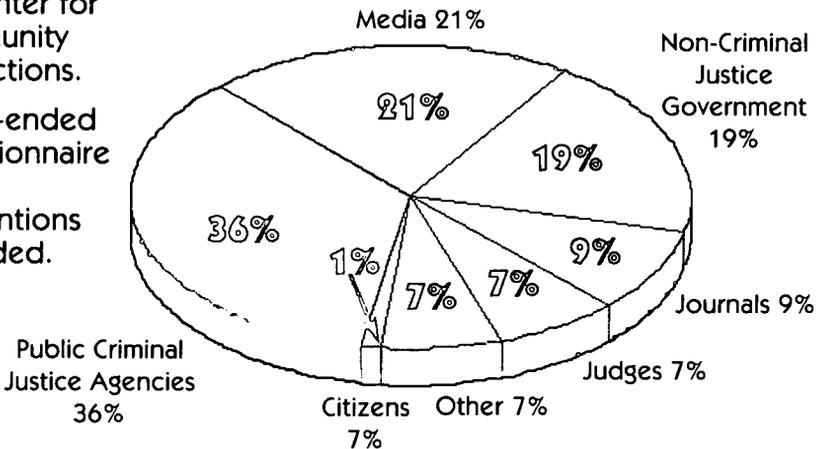
What do leaders see as the major impediments to improved community corrections? What have been their experiences? When asked open-ended questions about major

obstacles challenging community corrections programs, the respondents' views varied slightly depending on the perspective of the individual (whether a local, state, criminal justice or private agency).

### FIGURE 3. Where Respondents Get Information About Community Corrections

SOURCE: 1999 Survey by Center for Community Corrections.

Open-ended Questionnaire with all mentions recorded.



The following topics summarize basic challenges identified by the questionnaire and project focus groups:

1. The funding is unavailable or inadequate.
2. The public lacks an understanding of or is too punitive to support community corrections.
3. No one really is in charge and support is lacking in courts and criminal justice agencies.
4. Judicial cooperation must be encouraged in many places.
5. Various programs are either unavailable or do not fit client needs.

## VIEWS ON INADEQUACY OF FUNDING

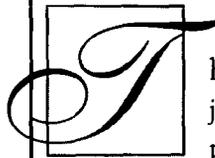


lected officials were overwhelmingly concerned about the lack of funding to meet the demand and provide quality community corrections programs. The single most frequently mentioned topic was the need for adequate resources. Local

officials faulted the state for not providing funding for offender programs. And for their part, state officials acknowledged a dearth of resources to fund such programs.

Although lack of funding was the prevailing and universally described problem, the different perspectives of intergovernmental respondents make it hard to pinpoint solutions. The tension between state and local officials was evident from many responses. Variances point to the need for dialogue between officials at various levels of government and agencies about how to resolve these issues. Without structured dialogue between governments about funding solutions to problems, agreements cannot be reached about which level of government should pay for what services. It was interesting that although many gave examples of dialogue around funding a particular facility or sanction, few gave examples of long term structured interactions between agencies and levels of government to resolve problems with funding.

## PERCEPTION OF THE PUBLIC'S VIEW



hat the public prefers jail and highly punitive programs was frequent-

ly mentioned. Respondents generally seemed concerned about the long term negative consequences of not providing programs for offenders in the community. Elected officials often did not see the need for more severe punishments but indicated that they thought the public expected more severe punishment of offenders. Such findings are consistent with earlier research pointing out that elected officials feel constrained by a public that is focused on serious and violent offenders. Such a perception constrains leadership and impedes problem solving. Several respondents noted that this causes a shifting of resources away from nonviolent offender programs. It also explains why the average sentence has been getting longer in most jurisdictions in recent years.

There is a basic discrepancy between the views of elected officials in our survey and findings of other polls and public opinion surveys concerning the public's views on crime and punishment. Part of the reason is that violent crime is a real concern for many Americans. They remain pessimistic. Even though crime rates have been steadily declining, they do not want to spend more on increased criminal justice expendi-

tures. Nevertheless, when the public is polled about community corrections options for non-violent offenders, it has shown its approval. The public especially supports providing restitution to the victim, ordering reparation or community work, and holding offenders accountable through victim offender dialogue.

