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# Blueprint for Developing Probation Teams

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SHOULD your Probation Department develop service teams? This question is frequently considered today as a result of recent moves in this direction by Federal probation offices and a number of state and local departments. If you find the prospect of a change toward teams interesting, you then have an even more difficult decision to make—what type of team should be considered? There are several models which could be utilized—the Community Resources Management Team (CRMT),<sup>1</sup> the Federal model of The Team Concept,<sup>2</sup> and a wide variety of modifications of each of these models.

My suggestion to you at this point is to sit down and review where your agency is and where you want it to go. Because the team concept is presently in vogue does not in itself mean that this approach will better allow you to accomplish your mission. I am a firm believer in the team approach

but only after you have considered all possible situations and alternatives available.

The review or assessment that I am recommending is extremely worthwhile for any probation agency. We tend to become overwhelmed by the high caseloads in Probation and the day to day crisis situations that must be dealt with immediately. Because of this, we frequently fail to look at what is really being done and why we are doing it.

## *The Assessment*

As a responsible public agency, we must look at ourselves, our clients, and our community. I would estimate that very few probation agencies are either actively aware of or involved with their community service network; could identify, in priority, the needs of their clients; or know the skills and potentials available within their own organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Corrections Program, P.O. Drawer F, Boulder, Colorado 80302.

<sup>2</sup> "The Team Concept," by Patrick J. Murphy, FEDERAL PROBATION, December 1976, p. 30.

### *Your Client*

Who are your clients?

This question is not as easy to answer as you may think. Perhaps some of your previously accepted ideas may change after some serious review of the matter. If you have maintained considerable demographic data, the job may be simplified, but if not, it is time to start working. Some general information that will be necessary should include the following:

- Length of probation
- Referral charge
- Age range
- Ethnic background
- Resident address

In addition to these items, you will need to develop data related to more specific areas of client needs such as: income levels (and/or employment status), vocational training levels, general physical health, mental health, academic levels, alcohol problem levels, and drug problem levels. You may want to add some items to this list depending on your area. What I am saying is you need to make an agency caseload survey. Supplement A is a case analysis form we have developed for this purpose and also as a device to measure change during the probation period. If this information cannot be obtained on all cases, a large random sample may be sufficient. Now after securing this necessary information, you should know your clients; where they live, types of crimes committed, and most importantly, their needs. Is your agency meeting these client needs?

### *Your Community*

Every community has areas separated by social levels, economic levels, and/or ethnic backgrounds. Identify these areas in your community. Next, you must determine how interrelated or self-sufficient these areas are. Is there a strong degree of community identity? If you live in a city with college or university facilities, the sociology or urban studies departments can be of great assistance in answering these questions.

In reviewing our community, we found a rather large public housing area which is almost totally separated from its surrounding community. Surrounding area citizens, of similar economic status, saw this public housing community as totally alien to them. In planning our neighborhood offices, we had to take into consideration that clients living in one area would be extremely reluctant to report to an office in the other area.

Also extremely important in any community is the transportation system. Is there mass transportation, and if so, does it service all areas of the community?

The next area of concern is the community service network. What services exist in your community? For whom? In addition to reviewing a service directory, the telephone book, and any other sources you may have, I might suggest an exercise I experienced through the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's Corrections Program called "A Community Survey." Staff from your agency could develop roles similar to many of their clients and then put themselves in the community to obtain the services needed. This training exercise demands considerable planning and cooperation of service agencies but the results could be extremely helpful to you and the cooperating agencies. This training exercise could answer a number of questions: Are the referral agencies really accessible? What barriers exist? Are these resources in the area where they are needed? What transportation problems really exist for your clients?

The Community Survey in which I participated was in Denver, Colorado. It proved to be an extremely enlightening experience for me personally and hopefully proved helpful to the Denver Probation Department to whom we submitted the results of the survey. Persons involved in this survey sought such services as alcohol counseling, drug counseling, employment and vocational training, each experiencing varying degrees of success. It was found that one could stay in alcohol service agencies (detox centers, hospitals, and halfway houses) for over one year if one could communicate a sincere need and willingness to follow rules; a person can get methadone immediately if one is persistent; busses did not reach several major referral agencies but hitchhiking was relatively easy; referral directories were frequently inaccurate; receptionists were critical to the success of a referral; and most important, some of the most useful information about how to receive services came from people on the streets, specifically at the bus depot.

It was apparent that Denver has a very competent and committed service network which could be easily utilized to assist probation.

After you have dealt with these issues, you should be better equipped to determine how your community interrelates with your agency and the needs of your clients.

