Risk Assessment in Parole Decision-Making
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# Table of Contents

*Risk Assessment in Parole Decision-Making* ........................................ 1

*Risk Assessment Instruments in Practice* ............................................. 2


Decision Factors with Strong Relationship to Post-Release Behavior .................... 10

Decision Factors with Mixed Relationship with Post-Release Behavior ................... 11

Decision Factors with No Relationship to Post-Release Behavior ........................ 14

*Structured Parole Decision-Making* ...................................................... 16

The Structured Decision-Making Framework ........................................... 17

*Summary* ......................................................... 22

*Conclusion* .................................................... 26

*References* ..................................................... 27
Risk Assessment in Parole Decision-Making

Criminal justice systems around the world use risk assessment instruments (RAIs). They were developed to predict the statistical likelihood that justice-involved individuals might achieve a specific outcome, like recidivism, based on how similar they are to a sample population. Researchers use sample populations to draw conclusions. These conclusions are then used to create assessment instruments. The instruments are validated or tested for accuracy by using them with people from groups that are similar to the sample population. Once they are shown to deliver reliable and consistent results, RAIs can be used with people who have the same characteristics of the sample population they were validated on. The conclusions from RAIs can be applied to groups of people with the same characteristics, with predictions being strong but not perfect.
That said, paroling authorities make predictions about individuals, not groups. Risk assessment instruments can inform parole decisions, but they are not the only indicators that paroling authorities use. Paroling authorities must assess available information to determine whether someone is suitable for release given his or her circumstances and potential.

This white paper discusses risk assessment within the framework of parole decision-making. It discusses factors beyond RAIs that paroling authorities consider in determining a person’s suitability for parole. It outlines which factors have been empirically established to relate to release success and which ones have not. Lastly, this paper recommends best practices for paroling authorities in their use of RAIs in parole decision-making. This includes an overview of a structured parole decision-making approach and its supporting research for paroling authorities.

"RISK ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS PREDICT THE STATISTICAL LIKELIHOOD THAT JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS MIGHT ACHIEVE A SPECIFIC OUTCOME, LIKE RECIDIVISM, BASED ON HOW SIMILAR THEY ARE TO A SAMPLE POPULATION."
A considerable body of empirical research demonstrates that actuarial risk assessments for justice-involved individuals are more accurate at predicting recidivism than predictions based on a clinician’s professional perceptions and experience, where there is no structure and no information on how or what factors the clinician considered (Ágisdóttir et al., 2006; Grove & Meehl, 1996). Actuarial assessments are based on specific factors that are often weighted based on their ability to predict recidivism.

As a result, in recent decades there has been a proliferation of risk assessment tools developed to aid the criminal justice system in identifying individuals at greatest risk of criminal behavior (Desmarais et al, 2016). Specific tools may be focused on predicting certain types of criminal behavior, such as violent offenses (e.g., VRAG-R), or
predicting criminal behavior for certain subpopulations of justice-involved individuals, such as women (e.g., WRNA), sexual offenders (e.g., Static-99), or people with mental illness (e.g., START).

Within the realm of parole decision-making, it is common to use risk assessment information when making parole decisions. A recent survey of American paroling authorities found that 90% of reporting paroling authorities use a risk assessment tool when making decisions (Ruhland et al., 2016). This is a marked increase from previous surveys of paroling authorities, with only 48% and 73% of paroling authorities reporting their use in 1991 and 2008, respectively (Alper et al., 2015). Widely used risk assessment tools include the Level of Service Inventory-Revised and the Static-99 (Ruhland et al., 2016). Indeed, present parole practice suggests that failure to incorporate RAIs into decision-making would be problematic at best and negligent at worst. However, such practice obscures the reality that practitioners might be conflating parole suitability with risk. It also ignores the growing evidence that static risk factors lose predictive value over time (Hanson et al., 2018; Serin, 2020). Finally, there is increasing concern that RAIs may not apply equally to all individuals and that risk may be over-estimated for women and people of color (Desmarais et al., 2022).