When focus groups learn of intermediate sanctions for non-violent offenders, participants favor community options over prison. A survey by the International Community Corrections Association found that 75% of Americans thought that a balanced approach of prevention, punishment and treatment is better at controlling and reducing crime than incarceration.

Elected officials and other criminal justice leaders should consider how they can help separate non-violent and violent offenders when addressing community corrections options. They also should concentrate on offender work, restitution, reparation and dialogue while under community supervision because these areas are particularly important to the public. Additionally, they should consider a balanced approach which includes public education and prevention of crime.

## LACK OF SUPPORT WITHIN AND BETWEEN LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES



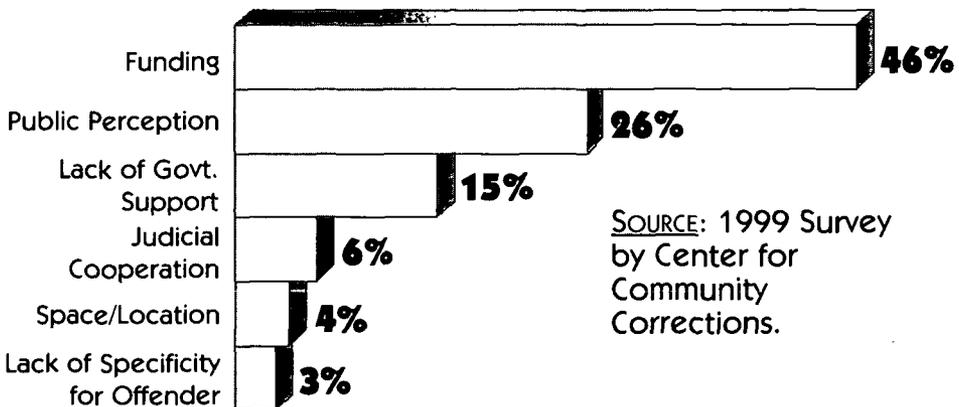
lected officials differentiate their own roles with respect to other

leaders and agencies and see them as unique. They tend to be involved in various specific issues, committees and projects. While a majority of these experts were supportive of community-based corrections, elected officials noted that many of their peers were ambivalent. That governmental leaders remain uncommitted to community corrections programs was a common concern.

Respondents noted that there is sometimes tension between communities and probation. Experts and elected officials often combine resource issues and leadership issues with concerns about lack of support for community corrections at the local, state and even federal levels. Figure 4 summarizes views about effective methods for improving intergovernmental relations.

One local elected official summed up the situation, noting that adequate state and federal funding of community-based supervision and programming was the biggest obstacle: "At least 65% of all convicted felons are on community-based supervision, not in prison. Where is most of the new federal and state funding directed? Prisons and jails."

**FIGURE 4. Perceived Obstacles for Improving Community Corrections**



## A NEED FOR MORE JUDICIAL COOPERATION

**H**ow do elected officials view judges and their roles? All types of elected officials and criminal justice leaders viewed judges as well-informed about community corrections. Judges and other criminal justice practitioners were concerned that a lack of understanding about community corrections programs at the local level, and the pressure of running for elected office impedes community corrections development. Greater efforts are needed to work with judges on developing programs that they support and to concentrate on what judges would be willing to do to improve sentencing.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

**T**he need to provide better information to citizens and neighborhood groups about the safety of community-based programs was an underlying concern. Common ground may well be developed around this issue, but it is a real problem for elected officials who must answer to specific constituencies. Lawyers who special-

ize in zoning disputes have developed specialty practices in opposition to residential facilities for correctional populations.

## LACK OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

**E**lected officials involved in the Center's survey had a general and expansive view of what community corrections can accomplish. Elected officials and criminal justice leaders shared a common concern that the types of services and programs that were available did not meet all of the needs in their communities.

Concerns about program needs focused on special needs groups:

- juveniles,
- the mentally ill or dually diagnosed offenders,
- immigrants, probation and parole facilities, and
- drug treatment and testing and offender employment programs.

