

# An Organizational Readiness Lens for Implementing the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Picture a scenario like this:

*You just celebrated your one-year anniversary as the director of a large probation agency in an urban area that provides community supervision to those with substance use disorders. The job has not been easy and challenges have emerged. Some staff feel that their primary job is surveillance and you are concerned about their workload as caseloads are high. Recent research shows that the continued emphasis on surveillance and monitoring has resulted in higher rates of recidivism for those on probation, high jail costs, and prison admissions due to supervision revocations.*

*You know there are ways to work smarter not harder. Most of your staff are young, eager, and understand the concept of best practice. Some staff have learned about evidence-based practices, and in particular the Risk, Need, and Responsivity principles, at other agencies or in training. At recent meetings, you have discussed a more consistent and systematic adoption of RNR throughout the agency as an evidence-based approach that can reduce recidivism. The need to build organizational capacity and readiness for this new innovation will require a sustained commitment. Do we have the motivation (willingness) to carry this out? Do we have the capacity (ability) to adhere to the fidelity of the model?*

Large and small organizations are frequently interested in bringing something new

into their setting. We define “innovation” as a program, policy, practice, or process that is new to a setting. Successfully integrating an innovation into a new setting can be challenging and include a variety of factors that can hinder high-quality implementation. The degree to which an organization is “ready” to implement an innovation can determine the level of success.

In this article, we present a readiness building system based on three components of organizational readiness:  $R=MC^2$  where  $R$ =Readiness;  $M$ =Motivation, and  $C^2$  consists of both General Capacities and Innovation-Specific Capacities (Scaccia, et al., 2015). This model includes both capacities and motivation. Within each of the three readiness components are specific subcomponents that can be enhanced through readiness building. Table 1 (next page) is the  $R=MC^2$  readiness components and the definitions of the subcomponents.

The purpose of this article is to describe the organizational readiness building system and offer suggestions for how to assess and build readiness in Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) practice. Because organizational readiness exists on a continuum, it is conceptualized as being more than “ready or not” and may be enhanced by using intentional strategies to build readiness (Livet, Yannayon, Richard, Sorge, & Scanlon, 2020).

## Section II: OVERVIEW OF THE RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY MODEL

The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model is derived from decades of research demonstrating that the best outcomes are achieved in the criminal justice system when (1) the intensity of criminal justice supervision is matched to participants’ risk for criminal recidivism or likelihood of failure in rehabilitation (criminogenic risk) and (2) interventions focus on the specific disorders or conditions that are responsible for participants’ crimes (criminogenic needs). (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006; Andrews, Zinge, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007; Lowenkemap, Latessa, & Smith, 2006; Smith, Gendreau, & Swartz, 2009; Taman & Marlowe, 2006). The RNR model, developed by researchers Donald A. Andrews and James Bonta, is based on three principles:

1) The risk principle asserts that criminal behavior can be reliably predicted and that treatment should focus on the higher risk offenders;

2) The need principle highlights the importance of criminogenic needs in the design and delivery of treatment; and

3) The responsivity principle describes how the treatment should be provided.

Applying the risk and need principles to community supervision means prioritizing the supervision and treatment resources for

**TABLE 1.**  
**Readiness Components and Subcomponents**

Subcomponent	Definitions
<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Degree to which the organization wants the new innovation to happen.</b>
Relative Advantage	The innovation seems more useful than what we've done in the past.
Compatibility	The innovation fits with how we do things.
Simplicity	The innovation seems simple to use.
Ability to Pilot	Degree to which the innovation can be tested and tried out.
Observability	Ability to see that the innovation is producing outcomes.
Priority	Importance of the innovation in relation to other things we do.
<b>Innovation-specific Capacity</b>	<b>What we need to implement the innovation.</b>
Innovation-specific Knowledge & Skills	Sufficient abilities to implement the innovation.
Champion	A well-connected person who supports and models the use of the innovation.
Supportive Climate	Necessary supports, processes, and resources to enable the use of the innovation.
Intra-organizational Relationships	Relationships within our site that support the use of the innovation.
Inter-organizational Relationships	Relationships between our site and other organizations that support the use of the innovation.
<b>General Capacity</b>	<b>The overall functioning of the organization.</b>
Culture	Norms and values of how we do things at our site.
Climate	The feeling of being part of this site.
Innovativeness	Openness to change in general.
Resource Utilization	Ability to acquire and allocate resources including time, money, effort, and technology.
Leadership	Effectiveness of our leaders at multiple levels.
Internal Operations	Effectiveness at communication and teamwork.
Staff Capacities	Having enough of the right people to get things done.
Process Capacities	Effectiveness to plan, implement, and evaluate.