In particular, Yang and colleagues (2010) note that predictive accuracy is so sufficiently imprecise that scores on RAIs should not be substituted for the parole decision-making process, especially when such decisions affect someone’s civil liberties. Of note, many paroling authorities do not conduct their own risk assessments, rather they are consumers of their affiliated correctional agency, which may or may not be up to date with contemporary risk assessment practice. It is important to
acknowledge that when examining the predictive validity of RAIs, there is generally no one assessment that has superior predictive validity compared to others (Desmarais & Singh, 2013; Kroner et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2010). For example, Kroner and colleagues (2005) compared the predictive accuracy of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, Level of Service Inventory-Revised, Violence Risk Appraisal Guide, and the General Statistical Information on Recidivism with four randomly generated instruments based on the original risk assessment instrument items. The results showed that none of the original risk assessment tools outperformed the randomly generated risk assessment tools in predicting post-release failure. This underscores the need for decision makers to use a variety of criteria to inform their selection of a risk assessment tool. Important considerations include: (i) identifying what kind of outcome is of interest to predict (e.g., general recidivism, intimate-partner violence); (ii) determining what population the tool will be used for (e.g., people with a mental disorder, psychopaths); and, (iii) outlining what resources are required to complete the risk assessment (Desmarais & Singh, 2013). These considerations, along with scale validation on the local offender population, will help ensure that the chosen risk assessment tool will have practical utility and that the paroling authority can accept the results with confidence.

**Guidelines Regarding Risk Assessment Instruments in Parole Decision-Making**

In response to increasing concerns from stakeholders regarding potential bias within RAIs, the Council of State Governments, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, convened an expert working group to develop guidelines for the selection and use of post-conviction risk-and-need assessments. The goal is to advance
accuracy, fairness, and transparency in risk assessment practice. The guidelines will be available in late 2022 for review (Desmarais et al., 2022) and will help paroling authorities explain their rationale for selecting a particular risk instrument.

The guidelines listed below have been adapted from the Council of State Governments’ expert working group to more directly reflect their relevance for parole decision-making. Specifically, RAIs used by paroling authorities should meet the following guidelines:

**Accuracy**
- Demonstrate inter-rater reliability and predictive validity for use with the population of interest with re-assessment every 5 years.
- Have training and fidelity guidelines regarding their competent use, with annual booster training.
- Include dynamic risk factors for re-assessment over time.

**Fairness**
- Establish whether recidivism estimates and norms vary by groups defined by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- Reflect risk-need-responsivity principles to inform service provision for individual cases.

**Scores on RAIs should not be substituted for the parole decision-making process, especially when such decisions affect someone’s civil liberties.**
Transparency

- Provide system stakeholders with sufficient information (intended settings, populations, outcomes, risk factors, scoring, etc.) regarding the RAIs being used to augment parole decisions.
- Communicate the strengths and limitations of the RAIs being used to augment parole decisions.

Communication and Use

- Identify the presence of risk and strengths and their relevance to the parole decision.
- Identify barriers to successful parole release and the potential need for intervention to increase parole suitability, including parole supervision conditions to mitigate risk.

Parole Decision-Making Factors

While RAIs play an important role in parole decision-making, risk is by no means the only factor that paroling authorities consider. They consider a wide range of other information when making parole decisions (Caplan, 2007; Kinnevy & Caplan, 2008; Ruhland et al., 2016). Table 1 outlines many of the factors that parole board members report as influences in parole decisions or factors that are empirically shown to affect parole decisions. Most of these have been identified by surveying parole board members about what factors they consider in the decision-making process, but some have also been confirmed through empirical research by examining the factors that make people more or less likely to be granted parole (e.g., institutional behavior, release plan, mental illness). However, not all factors that paroling authorities consider have been empirically linked with post-release outcomes, raising questions about their relevance in the decision-making process.
Not all factors that paroling authorities consider have been empirically demonstrated to relate to parole decisions. Further, not all factors have been empirically demonstrated to relate to suitability for release. Ideally, paroling authorities would emphasize reliance on factors empirically related to release suitability in their decision-making.