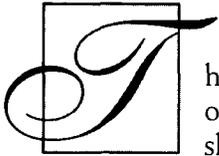
This reflects a growing awareness that public safety is increased when

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programs deal with the underlying problems known to contribute to criminal behavior. The absence of programs to address the most critical needs of nonviolent offenders was a

shared concern across disciplines. This is one area where common ground can be developed if elected officials meet regularly.

## Shared Principles for Improving Intergovernmental Partnerships



The following examples of successful partnerships were given by elected officials and criminal justice leaders:

### 1. Employ techniques to assure adequacy of funding.

Among the most common methods are those that assure that funding is certain, identifiable and adequate.

- pooled interagency resources: In Minnesota a county commissioner noted that three counties had partnered to provide adequate resources for developing their community corrections services.
- dedicated funding streams: In Community Corrections Act states, funding is available from an annual state appropriation for local programs. In a few states such as Ohio, discretionary Byrne Grant funding is also available through a statewide mechanism.

- private non-profit/public partnerships: Several county officials noted that they were able to develop specialized programs working with private service providers. In Alabama community corrections has worked closely with Child Advocacy Centers to develop a better approach to funding across the state.

- tax incentives and other benefits for neighborhoods which provide services and housing: In Maryland public housing plus aftercare is made available through a state/federal/local partnership to provide funding for neighborhoods impacted by crime.

### 2. Develop an informed public and advocacy group.

- public information teams: In Michigan statewide training and technical assistance provided by the National Institute of

Corrections have helped professionals work to provide better information to the public.

- citizen participation on advisory boards: Local board members of advisory groups in Wisconsin serve as liaisons to churches, education and businesses.
- media education and access: Elected officials mentioned that private agency providers are helpful in providing regular information to the media and informing them about new programs in the community.

**3. Seek intergovernmental support through various cooperative arrangements.**

- intermediate sanctions sentencing teams: In Oregon, Colorado and North Carolina these teams have brought together various elected and criminal justice officials with citizens to review developments and needs of a jurisdiction.
- community corrections legislation: About thirty states have some type of legislation that recognizes community corrections or probation alternatives and provides funding, technical assistance and coordination statewide. In Deschutes County, Oregon, the legislature has funded and partnered with the county on numerous innovative projects.

- interagency advisory boards: In Minnesota, Virginia and Ohio these boards provide guidance and monitor results of sentencing options.

- intergovernmental funding with incentives for reforms: In San Francisco, the community corrections office and the County Board have worked on drug enforcement and treatment protocols to develop county funded programs.

**4. Enlist judicial participation.**

- judicial oversight of program development: Judges have served on task forces to provide new facilities for community corrections programs in Oregon, Ohio and other states.
- judicial education: In Iowa and Virginia, judicial education is a part of statewide community corrections forums, and education programs.
- sentencing reform and flexibility to permit appropriate placements: In Ohio community corrections statutes govern which court will have control over managing certain community correctional facilities, and court officials and judges participate in local and statewide advisory boards.

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5. Overcome problems by developing and locating programs.

- neighborhood anti-crime group involvement in program development: In Hennepin County, Minnesota, county and city officials worked together to coordinate siting issues and develop services that coordinated with both jurisdictions.
- community and neighborhood representation on advisory boards: When new programs are developed or opened in a neighborhood, Domestic Violence Program providers and victims' advocates keep close contact with community corrections programs so that treatment and follow-through are more accountable for results.

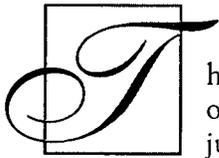
6. Develop a variety of programs to fit offender types.

- assessment of local needs: In Florida the county worked with the state and local providers to open a juvenile facility and sustain its funding.

- targeting of special groups through contract with private non-profit providers who specialize in particular types of cases: Elected officials worked with a private organization in Pennsylvania to develop funding for adults and juveniles in local program settings.
- developing public oversight of particular types of programs needed such as those for immigrants, elderly, juveniles, transitional family unification: In one state, community corrections and state agency directors meet monthly to discuss program development and oversight.
- addressing special needs: In California, special programs for female offenders have been developed to accommodate their families in residential settings where the women can serve short sentences and maintain their family bonds. In Ohio programs for elderly offenders, veterans and the disabled meet special health and psychological needs.



