


Chapter 9:

Developing a Policies and Procedures Manual

by

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Introduction

A critical and often overlooked ingredient of juvenile probation administration is the development and maintenance of the juvenile probation agency's written policies and procedures. Sound management practice requires explicit policies and clearly defined procedures and rules. In a department of only a few staff, a simple, well-organized, and timely file folder of memos, rules, and regulations may suffice. In a large probation agency, on the other hand, several manuals may be needed to contain all the policies and procedures for numerous agency divisions and activities.

Indeed, a hallmark of a well-organized probation agency is an operations manual that is regularly consulted by staff to provide guidance in doing their work correctly and effectively. However, not all juvenile probation agencies have the luxury of an effective operations manual. Some agencies may be small and informally administered. In some agencies, the probation administrator may recognize the need for and value of an operations manual, but be unable to commit the time, energy, and organizational resources to develop one. In other agencies, the administrator may be willing to devote the resources, but unsure about what to do. Unfortunately, there are precious few resources available to assist juvenile probation administrators in the planning, development, and production of operations manuals. Although some state authorities require an operations manual of local departments (e.g., Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 1995), few provide assistance in developing such a manual.

Furthermore, training and technical assistance in the development of an operations manual is not readily available. Given the multitude of serious

challenges facing juvenile probation these days, the topic of how to develop policies and procedures manuals rarely makes the agenda at professional conferences or other probation training programs.

The purpose of this chapter is to address that resource gap by providing some basic guidelines for the development of an operations manual for juvenile probation agencies.

Benefits of Policies and Procedures Manuals

In spite of the time and effort required to develop effective operations manuals, the dividends the effort pays to the organization are high. A well designed policies and procedures manual provides many benefits to the juvenile probation organization (Bloom, 1983):

- **Management Tool:** The operations manual provides managers with the *blueprints* of the organization. It provides guidance for doing the work of the organization, and it provides documentation of how the work is intended to be done.
- **Training:** Good policy and procedural manuals are instrumental in providing training to employees, both new and veteran, regarding agency goals, objectives, functions, and activities.
- **Reference Document:** The manual provides a single, easily-accessible source of authoritative answers to questions about official procedures and policy positions.
- **Information Repository:** Operations manuals provide a central repository for often-scattered official documents for easy reference, review, and revision.
- **Organizational Archive:** A well-maintained and frequently up-dated manual provides a record of organizational changes over time in programs, priorities, and philosophy.

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An up-to-date policies and procedures manual is a pre-requisite for professional accreditation. Accreditation of juvenile and adult probation agencies by the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections, for example, requires a comprehensive manual of appropriate policies and procedures in numerous management and operations areas. The American Correctional Association advocates the utilization of a comprehensive, well-written manual as an indispensable management tool for promoting professionalism, efficiency, and consistency (American Correctional Association, 1981).

Distinguishing Policies from Procedures

The terms policy and procedure, while related, reflect different concepts (see Figure 1). A policy defines a course of action or a principle adopted and pursued by an agency, which guides or determines present and future decisions and actions of the agency. Policies are value-driven and tell why things ought to be done.

There are several types of agency policies. Operational policies deal with agency functions, strategic goals, and tactical objectives—for example, the graduated agency responses to non-compliance of a court order by a probationer. General agency policies, however, state official value positions taken on such issues as confidentiality or equal opportunity.

Procedures, on the other hand, tell how things are done; they prescribe the methods and actions for doing work. For example, while policy may dictate that a youth is detained upon referral, the procedures describe who is responsible for causing the youth to be detained and the actions that must be accomplished to complete the task.

A procedure is a detailed and sequential action to be executed to perform an operation, and includes an identification of the personnel responsible for the required steps. The underlying and often elusive operational system is made visible in the written procedure. Accordingly, a compilation of accurate statements of an organization's policies and procedures represents not just a rule book, but a blueprint of the agency's systems (Matthies, 1987).

Figure 1: Policy / Procedure Comparisons

| Policy | Procedure |
|--|--|
| A plan for action by the organization | A description of the action |
| Reflects the overarching mission and goals of the organization | Reflects individual responsibility and activities for completing tasks |
| Statement of values | Statement of work |
| Addresses the "why" of the organization | Addresses the "how" of the organization |

Agency policies and procedures are often related to professional standards—normative measures of the quality of organizations and their performance. Any agency policy or procedure should be measured against the applicable professional standard (American Correctional Association, 1994).

Developing the Manual

Several individuals and groups are critical to the development of policies and procedures: the probation administrator, the operations manual development coordinator, the operations manual development committee, and agency staff.

The Juvenile Probation Administrator

The responsibility for creating and maintaining a juvenile probation policy and procedures manual rests squarely in the domain of the agency administrator (American Correctional Association, 1983). The juvenile probation administrator authorizes, initiates, directs, and ultimately approves the development of policies and procedures. The degree to which the administrator demonstrates support for the development of an operations manual will determine, in large measure, the success or failure of the initiative.

Administrative support for efforts to develop policies and procedures is demonstrated in a number of ways: 1) the actual allocation of staff time and financial resources to the initiative; 2) the quality and status of the staff assigned to develop the manual; 3) the degree to which the administrator is a vocal advocate for the process; 4) the administrator's publicly personal commitment of time to assist in the