higher risk offenders and focusing treatment on those criminogenic needs associated with criminal behavior as the way to reduce recidivism. Finally, responsivity addresses the need to tailor cognitive learning strategies and services to the person's individual characteristics, including culture, gender, and learning style. The responsivity principle guides choices of services and interventions for successful community supervision. This is summarized in Table 2 on the next page.

When adopting an innovation like RNR into a criminal justice setting, it is important for team members to be fully prepared for implementation. The RNR model requires changes in core ideologies from a focus on punishment and control to more therapeutic and rehabilitative philosophies. Existing research highlights the challenge of such culture shifts within correctional environments characterized by punishment ideologies. For

example, it may be that some probation officers do not believe that criminogenic needs can be changed or adequately addressed. This belief could limit their use of the need principle, which would lessen their use of the resources provided associated in the responsivity principle. The full adoption of the RNR model, including the simulation tool, may also present some concern for staff if the use of the "best fit" data are viewed as incorrect, faulty, or misleading when developing case plans. This suggests a strong need for adequate training, follow-up technical assistance, and guided practice and feedback.

### **Section III: OVERVIEW OF A READINESS BUILDING SYSTEM**

The Readiness Building System (RBS), developed at the Wandersman Center, includes assessment tools, feedback and prioritization processes, and readiness building strategies

(also known as change management strategies). The RBS has been used in a variety of projects including integrated primary health care (Scott et al., 2017), CDC Tobacco Control (Domlyn & Wandersman, 2019), and building organizational readiness for sexual assault prevention in ten sites for the Department of Defense (DoD). Given these and other experiences, this article describes how the RBS can be useful to organizations as they look to adopt effective policies to support the RNR model of community supervision.

The phases of RBS are illustrated in Figure 1 (next page) and include:

- Initial engagement.
- Deciding assessment options.
- Gathering feedback and prioritizing the subcomponents of readiness.
- Planning and implementing Change Management of Organizational Readiness (CMOR) strategies.

