

To: Illinois Risk, Assets and Needs Assessment Task Force

From: Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Sentencing and Corrections

Re: Purpose and Scope of the Task Force

Date: May 27, 2010

The Illinois Risk, Assets and Needs Assessment (RANA) Task Force was established and convened pursuant to the Illinois Crime Reduction Act of 2009 (the “CRA”). Upon invitation from the Task Force, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) is providing technical assistance to help the Task Force meet its statutory obligations. The purpose of this memorandum is to help the Task Force clarify its authority and specify the scope of its workplan and final recommendations.

The Crime Reduction Act of 2009

The Illinois Crime Reduction Act of 2009 recognizes that an assessment system is the engine that drives effective correctional programming. “[S]upervision and correctional programs are most effective at reducing future crime when they accurately assess offender risks, assets and needs, and use these assessment results to assign supervision levels and target programs to criminogenic needs.” (CRA, Section 15(a)) The CRA mandates that the Illinois Department of Corrections (DOC), the Parole Division of DOC, and the Prisoner Review Board adopt, validate and use a common assessment tool. CRA, Section 15(b). Once these agencies implement an assessment tool, the law requires them to adopt services and programs that are consistent with evidence-based practices. (CRA, Sections 10(b), (c))

The RANA Task Force is charged with developing plans for the adoption, validation, and utilization of the assessment tool that will be implemented by the DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board. (Appendix A sets out the specific statutory charge.) The two primary goals of the Task Force are to:

1. Select a common validated tool to be used by DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board (CRA, Section 15(d)(2)); and
2. Design a system that will result in assessment information being shared across all State and local agencies and branches of government that are part of the criminal justice system as well as non-governmental organizations that provide treatment services to those under local supervision (CRA, Sections 15(d)(1), (6)).

The plan developed by the Task Force must also address:

- The different points in the system at which the tool will be used by DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board, including the reassessment of offenders (CRA, Sections 15(d)(3), (5)); and

- How the tool will be implemented (e.g., training, pilot sites, etc.) (CRA, Section 15(d)(4)).

Scope of the Task Force

Given its statutory charge, the Task Force has two primary issues to address:

1. The type of risk, assets, and needs instrument(s) they wish DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board to implement; and
2. How to flow the information (i.e., the results of the assessment) throughout the entire criminal justice system.

The Task Force has already heard about several of the most widely used and well-known assessment instruments – namely, the LSI-R, the COMPAS and the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). The Task Force has learned that different tools are used at different points in the system. For instance, the ORAS has a different tool for use at each of the following decision points: pre-trial, community supervision, prison intake, and reentry planning. The tool used at each decision point is not common because the tools assess different factors (e.g., the risk of flight at pre-trial, the risk of recidivism, the criminogenic needs, offender strength). The instrument that the Task Force selects, therefore, may not be a single, common tool; it may be a collection of tools, each measuring different factors and serving different purposes in the system. (Although measuring different factors, the tools will collect much of the same data, because the questions asked in each tool will be very similar.)

Although the CRA does not mandate each agency or branch of government to implement the same assessment tool (the CRA only requires the DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board to implement the common tool), the law does require the Task Force to tackle the issue of the information will flow through the *entire* criminal justice system. The plan must include “[a] computerized method and design to allow each of the State and local agencies and branches of government which are part of the criminal justice system to share the results of the assessment.” (CRA, Section 15(d)(1)) For this reason, the Task Force includes representatives from local probation offices, and has invited the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts to attend each meeting. While the CRA does not require the Probation Services Division to implement a tool common to the DOC, the Parole Division, and the Prisoner Review Board, it is critical for the Task Force to include the AOIC and local probation offices in its work. By having all stakeholders at the table and understanding the tools they use, the Task Force is more likely to succeed in developing a plan that enables the flow of information throughout the system.

Task Force Workplan

The Task Force meetings have been designed to provide members with information about the different assessment tools used throughout the country (to help the Task Force select a common tool) and to familiarize the members with the assessments currently being done in Illinois (to help the Task Force design a system in which information flows throughout).

After the first two meetings, the members know about:

- the risk, need and responsivity principles, which are the foundational principles behind the use of an assessment instrument;
- several different assessment tools, including the LSI-R, the Ohio Risk Assessment System, and the COMPAS instrument;
- how another state (Michigan) selected a tool and implemented a new system;
- the assessment tools used by local probation offices around the state; and
- the assessment tools used by the DOC.

With respect to the **selection of an assessment tool**, the next steps include:

- learning about additional instruments used by different states;
- selecting criteria by which to assess the different instruments; and
- assessing the instruments against the selected criteria.

It is recommended that the Task Force select two or three assessment instruments and invite vendors to make complete presentations to the group during the summer.

With respect to the **sharing of information throughout the system**, the next steps include:

- identifying the common elements of assessment tools, which may be the fields that are shared throughout the system;
- understanding the computer systems used by each agency or branch of government and how they may work together to share information; and
- identifying technical experts who can assist the Task Force in designing a computerized method to share information.

The Task Force should consider whether these tasks should be completed by the entire Task Force or whether subcommittees should be formed to make specific recommendations. For instance, with regard to sharing information throughout the system, the Task Force may need to include additional people who have the technical knowledge about computer systems and designs. A subcommittee may also be best placed to consider the common elements that the assessment tools at each point in the system share, which may aid the Task Force in coming up with a plan to share information. In addition, the Task Force should consider the role of an Advisory Group, and how it may contribute to or help the Task Force meet its goals.

Appendix A

The Illinois Crime Reduction Act of 2009

RANA Task Force

Section 15

- (d) The Task Force's plans shall be released within one year of the effective date of this Act and shall at a minimum include:
- (1) A computerized method and design to allow each of the Illinois agencies which are part of the criminal justice system to share the results of the assessment.
 - (2) A selection of a common validated tool to be used across the system.
 - (3) A description of the different points in the system at which the tool shall be used.
 - (4) An implementation plan, including training and the selection of pilot sites to test the tool.
 - (5) How often and in what intervals offenders will be reassessed.
 - (6) How the results can be legally shared with non-governmental organizations that provide treatment and services to those under community supervision.