April 13, 2011

Bill Voit
Senior Project Director
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive, P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910

Dear Mr. Voit,

We are forwarding our application for the Council of State Governments 2011 Innovations Awards. In Virginia we are implementing a collaborative community-based approach to prisoner re-entry that is unique in its integration of human services and public safety.

This community-based approach to re-entry was designed to strengthen public safety, reduce recidivism and support family stabilization. The re-entry approach is also innovative in the collaboration between state and local governments as well as its ability to maximize existing resources. Currently the approach is being used in 44 localities in our Commonwealth.

Thank you for considering our application for the 2011 Innovations Awards.

Sincerely,

Marla Graff Decker
Secretary of Public Safety

William A. Hazel Jr., MD
Secretary of Health and Human Resources
2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE EXTENDED TO APRIL 15, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011-_____________________

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: __Virginia________

Assign Program Category (applicant): ___Office of the Secretary of Public Safety______(Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name – Virginia Community Reentry Initiative

2. Administering Agency: Office of the Secretary of Public Safety

3. Contact Person: Banci E. Tewolde

4. Address: 1111 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219

5. Telephone Number – (804) 786-5351

6. FAX Number – (804) 371-6381

7. E-mail Address – Banci.Tewolde@governor.virginia.gov


9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

   The Virginia Community Reentry Initiative (VCRI) is a community-based reentry approach unique in its integration of human services and public safety. The goals of VCRI are to increase public safety, reduce recidivism and support family stability through more effective reentry planning and service delivery at the community level.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered.

    June 2006

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?
This community-based approach to reentry was designed to address public safety, recidivism and family stability. Successful reentry reduces victimization, reduces recidivism and supports family stabilization.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Built on a collaborative model, VCRI is an approach to reentry that is community-based and family focused. Communities use it voluntarily. There has not been dedicated funding for VCRI and implementation has been made possible through shifting of existing resources, enhanced state and local coordination and collaboration among participating agencies and organizations.

VCRI goals are to increase public safety through reduced recidivism, to maximize opportunities for former offenders returning to the community and to support family and community reintegration for persons previously incarcerated. It is not a new program nor does it impose any requirements on correctional institutions or local government agencies and their community partners. It is rather a collaborative reentry approach that maximizes effective use of existing resources.

Communities voluntarily adopt this reentry approach. Participating localities establish local reentry councils that bring together representatives of public and private agencies, law enforcement, the courts, businesses, human services agencies, community-based service providers, victims of crime, former offenders, families of offenders and faith-based organizations.

Localities select council conveners or convener teams that represent public safety and human services. Councils get local government and citizenry, identify community assets and service gaps, identify reentry resources, coordinate reentry service delivery and develop local reentry mentoring programs.

Mentors play an important role in the VCRI approach as they are positive role models and serve as links to the community. They remain a concerned and supportive presence for the former offender for up to a twelve months period. Mentors work with inmates prior to release in preparing the offenders for a return to the community and helping them prepare for the social and emotional impact of reentry. They also support family reintegration by using the Parenting Behind Bars guide and working with inmates on conflict resolution principles.

VCRI is developed around four primary principles: pre-release planning, interagency coordination, integrated service delivery and a system of family and community support, including positive links to the community. Localities using this approach to reentry determine the type of reentry council they will establish. Local reentry councils in the model can focus in being resource councils or resource and service delivery coordination councils. Communities select the local reentry council type based on local reentry assets, local reentry needs and local resources.

In the VCRI model a reentry resource council brings the council members together on a scheduled basis to identify local reentry resources, to share the availability of these resources with state and local community corrections staff, to promote public awareness of reentry issues in the community and to facilitate, if needed, development of local reentry mentoring programs.

Local reentry councils with a resource and service delivery focus not only identify local reentry resources, they actively coordinate with state and local community corrections to deliver integrated community services to persons previously incarcerated. Reentry council services teams work with community corrections staff in implementing reentry plans that have been developed with the participation of the person incarcerated, correctional center staff, community corrections staff and local reentry council representation.
Communities using the VCRI resource and service delivery approach work with persons previously incarcerated and their families for up to 12 months in the three phases of the approach: pre-release, reentry and reintegration.

In VCRI Phase I, the pre-release phase, representatives of community reentry councils, including volunteer mentors, begin meeting with returning inmates from state correctional institutions and/or local jails to coordinate return to the community and to share information on services and obligations that affect them and their families. The pre-release phase is for three months prior to release and includes forming a prosocial relationship with a volunteer mentor and completing assessment of risk, family stabilization, service needs and work skills. Coordination during the pre-release phase is enhanced using video conferencing for both case management and family visitation when geographic distance between communities and correctional institutions are a factor.