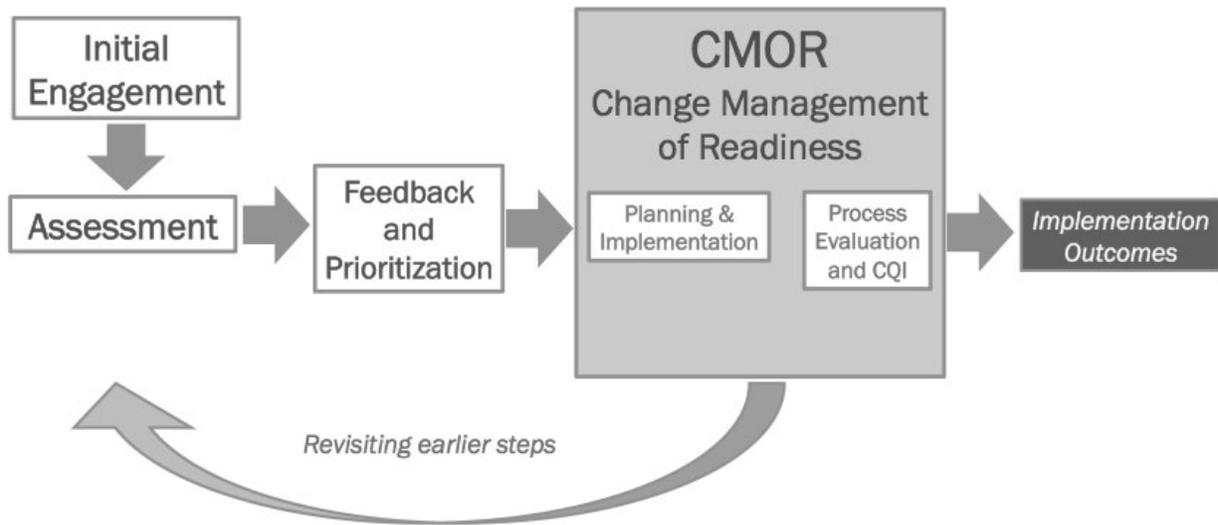
#### **Phase 1: Initial Engagement**

Successfully engaging a readiness team or a group of key stakeholders in a readiness-building process is important for success. When selecting individuals for an organization's readiness team, members should have a deep understanding of the strengths and challenges the organization faces to adopt the innovation. This may include knowledge of risk and protective factors for recidivism, relevant trend data, and historical knowledge of previous community supervision strategies implemented. In addition, this team will be asked to provide input into which readiness assessment tool will be used and to identify possible strategies for readiness-building. In general, the readiness team should be 8–12 members, depending on the size of the organization.

#### **Phase 2: Readiness Assessment**

The two primary readiness assessment tools to assess readiness are the Readiness Diagnostic Scale (RDS) and the Readiness Thinking Tool (RTT). Both are designed to assess organizational readiness using the R=MC<sup>2</sup> framework. Usually, leadership (in collaboration with the readiness team), determines which assessment tool is best for a specific organization. The RDS is administered electronically and takes about 20–25 minutes to complete. Respondents use a 7-point Likert scale to answer questions related to the 19 subcomponents listed in Table 1. Upon completion of the RDS, a readiness report is provided showing how the subcomponents are rated by the

**FIGURE 1.**  
Phases of the Readiness Building System (RBS)



**TABLE 2.**  
Principles and Application of the Risk, Need and Responsivity Model

Principle	Description	Application
<b>Risk</b>	<p><b>Likelihood</b> that a person who committed a crime will again engage in future criminal behavior.</p> <p><b>Based</b> on static risk factors that correlate with criminal behavior.</p> <p><b>Static</b> risk factors are associated with the individual’s prior history with the criminal justice system and cannot be changed. They include: age of first arrest, # of times arrested, # of times incarcerated, age and gender.</p> <p><b>Higher-risk</b> people are more likely to re-offend and recidivate than moderate or lower-risk people.</p> <p><b>High-risk</b> requires more community supervision.</p>	<p><b>Match</b> level of community supervision to risk and prioritize supervision and treatment resources for higher-risk individuals.</p> <p><b>Specifies:</b> <i>Who to Target</i></p>
<b>Need</b>	<p><b>Criminogenic</b> needs are linked directly to criminal behavior.</p> <p><b>Labeled</b> “dynamic” or “changeable” risk factors because unlike “static risk factors” they can change.</p> <p><b>Changes</b> are associated with likelihood/unlikelihood of person to recidivate.</p> <p><b>Central Eight Risk Factors and Indicators:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>*History of Antisocial Behavior</b> - Early involvement in antisocial activities (e.g., being arrested at a young age, a large number of prior offenses).</li> <li><b>*Antisocial Personality Pattern</b> - Impulsive, pleasure-seeking, involved in generalized trouble, and show a callous disregard for others.</li> <li><b>*Antisocial Cognition</b> - Identifying with criminals, negative attitudes towards the law and justice system, beliefs that crime results in rewards.</li> <li><b>*Antisocial Associates</b> - Associate with pro-criminal individuals and isolate from individuals who are anti-crime.</li> <li><b>Family/Marital Circumstances</b> - Poor-quality relationships between the child and the parent (in the case of juveniles involved in the criminal justice system) or spouses combined with lower expectations of non-criminal behavior.</li> <li><b>School/Work</b> - Low levels of performance, involvement, rewards, and satisfaction.</li> <li><b>Leisure/Recreation</b> - Low levels of involvement in and satisfaction from noncriminal leisure pursuits.</li> <li><b>Substance Abuse</b> - Abusing alcohol and/or other drugs.</li> </ol> <p><i>* Four factors most highly correlated with criminal behavior</i></p>	<p><b>Identify</b> criminogenic needs.</p> <p>Target and prioritize those needs with appropriate interventions and treatment to decrease the likelihood of future criminal behavior and recidivism.</p> <p><b>Specifies:</b> <i>What to Target</i></p>
<b>Responsivity</b>	<p><b>Programs</b> and interventions delivered in a style and mode that is consistent with the ability and learning style of the individual under community supervision.</p> <p><b>Identify</b> the individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, personality, personal motivations, stages of change, etc.), along with other strengths which can inform “responsivity” factors for case planning.</p>	<p><b>Deliver</b> interventions and services in a manner consistent with the ability and learning style of the person(s) under community supervision.</p> <p><b>Match</b> and tailor the interventions and programming with the individual characteristics and “responsivity” factors for community supervision.</p> <p><b>Specifies:</b> <i>How to Target</i></p>

