



## Going Beyond the Sales Pitch

*When buying new products and technologies in the past, corrections administrators relied mainly on catalogs and vendors. Even after reviewing the literature and talking with sales representatives, a correctional facility might buy a product that a nearby facility had already found did not live up to expectations. For a group of State and other correctional facilities in the Northeast, that problem has been solved thanks to the Northeast Technology and Product Assessment Committee (NTPAC).*

"I think what NTPAC is doing is common sense. We're getting the decisionmakers together, we're looking at the technology, and we're getting an understanding of what the technology does," says Chris McAleavey, program manager at the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)—Northeast and liaison to NTPAC. "For years, people who work in corrections have felt they were left out in the cold, that nobody was trying to do anything for them. NTPAC gives them a chance to express their issues and concerns and to hear what NIJ is doing for them."

NTPAC is the brainchild of Massachusetts Commissioner of Corrections Michael Maloney, chairman of the technology committee of the Association of State Correctional Administrators. Maloney saw that providing a regional forum for sharing information about corrections technologies could benefit both correctional agencies and vendors, and he led the committee's organization. For the past 3 years, NTPAC's quarterly meetings have brought together representatives of its member organizations to watch vendor demonstrations of products in development and listen to educational presentations on the latest technological advances. On the first day of a 2-day meeting, vendors give 30-minute presentations on their products, including a Q-and-A session. After each vendor finishes and leaves the room, committee members discuss the product and assess its potential benefits and drawbacks. These demonstrations give committee members a chance to learn about new products and to provide feedback to vendors to use in developing or modifying their products to meet correctional needs.

Although at first NTPAC had to recruit vendors to give demonstrations, manufacturers now recognize that being on the agenda creates an opportunity to extend their markets and improve their products. Committee Chair Alex Fox, director of security technologies for Massachusetts correctional facilities, says he now receives vendor presentation requests almost daily. When selecting vendors to present, Fox says, "I look for innovative technologies. What the group is interested in is new and creative technological solutions for problems that have existed forever."

On the second day, guest experts provide informal training on specific technologies. These speakers come to educate, not to sell products. Recent topics have included advances in radio technology and biometrics. At the end of the day, participants suggest topics and products for the next meeting.

"We look for emerging technology, for things that are not quite ready for purchase," Fox says. "These vendors want feedback, and they will try to adapt their products to meet our needs." For that reason, vendor presentations usually do not address products already on the market; NTPAC members want to hear about technology that can still be modified to meet correctional needs. One such product is a portable evidence recovery unit—a stainless steel toilet designed to capture, disinfect, and store contraband objects swallowed and passed by inmates.

"This was just an individual who had this idea and was working on it in his garage," Fox says. "He came out with the prototype and we gave him feedback. He has returned three times, each time after making modifications requested by the committee. This is a great way of illustrating what the group can do for a vendor and what the vendor can do for us."

This impressed Clair Bee, assistant commissioner for correctional facilities and NTPAC representative from New York State. Although New York has had a technology testing and evaluation program for 25 years, Bee says he

benefits from NTPAC membership because the meetings let him see products—such as the portable evidence recovery unit—that he might not hear about otherwise.

“It’s given me some new ideas,” Bee says. “You can get a little stale working on your own.” He adds that vendors sometimes do not want to make a presentation to just one State, even one as large as New York, but are eager to present to NTPAC. “That gives NTPAC a lot of clout as far as vendors are concerned.”

New York State repays NTPAC for that clout by offering to test some of the products presented to the committee. “We’re really able to help the smaller States that just can’t do a testing program,” Bee says. “New York, Pennsylvania, or BOP [Federal Bureau of Prisons] will say ‘sure, we’ll take that back and test it.’ ”

Correctional departments are not NTPAC’s only members. The U.S. Army Natick Soldier Center (NSC) and its National Protection Center (NPC) also attend the quarterly meetings. NSC performs research and development on protective gear—clothing, body armor, bomb suits, boots, gloves, and duty uniforms—for the U.S. Army and the Marines. Approximately 4 years ago, NSC set up NPC to develop partnerships with the emergency response community. As part of NSC’s outreach efforts for NPC, Bill Haskell, NPC senior systems integrator, met with Maloney, who invited Haskell’s organization to join NTPAC.

“We had established a number of strong partnerships with the law enforcement community, but this was our first partnership with the corrections community,” Haskell says. NSC technologists understood the needs of military corrections officers, but working with NTPAC has taught the organization about the needs of the civilian corrections community.