**Table 1: Factors Considered to Determine Parole Suitability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Association with Parole</th>
<th>Empirical Association with Post-Release Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board member survey</td>
<td>Empirical Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Characteristics of Individual (a)</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal History</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,2,4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History on Community Supervision</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use History</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release Plan</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;7,12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Participation</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;2,3,4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Behavior</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,2,3,4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;5,6,7,12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type or Severity of Index Offense</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;1,2,3,4,11&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>X&lt;sup&gt;5,8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- X: Indicates a significant association.
- Strong: Strong evidence for association.
- Mixed: Mixed evidence for association.
**Table 1: Factors Considered to Determine Parole Suitability (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Association with Parole</th>
<th>Empirical Association with Post-Release Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board member survey</td>
<td>Empirical Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>$X^{1,2,4,11}$</td>
<td>$X^{9,10}$ Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Information (b)</td>
<td>$X^{2,4}$</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Served</td>
<td>$X^{2,4}$</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual's Disposition or Demeanor at Hearing</td>
<td>$X^{1,4}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony from Individual</td>
<td>$X^{1}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence or Absence of Remorse</td>
<td>$X^{11}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Input</td>
<td>$X^{1,2,4}$</td>
<td>$X^{6}$ None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family of Individual</td>
<td>$X^{1,2}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Staff Input</td>
<td>$X^{1}$</td>
<td>$X^{7}$ None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Input (c)</td>
<td>$X^{1,2}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Information</td>
<td>$X^{4}$</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Demographic characteristics of the offender (e.g., age at time of offense, gender); b Victim information from the perspective of criminal thinking (e.g., number, age of victims); c Court input (e.g., judge, district attorney input)

DECISION FACTORS WITH STRONG RELATIONSHIP TO POST-RELEASE BEHAVIOR

Paroling authorities should determine an individual’s release suitability by first considering factors that have strong empirical support. Such factors include risk assessment, criminal history, history on community supervision, substance use history, program participation, release plan, and an individual's demographic characteristics. Individuals with higher risk, a previous criminal conviction, previous failure on supervision, and current substance use are more likely to fail on release (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Monahan & Skeem, 2016; Yesberg & Polaschek, 2015), with demographic characteristics such as younger age and male gender having historically higher recidivism rates as well (Goodley et al., 2021; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Piquero et al., 2015). The relationship between race and recidivism is nuanced and influenced by systemic factors and will not be discussed in this white paper (see Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016) but is an important consideration in the selection of risk instruments.

While not necessarily accounted for by risk assessment instruments, the factors of program participation and release plan are associated with parole suitability. Program participation is associated with parole suitability when an individual actively participated in and completed rehabilitative programming targeted to his or her criminogenic needs at a dosage appropriate for his or her risk level (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Hanson et al.,
Release plans are important means in setting an individual up for success on release by fostering appropriate housing and employment (Dickson et al., 2013). These factors reflect an individual’s prosocial supports and change.

**Decision Factors with Mixed Relationship with Post-Release Behavior**

Other factors that paroling authorities consider have a more subtle relationship to parole suitability and should be considered carefully. These factors include institutional behavior, index offense type or severity, offender change, mental illness, victim information, and time served.

Institutional misconduct is often considered in parole decision-making (Caplan, 2007; Bowman & Ely, 2017; Lackenby, 2018; Mooney & Daffern, 2014; Young et al., 2016), but it is considered differently by different paroling authorities. For example, some paroling authorities only examine misbehavior and not good behavior (West-Smith et al., 2000) while others examine both (Serin & Scott, 2006). Meta-analysis by Goodley and colleagues (2021) revealed mixed results in whether institutional misconduct predicts parole suitability, likely due to differences in the recency and type of institutional behavior that paroling authorities consider. Guidelines in one structured decision-making framework suggest adding the recency, severity, and relevance of any misbehavior to an individual’s pattern of earlier criminal behavior for a misconduct to be considered an aggravating factor (Serin & Rieger, 2019).
Similar to institutional misconduct, evidence regarding the empirical relationship between the type and severity of an individual’s index offense and his or her release suitability is mixed. This is likely due to regional differences and different considerations of the seriousness and type of the index offense. For example, many jurisdictions associate a history of property offenses with the increased likelihood of reoffense (Alper et al., 2018; Goodley et al., 2021; Moore & Eikenberry, 2021). However, jurisdictions differ on reoffense rates for violent offenses (Goodley et al., 2021; Kyckelhahn & Cooper, 2017). Consideration of the index offense should include an examination of the index offense’s relationship to a pattern of criminal behavior in parole decision-making. Index offenses may also affect decision makers’ concerns regarding the effect or impact of a community failure (i.e., low probability event but high negative concern).
Offender change is an observable shift in an individual’s criminal attitudes and behaviors towards a more prosocial outlook. Currently, empirical evidence is mixed on the relationship between offender change, release suitability, and post-release outcome (Serin et al., 2013; Wardrop et al., 2019). This variation may be due in part to the difficulty of reliably measuring offender change (Serin et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2015). Where paroling authorities can reliably measure prosocial change, this factor could be useful in making parole decisions (McLaren et al., 2021).