Source: James, Nathan (2018). *Risk and Needs Assessment in the Federal Prison System*.

organization's survey respondents. The RDS was developed to be a comprehensive readiness measure based on  $R=MC^2$  and designed for all phases of implementation. Early use of the RDS showed its utility as a diagnostic tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses across several content areas (e.g., community coalitions, schools, primary health care settings). Currently, studies are in process to rigorously test: 1) the survey item characteristics, 2) relationships between the survey items, and 3) latent factor structures for each subcomponent.

The RTT is a brief checklist-style rating about the readiness subcomponents. This tool is less formal and takes about five minutes to complete. Respondents rate each of the 19 subcomponents using a 1-4 scale of agreement (1=definitely no; 2=mostly no; 3=mostly yes; 4=definitely yes). There is no formal scoring of the RTT, and it is mainly used to prompt discussion among the team members. Regardless of which tool is chosen, an important follow-up action step is to ensure a facilitated discussion of the organization's readiness results. If the organization received a readiness report after completing the RDS, scores on the subcomponents and individual items are discussed. If the RTT is completed, there is an opportunity to have a similar discussion about the organization's perception of the subcomponents. Regardless of the tool chosen, the discussion is likely to take one to two hours, depending on the number of readiness team members participating in the discussion.

### Phase 3: Gathering Feedback and Prioritizing Readiness Subcomponents

The process of gathering feedback through the facilitated discussion is similar to a focus group. It allows input from all readiness team members, including information about the strengths and challenges for each subcomponent. The major goal of the feedback process is to determine which readiness subcomponents are most likely to impact implementation. As information is summarized, the team is asked to prioritize which readiness subcomponents to address. These are likely to be subcomponents with lower scores as well as those that emerge during the facilitated discussion. The RDS includes a series of questions to help complete the prioritization tool, including:

- Is a low score on this subcomponent likely to have a significant negative impact on successful implementation of our program,

practice, or policy?

- Do we have the resources (time and budget) to address this subcomponent?
- Does it make sense for us to address this subcomponent at this time given our other priorities?

We usually suggest that no more than three readiness subcomponents be addressed at one time. These subcomponents will be included in the readiness-building plan as priority areas in which to focus when preparing to implement a RNR model of community supervision.

### Phase 4: Planning & Implementing Change Management of Readiness (CMOR) Strategies

Once the readiness subcomponents are prioritized, CMOR strategies can be selected to develop the readiness-building plan. Having a written plan to increase capacities and motivation for change helps to:

- Keep the entire team on the same page and moving in the same direction.
- Monitor progress with the plan.
- Make adjustments to the plan when needed.

After the readiness-building plan is developed, it is time to carry out the specific readiness-building tasks. Those skilled in providing readiness-focused technical assistance should meet regularly with the team to provide guidance on the plan. Key components of the readiness-building action plan template include: specific readiness-building tasks, person responsible, and timeline. This template is organized by the prioritized subcomponents identified by the readiness team. The readiness team should meet frequently enough so that problems can be identified early, but not so frequently that there is little progress occurring between meetings.

### Section IV: USING THE READINESS BUILDING SYSTEM TO IMPROVE PRACTICES RELATED TO RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY

The ability (capacity) and willingness (motivation) to implement an evidence-based practice requires understanding what factors will promote or detract from the organization's readiness to implement RNR principles. Several factors likely to support the successful implementation of these principles include:

- Recognition by leadership and decision-makers of the ineffectiveness of surveillance

and monitoring alone in the successful completion of community supervision and recidivism reduction.