“We’re finding—as well as we know the military and what it does—that there are products and vendors who work with the civilian community that we’ve never heard about,” Haskell says. “We give the other NTPAC members information on products that we’ve tested. They give us leads on new ideas and new manufacturers we didn’t know, and we introduce them to military vendors they didn’t know.”

In turn, Fox says, “NSC has been a great resource for NTPAC to use. They’ve opened a door for us with regard to how the military looks at things.”

NLECTC–Northeast’s McAleavey has found that his work with NTPAC has afforded him an opportunity to learn more about the correctional community. “To support corrections as a NLECTC program manager, I need to understand their needs,” he says. “By participating in the committee, I not only learn about their requirements firsthand, I see the challenges they face.” He recalls that

## ***NTPAC: FROM THE BEGINNING***

When Massachusetts Commissioner of Corrections Michael Maloney planned the Northeast Technology and Product Assessment Committee (NTPAC), he called on his colleagues in the northeast region of the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA). As chair of ASCA’s technology committee, Maloney knew that this group of commissioners already worked together; he hoped familiarity would help organize NTPAC.

“I wanted to set up a system to share information on the products that people were using and get information on evolving technology that might meet our needs,” Maloney says, recalling a pre-NTPAC discussion about the need for a forum in which corrections officials could obtain unbiased technology information. “If I say I have a problem and I need a technological solution, three or four vendors are bound to tell me they can solve that problem.”

“We approached [their colleagues in other States] by saying, ‘We’re all facing pretty much the same situations. Wouldn’t you like to know which products are good and which are bad?’ ” Alex Fox, NTPAC’s chairman, says of the kickoff period. “ ‘Someone out there has already bought these products, used them, and possibly paid a heavy price for picking the wrong technology. Shouldn’t this information be shared?’ ”

NTPAC came together even more smoothly than Maloney had hoped. The commissioners resolved concerns with the memorandum of understanding (MOU), and the NTPAC members started sharing technology information. Under the terms of the MOU, Massachusetts led the development of NTPAC and hosted and chaired the committee for its first 2 years. Maloney chose Fox, then superintendent of a Massachusetts correctional facility, to help organize the committee and lead it day to day. At the end of the first 2 years, committee members voted to keep Massachusetts in its leadership role for another 2 years. Working with NTPAC and corrections technology became Fox’s full-time job.

Chris McAleavey, program manager at the National Institute of Justice’s National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center–Northeast and its NTPAC representative, recalls a visit from Maloney and Fox during the kickoff. He found their proposal interesting because “every correctional agency I’ve ever talked to has wanted to do something like this, but [this] was different because it had support from the commissioners. I knew this top-down support would make it a success.”

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one State had a problem with inmates using their steel bedframes to smash and break handcuffs; that State looked at nearly 20 types of handcuffs before finding a model that met its needs. McAleavey, for his part, brings to the committee the knowledge and expertise of NIJ and the NLECTC system.

In addition to the quarterly meetings, members stay current through NTPAC's limited-access website, which provides information on products States have purchased and contacts for more information. As part of the effort to replicate NTPAC in other regions, Fox says he would like to open the website to all commissioners of corrections nationwide. Maloney also says he would like to see NTPAC link with other groups and State technology committees, perhaps by giving them advance notice of meeting agendas and an open invitation to attend sessions that present topics they find interesting. The committee already has invited representatives from States outside the Northeast region to observe meetings to promote the NTPAC model. McAleavey says that NIJ and the NLECTC system are working to facilitate these efforts.

***To learn more about NTPAC and the possibility of starting similar committees in other areas, contact Alex Fox, 508-850-7730, e-mail [afox@doc.state.ma.us](mailto:afox@doc.state.ma.us); or Chris McAleavey, 888-338-0584, e-mail [chris.mcaleavey@L-3com.com](mailto:chris.mcaleavey@L-3com.com).***

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### ***NTPAC: From the Beginning (continued)***

That top-down support did not occur by accident; rather, the MOU required it from the beginning. "One of the things that makes this work is we required all committee representatives to have direct access to their commissioner," Maloney says. "In similar groups, you sometimes have people who understand the technology but don't have access to the decision-makers. In NTPAC, it's different. For example, Alex and I meet regularly, and I also attend as many meetings as I can."

Three years later, Maloney believes NTPAC has become what he envisioned: a forum for corrections officials to communicate and gather information on emerging technologies.



This article was reprinted from the Fall 2003 edition of *TechBeat*, the award-winning quarterly newsmagazine of The National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center system, a program of the National Institute of Justice under Cooperative Agreement #96-MU-MU-K011, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

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