Both lay and industry professionals often misconstrue mental illness as a strong predictor of recidivism. The presence of a mental illness does predict parole denial (see Caplan, 2007), particularly for women (Hannah-Moffat, 2004). Yet its relationship with recidivism has been mixed. There is some support that the presence of mental illness is related to technical violations, but there is less consistent support for it as a predictor of new criminal offenses (Porporino & Motiuk, 1995; Skeem et al., 2014). It may be helpful for decision makers to consider the presence of acute symptoms and an individual’s response to intervention in addition to his or her simple diagnosis.

Victim information refers to an individual’s victim profile, if applicable. This includes the age and gender of victims as well as the number of victims. Justice-involved individuals with an established history of targeting a particular victim profile are thought to have a higher likelihood of repeating their pattern of criminal behavior. This is especially
true for sexual offenders (Carpentier & Proulx, 2011) and intimate partner violence offenders (Hilton et al., 2004). Evidence to support these theories is mixed and unreliable, yet may be relevant for risk management upon release.

The relationship between how much time a person has served, the parole decision, and determination of that person as suitable for release is nuanced. Some research suggests that paroling authorities are more likely to release someone who has served a large proportion of his or her sentence (Proctor, 1999) and has previously been denied release (Carroll et al., 1982); however, the severity of the sentence did not predict parole a decision (Caplan, 2007; Ruhland et al., 2016; Young et al, 2016). While jurisdiction-specific statistics have reported a positive association between time served and success on release (e.g., Alper et al., 2018), meta-analysis does not support the link (Goodley et al., 2021).

**Decision Factors with No Relationship to Post-Release Behavior**

Many of the factors considered by paroling authorities have no empirical relationship to an individual’s post-release behavior. These factors tend to be subjective and involve information presented in a parole hearing. They might include an individual’s disposition/demeanor, his or her testimony, remorse, victim input, family input, institutional staff input, court reports, and police information.
The factors related to an individual’s disposition (his or her demeanor, testimony, and remorse) have displayed no reliable relationship to his or her likelihood of success or failure on release (Dandawate et al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2017). These factors all relate to the decision maker’s subjective interpretation of the offender’s demeanor and could be influenced by personal or implicit biases or potentially manipulated by a good liar. The challenge of considering remorse in the parole process has also been discussed (Börnmann, 2020).

Input from outside sources (victim, offender family, court, prison staff, police) is similarly subjective and is understudied regarding post-release outcome. Paroling authorities would do better to rely upon the proxy factors that can be more objectively measured. For example, examination of victim information as it relates to an individual’s pattern of behavior and/or the nature of contact with prior victims would be more reliable than consideration of personal testimony by the victim regarding the effect of a crime, which should be addressed at sentencing (Roberts, 2009).

**Many of the factors considered by paroling authorities have no empirical relationship to an individual’s post-release behavior.**
STRUCTURED PAROLE DECISION-MAKING

As various stakeholders reflect on parole decisions, paroling authorities are increasingly expected to explain how they make those decisions. The extent to which a paroling authority’s decisions reflect a standard of practice, it may help to counter the competing interests of stakeholders whose views of public safety and the potential for rehabilitation may differ. Given the wide range of information paroling authorities consider when making parole decisions, it is perhaps surprising that less than half use some sort of release guidelines or sequential models to assist in decision-making (Ruhland et al., 2016). Increasingly, there have been recommendations for paroling authorities to use decision-making guideline tools to ensure decisions are structured, informed by
relevant policy, and are transparent to outside examination (Rhine et al., 2016). One strategy is to define a standard of practice for parole decision-making that reflects both empirical and policy considerations, is grounded in risk assessment, and provides for case-level decisions. Described below is a structured parole decision-making approach developed to meet these requirements.