- Understanding the cost of supervision revocation and inappropriate supervision of low-risk individuals in state and local jurisdictions.
- Parole, probation, and pretrial services agents who are open to new approaches and system changes that will support them in being more effective with community supervision.
- Dissemination of research supporting the effectiveness of using evidence-based practices in reducing recidivism and improving the outcomes related to community supervision that agencies have sought to achieve.
- Use of the RNR Simulation Tool developed by the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence to determine an individual's level of risk and criminogenic needs related to those selected for community supervision.

The web-based RNR Simulation Tool operationalizes the RNR model by providing information to make decisions when matching a person's needs with recommended programs and services. It also displays the array of services that are provided in the jurisdiction. Used by probation agencies and jurisdictional leadership, the tool can also identify local treatment and programming resources based on the populations they serve. The overarching aim of this computer portal is to help criminal justice agencies better understand the resources available to them and to foster responsivity to specific risk-need profiles. The RNR Simulation Tool provides an example of how probation agencies may operationalize an evidence-based practice (EBP) if they are ready to move forward with effectively assessing those on probation for risk, need, and responsivity.

When considering applying a readiness-building system to prepare for a model such as RNR, the organization must evaluate both the existing capacities and motivation for implementing the innovation. General capacities have been conceptualized as the global skills and characteristics of a setting associated with the overall functioning of the group (Flaspohler, Duffy, Wandersman, Stillman, & Maras, 2008). While these capacities are not specific to a particular innovation (e.g., RNR), they include foundational capacities/structures that are necessary to implement an innovation. Certainly, each subcomponent has a variety of characteristics or skills that

comprise the subcomponent. Table 3 provides examples of some characteristics of general capacities and motivation that are important for an organization to be ready to implement the RNR model. General capacities such as effective organizational leadership as well as a history of innovativeness and a favorable climate for implementing an evidence-based practice are important to have. Lower scores on these subcomponents suggest that a readiness-building plan may want to prioritize enhancing those important general capacities.

In a similar way, the defining characteristics for the motivation subcomponents related to RNR are also presented in Table 3. Recent data suggest that the motivation component is most relevant when preparing to adopt an innovation (Domlyn & Wandersman, 2019). Specifically, once the innovation becomes part of standard practice, motivation subcomponents become less relevant. This is consistent with previous findings that motivation for a new innovation is critical for the initial persuasion of adoption (Rogers, 2003).

We provide more detailed examples of the innovation-specific subcomponents to demonstrate how they may be applicable to RNR. Table 4 (next page) includes each readiness subcomponent, potential organizational challenges, and sample CMOR strategies that may be useful. Certainly, these examples are not exhaustive and are highlighted as potential CMOR strategies to be considered, based on the identified challenges.

### Section V: CONCLUSION

As criminal justice organizations have begun to examine evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism, integrating the RNR model is one policy that is usually considered. The model includes a validated assessment tool as part of a larger data system to ensure the selection and provision of appropriate services and interventions. As described in the R=MC<sup>2</sup>, it is important to have sufficient capacities and motivation for successful implementation of an innovation.

To demonstrate the importance of all of the subcomponents for a probation agency, the following paragraph is presented by a content expert in criminal justice policies (including RNR), and we suggest the primary readiness subcomponent throughout the paragraph (in italics). This highlights the broad categories of the organizational readiness issues to the “typical” challenges of adopting a RNR model.

**TABLE 3.**  
**General Capacities and Motivation Subcomponents and Examples**

General Capacities	Positive Examples of Subcomponents
Culture	Organizations recognize better outcomes when evidence-based practices are implemented.
Climate	High morale among staff.
Leadership	Leadership is effective in communicating and promoting positive change.
Innovativeness	Organization has history of positive change efforts.
Resource Utilization	Good connections with state and community providers and with contracted service providers.
Process Capacities	Organization has strong internal monitoring system and evaluation.
Staff Capacities	Organization has adequate ratio of probation agents to cases.
Internal Operations	Organization has written communication plan.
Motivation	
Simplicity	RNR implementation is at an acceptable level of complexity.
Compatibility	RNR is consistent with operating procedures.
Priority	RNR principles are a priority in their current scope of work.
Relative Advantage	Outcomes obtained from RNR are better than current practices.
Observability	Likely to see positive results in the short term.
Ability to Pilot	Able to test feasibility of RNR with a sample of probation officers.