### *Your Agency*

This is probably the hardest area to survey. Probation agencies, traditionally, have evolved as a result of need. Workloads have been high and there has been little time to evaluate where we are going or how well we are doing. The times are changing, not the workload. More and more we are being required to justify our existence and to utilize more sophisticated management practices. Although this is time-consuming, it is necessary and beneficial. If you have developed objectives, you are one step ahead. If not, it would be beneficial to at least identify agency goals. You must identify what you are doing and what you would like to do. You should address the counseling vs. supervision dilemma. After the philosophical basis has been agreed upon, you can answer particular questions related to staff size, physical facilities, caseload limits, budgetary planning and your area's specific criminal justice concerns.

Now the more difficult areas need to be addressed. What is the state of your staff's morale? Are your line officers communicating in the areas of resources and case problems? Is your staff ready for a change? What does your line staff feel they are doing—counseling, supervising, or referring?

The next activity which I would emphasize as being extremely important is a time study. How much staff time is spent on presentence investigations, probation intakes, probation supervision, court appearances, and any other major work areas of concern to you. You may find as we did that the intake process was often being duplicated while not enough time was being spent in the development of an initial plan for each individual probation client.

### *Mixing Bowl*

All of the above information should be developed and obtained through the combined efforts of your total staff. All the staff should know why this information is important. If you decide to implement the team concept, staff involvement at all levels will be critical.

Once this information has been accumulated, it can then be interrelated and considered in total. At this point, you will easily be able to answer both questions you started with: Should you have teams, and if so, what type. The type of teams

should be determined by the needs and resources of your agency, your clients, and your community.

### *Our Example*

After our agency went through this comprehensive type of assessment, we elected to develop Field Service Teams. Our teams share some characteristics of other probation teams, but in a larger sense, they are structured to our particular situations. We abandoned our large intake unit, put more staff on Field Service Teams, and developed a process for early case assessment and plan development involving case staffings. Now, within a short period after receiving a referral, we are able to assess the clients' needs and potentials, match these to the community resources, and develop a case plan which utilizes the skills and resources of a number of staff members. We have three service teams decentralized in the community enabling us to provide our clients a more comprehensive plan, utilizing resources and services available to meet their individual needs in their communities.

One of the continual problems has been extremely high caseloads. After reviewing the needs of these clients and their potential danger to the community, we developed a classification system with varying sized caseloads within each team. Through this process, we are better able to address the cases that have been identified as needing direct services or a higher degree of supervision due to their potential danger to the community.

Our survey has resulted in changes in our physical location, staff placements, case forms, office hours, case handling, supervisory responsibilities and most of all, a noticeable increase in staff morale.

### *In Closing*

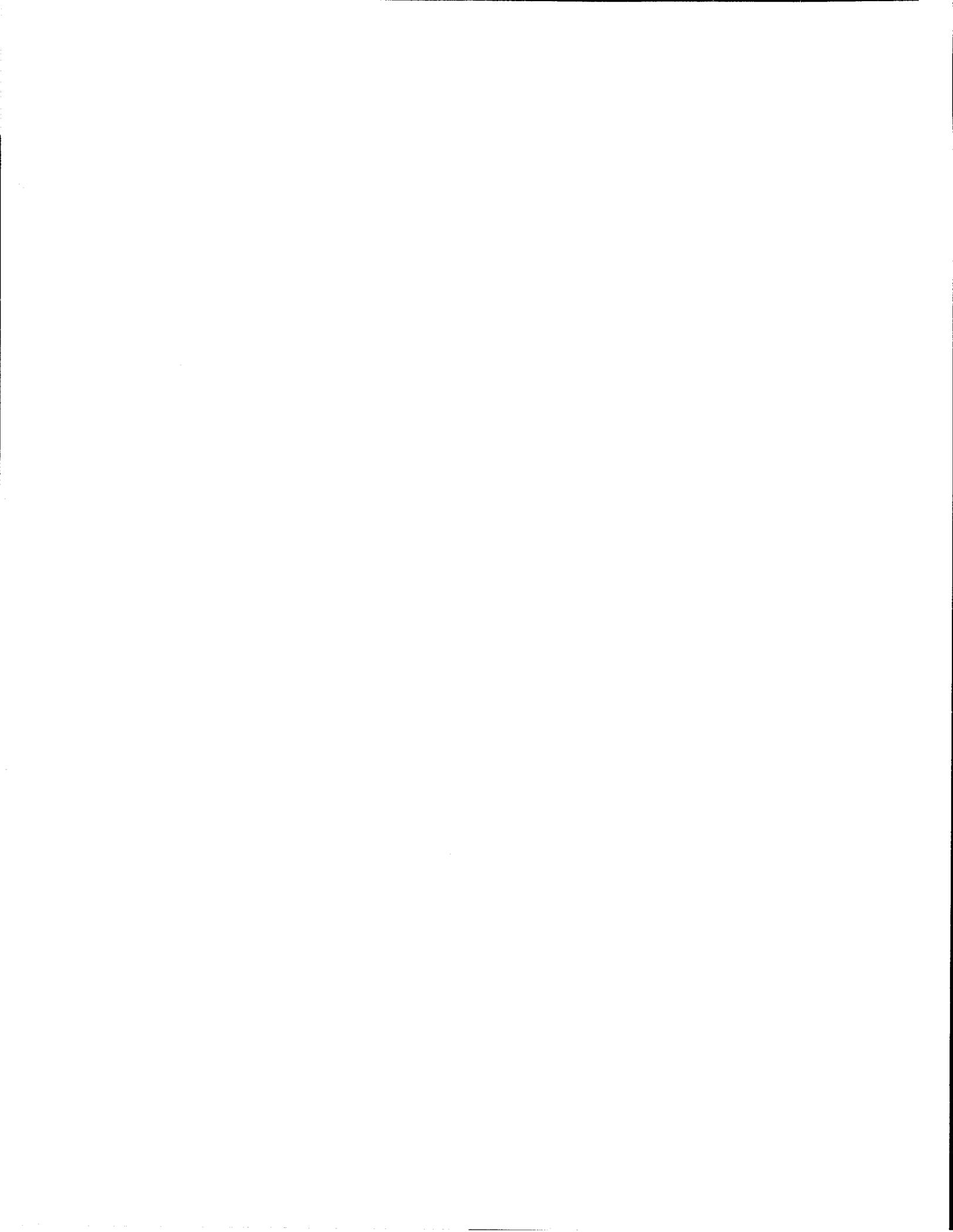
The team concept is one method of organization for a probation department. It may benefit your agency but it should only be developed after a thorough survey of your agency, your clients, and your community. One point which needs to be stressed is that all staff should be involved in the survey and decision process. Staff motivation and commitment are critical should your decision be to make such a large change in the structure of your agency.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY PROBATION SERVICES  
**CASE ANALYSIS SCALE—TALLY SHEET**