Phase II of VCRI is the reentry phase and covers the first 90 days following return to the community. During this phase there is emphasis on housing, employment, family reintegration and connection to any needed support services. Human services agencies work closely with community corrections staff in implementing reentry plans. Mentors are also a vital link between inmate and community in this reentry phase. They are often present to meet the inmate at the gate when they are released and provide them transportation for their return home.

Phase III, reintegration, is the final VCRI phase and includes the fourth through the twelfth months following release. The reintegration phase includes continued employment and family reintegration support, family and community stabilization, planning for the future and developing a system of positive links in the community. During this time there is continuing contact with the mentor, if needed. Phase III also includes a fatherhood/motherhood responsibility focus, along with parenting and healthy relationship classes. Additionally there is emphasis on use of evidence-based programming by mentors and community service providers to support development of responsible decision making, formation of healthy relationships, use of positive parenting practices and development of positive work habits.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Traditionally reentry has been viewed as the revue of public safety agencies (corrections departments, jails and community corrections). This reentry approach recognizes the role of the community and of building community reentry capacity, the importance of community ownership of reentry, and the value of integration of human services and public safety for successful reentry outcomes. The approach is also innovative in the collaboration between state and local governments. It is also an approach that provides localities a way to address reentry in times of budget constraints by maximizing existing resources.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

There has never been dedicated funding for this initiative. The initiative is voluntarily adopted by local counties and cities. Implementation has been made possible through shifting of existing resources, enhanced state and local coordination, and collaboration among participating agencies and organizations. Some localities have received grant funding to support service delivery or mentoring programs. The Department of Social Services received a 2010 Second Chance Act grant to provide six areas of the state with 12 months of case management services and one locality has received grant funding to support their reentry mentoring program.

VCRI is an approach to reentry rather than a program. In this model all participating agencies and organizations do what they have always done, but they do it in a planned and coordinated way, and implementation can be managed and adapted to the resources available. Dedicated funding would of course allow for more offenders and their families to be served.
Localities using this model use service coordination teams that are identified from participating local reentry council agencies and organizations. Composition of the service teams differ based on the needs of the individual returning to the community. Volunteers who serve as mentors and/or case managers are also central to implementation of the model. For replication, there does need to be a champion for providing local communities information and technical assistance on implementation of the model. This champion can be a public agency representative or could be from a non-profit or volunteer organization.

15. What are the program’s annual operational costs?

In Virginia there has never been dedicated funding for the initiative. However, as noted above, a 2010 Second Chance Act grant is providing funding to enhance service delivery and case management services in 6 of the sites.

16. How is the program funded?

There has never been dedicated funding for the initiative. Implementation has been made possible through shifting of existing resources, enhanced state and local coordination and collaboration among participating agencies and organizations. Please see the previous notation on Second Chance Act funding.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number. No

Passage of legislation, executive order or regulations is not required as this is a local community approach to reentry based on integration, coordination and collaboration of service delivery among existing agencies and organizations.

However, in Virginia gubernatorial executive orders on reentry have made reentry a priority in the state and assured coordination among public agencies for the initiative.

Executive Order 22 – Governor Tim Kaine
Executive Order 11 – Governor Bob McDonnell

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

No unique equipment, technology or software is required. However, in Virginia use of video conferencing for pre-release planning and family visitation is made possible by agreement between the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS). This agreement reflects the value of integrating human services and public safety. DOC and its statewide network of institutions and VDSS and its statewide network of community offices both have video conferencing capabilities. Integrating use of these systems in support of reentry is helping each agency meet their goals for public safety and stable families.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Other states have developed reentry programs in the community. However, the VCRI model with its integration of human services and public safety, its establishment of local reentry resource or resource and service delivery councils, its connection of former offenders to a system of positive community support, its maximization of existing resources and the collaboration between state and local government is, we believe, unique to Virginia.
This approach grew out of the collaborative work and input of a wide range of reentry state and local stakeholders in Virginia. The initiative design was developed by Jane Brown of the Virginia Department of Social Services and Ms. Brown has led the community outreach on the initiative. Her current contact information is:

Jane Brown, Director for Community Partnerships  
Secretary of Public Safety  
Office of Governor Robert F. McDonnell  
1111 East Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
Telephone: 804 692-0331  
jane.brown@governor.virginia.gov

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Michigan has established the Michigan Reentry Initiative (MPRI). A component of the initiative is a MPRI Community Coordinator described as “essential staff to the MPRI process at each site. The Community Coordinators can be employees or contractors of the Administrative Agencies or employees or contractors of third-party agencies.” Local community involvement is linked to a paid staff position in each site.