#### *Probation Agencies: Readiness to Adopt Use of RNR Model*

Many probation agencies recognize that transformation (*innovativeness*) is necessary to reduce recidivism and the support (*supportive climate*) of counties and state leaders is needed (*leadership*). There are actions agency leaders need to take (*champion*) to move this transformation forward (*priority*). Probation agency personnel consist of more than probation officers (*staff capacities*). In addition to community supervision, probation agencies consist of challenging, multiple systems (*inter-organizational relationships*) where operational and administrative staff have time-consuming responsibilities (*internal operations, process capacities*). In addition to having leadership at all levels (*intraorganizational relationships*) involved in this major change (the RNR innovation), staff should be involved in the process (*knowledge and skills*) from the beginning (*priority*), and remain patient in the process (*ability to pilot*). There are also other

professionals in law enforcement and social services who play critical roles in the community supervision process (*resource utilization*). Collaboration is key. Each has a vested role to ensure the success of probation agencies (*relative advantage*) in reducing recidivism, reoffending, and relapse. Leadership can help to create “small wins” (*observability*) and support by educating stakeholders and personnel about the alignment (*compatibility*) necessary for successful community supervision.

As agencies begin to consider adopting new policies for community supervision, they would be well suited to consider the full readiness building system, which includes assessment, prioritization, and CMOR strategies. Clearly, the importance of the three readiness components and specific subcomponents are relevant to many agencies as they look to implement any new evidence-based program, practice, or policy to reduce recidivism.

**TABLE 4.**  
**Sample Challenges and Readiness-Building Strategies by Subcomponent**

Innovation-Specific Readiness Subcomponent	Sample Challenges to Implement RNR Community Supervision Model	Sample Readiness Building Strategies to Implement RNR Community Supervision Model
Knowledge and Skills for RNR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many behavioral health and criminal justice professionals misconstrue risk, need, and responsiveness concepts.</li> <li>• RNR requires comprehensive assessment so services are customized for the right person at the right time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer research terms into familiar concepts for practitioners.</li> <li>• Share successful RNR models to increase knowledge of effective RNR community supervision practice.</li> <li>• Increase actions to promote skill-building (e.g., training, supervision) and updated RNR practices.</li> </ul>
Program Champion for RNR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership is unclear about their role in championing and implementing evidence-based practices in using the RNR model (e.g., comprehensive assessment, etc.) for community supervision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PC communicates the effectiveness of RNR when done correctly.</li> <li>• PC identifies best practices and brings them forward.</li> <li>• PC gets commitment from all partners to support high-quality implementation of RNR.</li> </ul>
Supportive Climate for RNR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various levels of leadership support for RNR.</li> <li>• Agency leadership has competing priorities.</li> <li>• Leadership at state, local, and jurisdictional levels are unwilling to commit the resources required to implement new approaches.</li> <li>• Leadership has little experience with evidence-based practices and unaware of fidelity monitoring strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership is accepting of RNR model including modifications in assessment and use of data to determine appropriate levels of community supervision.</li> <li>• Agency leadership understands the commitment of evidence-based RNR strategies and uses resources well to support high-quality implementation.</li> <li>• Policies are modified to ensure that the RNR model can be implemented fully (e.g., use of appropriate tools, use of a data-informed system for community supervision).</li> </ul>
Intraorganizational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parole and probation agents responsible for conducting community supervision have high caseloads and can feel overwhelmed for system and culture change.</li> <li>• All levels of leadership are unwilling to support an evidence-based RNR model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership understands the need for policy changes to begin reducing the caseloads and turnover of probation staff.</li> <li>• All agency staff implementing RNR recognize the need for changes in the practice of community supervision.</li> </ul>
Interorganizational Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger criminal justice system does not fully embrace implementing RNR principles.</li> <li>• Ongoing training, data collection, and evaluation of RNR requires that new practices be embraced by partners involved in the cultural change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate specific RNR strategies and the effectiveness of the menu of community supervision practices.</li> <li>• Conduct site visits to locations where RNR is successful.</li> <li>• Jointly plan with partners specific programs that will meet the needs of those receiving community supervision (e.g., education-based, skill-based, etc.).</li> </ul>

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