**The Structured Decision-Making Framework**

Originating in Canada, a promising decision-making tool that has increasing empirical support is the Structured Decision-Making Framework (hereby known as the framework; Serin, 2007) depicted in figure 1. Using a worksheet, the framework assists board members in the efficient compilation of information in empirically relevant domains: Criminal and parole history, Offender self-control, Programming, Institutional and community behavior, Offender change, and Release plan. Each domain is assessed as having an aggravating, mitigating, or neutral effect on an incarcerated person's suitability for parole. Decision makers are also able to reflect on any discordant or conflicting information and to evaluate any additional information gathered in a parole hearing, if applicable. Notably, the framework does not produce a recommended parole decision in an actuarial manner, but it instead uses a structured professional judgment approach by framing the decision-making process so that the decision maker reviews and analyzes evidence-based information in a consistent
and holistic manner. The result being a comprehensive, evidence-based, and defensible rationale for the final parole decision.

There have been numerous empirical examinations of the utility of the framework in aiding parole decision-making in various jurisdictions (Gobeil & Serin, 2005; Griffith et al., 2007; Scott, 2006; Serin, 2007; Wardrop et al., 2019). Multiple Canadian retrospective studies have shown that the framework improves decisional accuracy by better classifying individuals’ suitability for release (Gobeil & Serin, 2005; Griffith et al., 2007; Serin, 2007). For example, Serin (2007) examined the ability of the framework to flag failures on parole in Canada. Using the framework, Serin retrospectively assessed the case files of 43 individuals who experienced sensational failures (i.e., perpetrated a new serious violent offense such as homicide) within the community while on parole. Results showed that, while the majority of cases appeared to have met the requirement of a quality decision as defined by the framework, a significant minority (42%) of these cases did not. It may be the case that, had the framework been used in the decision-making process, different parole decisions may have been made, having a substantial effect on public safety. Parole board members appear to be receptive to using a structured parole decision model, thinking that such a tool increases accuracy and confidence and assists in developing a rationale for the parole decision without greatly increasing the time it takes to make a parole decision (Serin & Scott, 2006).
In recent years the framework has been implemented in several states, with research showing it to be predictive of parole decisions and, where data is available, recidivism outcomes (Rieger & Serin, 2021; Serin & Gobeil, 2013; Wardrop et al., 2019). When examining 4,966 individuals eligible for release by the Connecticut Board of Pardons & Paroles, Wardrop and colleagues (2019) assessed the predictive validity of the...
framework in predicting both parole decisions and recidivism (e.g., any return to custody, including for technical violations). Results showed that the ratings on the majority of framework domains were predictive of both parole decisions and recidivism outcomes, even when statistically controlling for individuals’ static risk ratings. When predicting recidivism, the framework domains of Offender change, Programming, and Release plan were particularly important in that individuals rated as aggravating on those factors were more likely to return to custody. Moreover, those granted parole under the framework were more likely to succeed in the community compared to those denied parole but released for another reason.

More recently, a study by Rieger and Serin (2021) assessed parole decision-making in a midwestern state parole board to determine whether
the board’s framework domain ratings predicted their parole decisions. Results showed that people were more likely to be denied release if board members gave aggravating ratings on the Offender self-control, Institutional behavior, Offender change, and Release plan domains. Comparatively, people with mitigating ratings on the Institutional behavior, Offender change, and Release plan domains were between 63% and 81% more likely to be granted parole. Recidivism results also showed that individuals granted parole using the framework were significantly less likely to return to custody (for any reason, including technical violations) than individuals released for another reason. Overall, this body of research supports the use of the framework as it appears to be predictive of both parole decisions and recidivism outcomes.