Case Name .....  
 Entry Date .....  
 Termination Date .....

SCALE CATEGORIES

		EMPLOYMENT	VOCATIONAL TRAINING	ACADEMIC TRAINING	HEALTH	MENTAL HEALTH MENTAL ILLNESS	LEGAL	SUBSTANCE ABUSE (Alcohol)	SUBSTANCE ABUSE (Drugs)	HOUSING
High ↑ Scale Levels ↓ Low	1	Less than \$100 earned last month	Unskilled, in need of training; no desire for training	Grade 8 or less	Disabled: unemployable	Need of mental health treatment (not receiving treatment—no desire for treatment)	Civil difficulties, court action pending; e.g., divorce pending, custody pending	Alcohol use incapacitates individual; e.g., unable to work and/or maintain social contacts	Drug use incapacitates individual; e.g., unable to work and/or maintain social contacts	No current housing
	2	\$100-\$250 earned last month	Unskilled, in need of training; wants training	High School course-work; no diploma or G.E.D.	Health problems reduce employability	Need of mental health treatment (not receiving, but desires treatment)	Civil judgment, not abiding by terms	Alcohol use caused loss of job, arrest, (last 3 months) or entry conviction	Drug use caused loss of job, arrest, (last 3 months) or entry conviction	Has housing, but considered problematic to long range goals
	3	\$251-\$500 earned last month	Enrolled in training program (less than 3 months)	G.E.D. or High School diploma	Reports health problems; may reduce employability	Enrolled in treatment program (less than 3 months)	Civil judgment, abiding by terms (last 3 months)	Alcohol use caused family or job problems (last 3 months) e.g., missed work, frequent family arguments	Drug use caused family or job problems (last 3 months) e.g., missed work, frequent family arguments	Dependent housing; i.e., group home, parental home, halfway house, etc.
	4	\$501-\$900 earned last month	Enrolled in training program (more than 3 months)	College course work, no degree	Reports health problems (no effect on employment)	Enrolled in treatment program (more than 3 months)	Civil judgment, abiding by terms (over 3 months)	Client feels alcohol use is excessive, but no serious life problems result; i.e., family stable, job stable	Client feels drug use is excessive, but no serious life problems result; i.e., job stable, family stable	Same housing, owned or rented less than six months
	5	Over \$900 earned last month	( ) Completed training ( ) No need for vocational training	College Degree: ( ) Associate ( ) Bachelor	Health no problem	( ) Completed treatment program ( ) No need for mental health treatment	No civil difficulties	Alcohol use not a problem	Drug use not a problem	Same housing; owned or rented over six months



**END**