In the VCRI model, the structure does not require a paid position for local implementation. The model can be implemented within existing resources. Also, VCRI is more administratively streamlined. Community reentry councils include prison warders, probation chiefs, sheriffs, jail administrators and human services directors. This brings the community human services agencies and public safety agencies into direct contact and allows them to address the unique needs of the local community without imposition of intermediate administrative structures.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The program has evolved in the last four years, but the model is currently being fully implemented.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The VCRI approach is an effective way to engage communities in reentry and address public safety, victimization and family stability. Because the approach uses using existing community resources more communities are willing to focus on reentry in a planned and coordinated way. For example, human services agencies are now engaging with correctional institutions around issues such as child support, family reunification, employment, mental health and substance abuse, domestic violence and day care. Communities using the VCRI approach are engaging community based service providers to work with correctional institutions and community corrections staff to support successful reentry.

A second strength of the approach is its flexibility. While in each community the model has commonalities (establishment of a reentry council and adherence to core principles), each locality places emphasis on the areas identified by the local asset and needs assessment. All localities emphasize early engagement with the workforce after release. However, additional areas of focus will vary depending on local resources and barriers to successful reentry. For example, housing may be the focus of a reentry council in one locality, transportation the focus in another.

The voluntary nature of this approach also contributes to its effectiveness. As localities adopt this approach voluntarily to address community issues, it is recognized as a local investment. This is demonstrated by the number of Virginia localities that have voluntarily adopted this reentry approach with no funding and no mandates. Currently 44 Virginia localities have adopted the VCRI reentry approach. Further, in upcoming months VCRI informational sessions are being scheduled for an additional 40 localities.
The reentry mentoring component of the VCRI approach also contributes to its effectiveness. The pro-social relationships that are formed through mentoring provide the persons previously incarcerated with a positive link to the community and a guide to assist them in navigating their return to the community.

The primary challenge of the approach is the limitations of no dedicated funding. Because of this there are limitations to the number of individuals communities can serve using coordinated service delivery. So far in Virginia communities with local reentry councils have been able to assist all those who have requested coordinated services delivery (in 2010 the existing local reentry councils serviced over 2000 individuals using the coordinated service delivery approach). However, localities anticipate that as awareness of the initiative increases they may in the future have to prioritize those they serve. It is the intent of the existing councils that as they reach their maximum capacity for providing coordinated service delivery, they will focus the coordinated service delivery on higher risk offenders.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Originally five localities in the state implemented this community collaboration approach to reentry on a pilot basis. All those localities have now adopted the approach and the initiative has expanded. Currently the VCRI approach is being implemented in 44 localities. Planning is underway with an additional 40 localities.

The last year, the initiative also added an emphasis on use of evidenced-based practices. Community service providers are being trained in use of Thinking for a Change and Motivation Interviewing. These are cognitive-behavioral programs are used by the Virginia Department of Corrections. Training local services provides in their use helps re-enforce the work that has been done in the institutions and continues to support development of responsible decision making by the persons previously incarcerated.

Initially in the VCRI approach envisioned all local reentry councils being resource and service delivery councils. However, as the initiative expanded, it became clear that for some localities a resources council that identified resources, promoted public awareness of reentry issues in the community and facilitated development of local reentry mentoring programs was the most effective approach. This is particularly true of localities with low numbers of inmates returning to the community. Two of the existing reentry councils in Virginia are resource councils. Reentry councils for the remaining 42 localities are resource and service delivery councils.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

For successful implementation of this reentry approach the following are key factors for success:

- State executive level support (Virginia has Executive Order 11 making successful reentry a priority in the state).
- Champion/champions (The Virginia Department of Social Services carries responsibility for community capacity building and has experience working with localities. The director for the agencies Office of Community Partnerships has served as the initiative champion. As the initiative is expanding, reentry capacity building is now being included in the job responsibilities of community outreach staff in each of the department’s regional offices. Any state adopting this approach would need champion/champions for presenting the model to communities and providing technical assistance as they implement it. The champion/champions can be from a public agency, from a statewide non-profit or from a statewide volunteer organization).
As well as the need for executive support and champion/champions, state could encounter résistance from Public Safety and Human Services agency staff as this integration of Public Safety and Human Services is a new way of thinking. However, any resistance will likely decrease as professions from these areas realize the partnership helps them meet their mandates and goals.

Recruiting sufficient mentors to match with person previously incarcerated can be challenging. Engaging state volunteer and mentor organizations, civic organizations and the faith community can help in addressing this limitation.

CSG reserves the right to use or publish in other CSG products the information provided in this application. If your agency objects to this policy, please advise us in a separate attachment.
2011 Innovations Awards Application
Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state’s submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

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CSG Innovations Awards 2011
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive, P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910

Contact:
Nancy J. Vickers, National Program Administrator
Phone: 859.244.8105
Fax: 859.244.8001 – Attn: Innovations Awards Program
The Council of State Governments
E-mail: nvickers@csg.org

This application is also available at www.csg.org.