When examining the predictive validity of RAIs, there is generally no one assessment that has superior predictive validity compared to others.
A goal of this paper is to summarize key considerations for parole decision makers, at both the agency and individual board member level. This includes identifying important empirical and policy factors, having an understanding of the synergistic relationship between risk assessment and parole decision-making, and adhering to the need for transparency. We have organized this work for parole decision-making into a list of top 10 guidelines, which are presented below.
**Top 10 Guidelines for Parole Decision-Making**

1. **Parole Decision-Making Should be Grounded by Risk Estimates**
   
   Parole decision-making involves more than risk assessment; risk assessment does not equal parole decision-making. However, ignoring risk level when make a parole decision is ill-advised.

2. **Parole Decision-Making Should Consider Risk Estimates Validated for This Population**
   
   Risk instruments should be validated such that scores or ratings differentiate between those who succeed or fail on release for the parole population of interest, reflecting transparency and diversity.

3. **Parole Decision-Making Should Consider Current Risk**
   
   Static risk estimates lose predictive power over time. Parole decision makers should consider dynamic risk factors to reflect the *current* risk an individual poses to public safety.

4. **Parole Decision-Making Should Be Structured**
   
   Structured approaches to parole decision-making are preferred as they increase accuracy, consistency, and transparency while allowing for decisions to be logical and standardized.

5. **Parole Decision-Making Should Emphasize Empirically Supported Factors**
   
   It is helpful to distinguish between factors related to recidivism (i.e., empirical) and factors reflected in statutes and eligibility (i.e., policy) and to consider their relative importance.
6. **Parole Decision-Making Should Consider the Recency and Context of Factors Considered**

Institutional misbehavior remains a moderately important predictor of post-release failure, but historical poor institutional behavior may be insufficient for a negative decision. The recency and circumstances of the misbehavior are also important to contextualize current risk in terms of pro-criminal attitudes, and competencies such as problem-solving, when considering the likelihood of parole success.

7. **Parole Decision-Making Should Include Only Conditions Necessary for an Individual's Success**

Decisions regarding parole conditions should be case-specific in terms of criminogenic needs, and they should be measured and viable. Parole conditions can mitigate risk only somewhat, and disproportionately increasing the number of conditions does not necessarily manage risk. Indeed, excessive parole conditions could potentially nullify parole suitability and likely increase rates of technical violations and returns to incarceration.

8. **Parole Decision-Making Should Emphasize Reliable Evidence of Change for Justice-Involved Individuals**

Evidence of change seems to be one of the more important considerations in parole decision-making and should reflect more than a person’s self-reports. Programming is one important strategy to influence change, but simple attendance in programs does not guarantee change.
9. **Parole Decision-Making Should Consider Viable Reentry Planning**

Reentry planning and support are important considerations, even if the paroling authority does not have oversight for supervision. Both internal (i.e., agency, identity) and external (i.e., social capital, stability of employment and housing) strength factors are important in understanding parole success (i.e., crime desistance). Addictions and mental health are also important considerations in reentry planning.

10. **Parole Decision-Making Should Withstand Scrutiny**

In addition to using a structured approach for consistency across board members and cases, parole decisions should also withstand scrutiny in the event of a negative community outcome. This is accomplished by providing clear rationales that reflect a thorough review of relevant issues and policy, following transparent processes, and analyzing current risk and parole suitability carefully.

*RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE ACCURATE THAN JUDGEMENTS BASED ON A CLINICIAN’S PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTIONS*
CONCLUSION

The above-noted guidelines summarize a review of the relevant research literature regarding risk and parole decision-making, best practices from parole surveys, and an acknowledgement of the increasing requirement for parole decisions to be transparent and informed by research. The extent to which these guidelines are met should focus conversations between paroling authorities and stakeholders, increase confidence in the parole process, and underscore public safety as the fundamental priority when releasing individuals from incarceration. It is also important to be mindful that in many circumstances paroling authorities do not have oversight over community supervision, but these guidelines should be helpful in describing expectations for success to community supervision while working with paroling authorities.


Gobeil, R., & Serin, R. C. (2009). Preliminary evidence of adaptive decision making techniques used by parole board members. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health, 8*(2), 97-104. [https://doi.org/10.1080/14999010903199258](https://doi.org/10.1080/14999010903199258)