## Involvement in Spanning Boundaries and Making Changes



The responses of elected officials and criminal justice practitioners reveal their deep involvement in improving community-based options. Additionally, they have pointed out the importance of private philanthropy, federal agencies, citizens, neighborhood groups, victims' organizations and private agency providers.

In summary, elected and criminal justice officials view gains in interagency and intergovernmental relations as involving these stakeholders in the following ways:

- They motivate action among political leaders, the public and private sector.
- They enable solutions across jurisdictions and agencies.
- They involve public and private sectors in the shaping of community corrections programs.
- They take meaningful steps that enhance public safety.

What intergovernmental actions are seen as most likely to produce improvements? The respondents were asked about promising or possible solutions and their likelihood of moving community corrections forward. The following were some of the options that they consider most favorably. These options are consistent with their preferences and answers on other questions discussed earlier.

- sharing of information through coordinating boards, joint policy making and oversight
- interagency agreements
- intergovernmental compacts
- community corrections legislation
- restorative justice measures and other community collaborations
- victim witness programs
- criminal justice system collaborations
- pooled resources
- concentration on targeted populations and communities



## Innovations Accomplished and the Future



riminal justice leaders and elected officials support coordinated graduated sanctions and they will continue to learn how they can make them more available. They are aware that targeted services to fit clients produce better results. However, they do not have specific information about various types of programs for specific offender groups. They would very much like to see improved use of resources in the field of community corrections but are aware of budget limitations at every level of government. They approve of greater citizen and victim involvement on boards and volunteer services. However, many have negative views of the public's understanding of community corrections. Many see the value of restitution, reparation and community healing

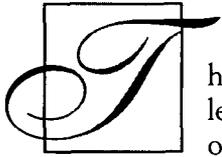
and are investigating restorative justice projects for their communities.

What remains to be accomplished? Respondents seem to be concerned about applying what is most effective in reducing offender recidivism. They are working on increasing access to services like drug and mental health treatment for offenders in their communities. They are interested in linking comprehensive job training and placement programs. Many are working with family and children's services on issues involving reunification to families. Payment of fines, fees, restitution and/or community service is a basic part of most community-based programs. Building community support and commitment through involvement and leadership is a recognized need in most places.



## References and Contacts

### ABOUT THE CENTER'S SURVEY



The Center wanted to learn about how elected officials and other leaders in the field view intergovernmental relations issues and community involvement. The purpose was to reconcile their views with earlier research showing a discrepancy between elected officials and public opinion. The survey asked questions of key informants in several fields to learn more about their experiences with intergovernmental relations in the community corrections area. If certain areas were targeted as concerns by respondents, then the Center could begin to develop research, training and technical assistance to address these areas.

The Center developed its survey after reviewing national polling questions, earlier focus groups and litera-

ture on public opinion related to crime and punishment. After some initial pre-testing and review of the survey by several experts, the final questions were developed. The Center mailed 200 questionnaires to state legislators, county elected officials, community corrections administrators, community corrections practitioners, business, education, volunteer and religious leaders. Ninety-one responses were tabulated.

The survey was designed to generate responses on two topics related to community corrections: intergovernmental relations and community involvement/participation. The intergovernmental questions were open-ended and pertained to perceptions of relationships between agencies and actors, sources of information, perceived successes, perceived obstacles.

The survey of business, volunteer, religious, and education representatives was composed of six questions. They asked about participation in

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criminal justice issues, sources of information, and perceptions of public participation in various different categories of activities. An open-ended question asked about examples of successful involvement.

Categories were developed for open-ended questions and aggregate responses were tabulated for each question category. In response to two questions that were not open-ended,

the answers were tabulated by category. Data was recorded on a spreadsheet format and tables were constructed according to various data categories. Tables and charts were constructed by cross tabulation of variables. Initial tabulation, analysis of data in categories, and entry of data were checked and verified.

Copies of survey questions and data are available upon request.

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## **About the Center for Community Corrections**

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The Center for Community Corrections is a broad coalition of former public officials, researchers and correctional professionals representing local, state, and federal concerns. The Center was created in 1987 to promote the overall concept of community-based sanctions as well as specific program options.

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