

## **STATUS REPORT: OVERVIEW**

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**CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

## INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 1

Question 45: “Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offender’s risks?” ..... 1

Question 45a: “If you answered *Yes*, Please specify the factors you use most frequently to decide offenders’ risk status and rank them in order of importance.” ..... 1

Question 46: “Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offenders’ needs?” ..... 3

Question 46a: “If you answered *Yes*, please specify the factors you use most frequently in choosing the services from which an offender may benefit and rank them in order of importance.” ..... 3

Question 47: “ Are there ways in which Probation and Parole could better serve offenders that are not currently in place?” ..... 4

Question 47 a: “ If *Yes*, please describe the most important changes you would make to the system.” ..... 5

Question 48: “Do you think the population of offenders in New Mexico possess any unique characteristics or bear any influential circumstances that are not addressed by the Risk and Needs Assessment procedures currently in use?..... 6

Question 48 a: “ If you answered *Yes*, please describe the most important characteristics or circumstances you’ve come across in your work.” ..... 7

List of Tables

Table 1. Q 45a Factors, Other Than RNA Criteria, Used to Determine Offender’s Risk Status ..... 2

Table 2. Q 46a Factors Used Most Frequently in Choosing Services for the Offender ..... 3

Table 3. Q 47a In What Ways Can PPD Better Serve Offenders That are Not Currently in Place ..... 6

Table 6. Q 48a The Most Important Characteristics or Circumstances Unique to New Mexico Offenders .... 7

List of Figures

Figure 1. Q 45 Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offenders’ Risk Status? ..... 1

Figure 2. Q 46 Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offenders’ needs? ..... 3

Figure 3. Q 47 Are there ways in which Probation and Parole could better serve offenders that are not currently in place?” ..... 5

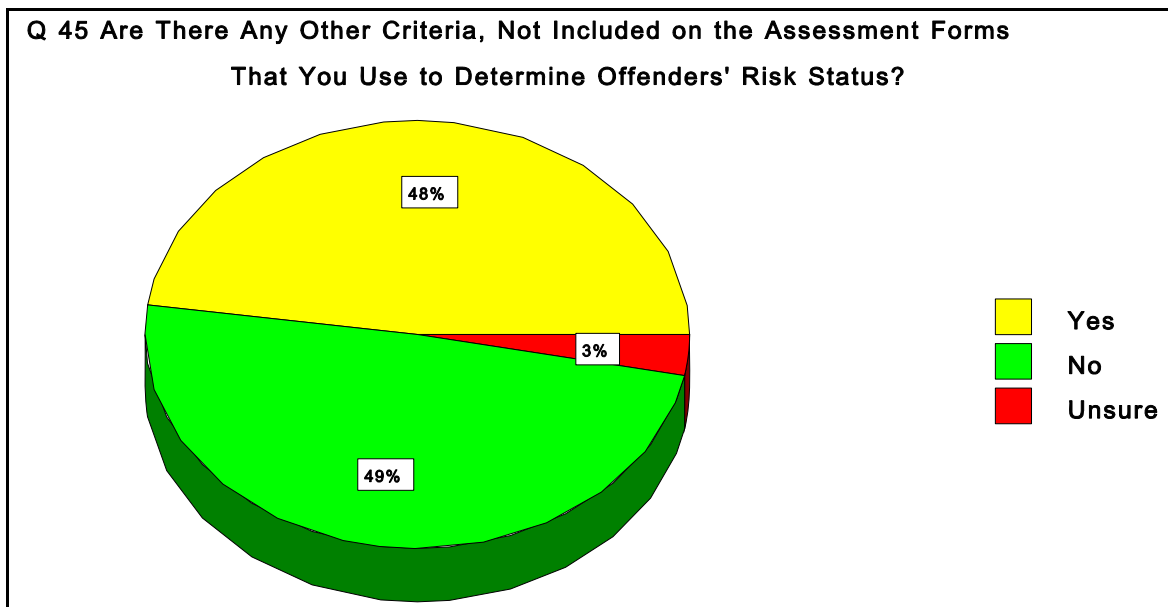
Figure 3. Q 48 Do you think the population of offenders in New Mexico possess any unique characteristics or bear any influential circumstances that are not addressed by the Risk and Needs Assessment procedures currently in use? ..... 6

**INTRODUCTION**

In status report five on the data collected in the Measuring Outcomes section of the PPO survey we reported on the strategies and mechanisms used by PPOs to manage and monitor the outcomes of their clients. Our objective was to compare the responses of officers regarding the tools they find relevant for anticipating outcomes to the categories incorporated into the risk needs assessment instrument. In this sixth status report on the Overview section of the survey, we followed up on the criteria officers use to determine risk status, refer to treatment and otherwise serve offenders as a means of facilitating their progress. We asked officers to tell us about any protocol they use which falls outside the parameters of the RNA forms. We also inquired about any characteristics that PPOs felt were unique to the New Mexico offender population to ascertain whether the instrument currently in use, which was validated in another geographic region with differing demographics, is in fact relevant and applicable for probationers and parolees in this state. We reviewed the factors cited by PPOs to determine which ones might be relevant and worthwhile to include in a revised instrument.

**Question 45: “Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offender’s risks?”**

Forty-eight percent of responding officers told us that they do use criteria, other than those included on the RNA, to determine offender risk status. The fact that half of the PPOs utilize other criteria may indicate a low level of officer confidence in the RNA instrument or may reflect that



officers do not feel the RNA includes all relevant criteria. Twelve officers did not answer this question. The follow-up question asks that officers describe these other criteria and these results are presented in the table for question 45a.

**Question 45a: “If you answered *Yes*, Please specify the factors you use most frequently to decide offenders’ risk status and rank them in order of importance.”**

The largest percentage of officers reported that they use knowledge gained from personal contact with the client to inform their assessment of risk status (15%). A number of officers referred to this information as the “gut feeling” they get from working with a client. A number of other officers broke down the information they receive from personal contact into characteristics of client appearance without further specification. Others noted that the age of the client is relevant if they have a long history of criminal behavior, a factor which is included on the RNA in the category “age at first adjudication” and “type of juvenile adjudications.” The second most commonly cited criteria used to determine risk status was client attitude, referring to whether offenders behave responsively toward their supervision which is also reflected on the risk portion of the RNA (13%). These categories of information are notably the most subjective information an officer can utilize and can not be standardized into factors reflected on the Risk Needs Assessment. However, certain aspects of officer opinion may follow trends which these officers have noted across the offender population over time and may be supported by statistics or other literature. If these subjective measures could be isolated, standardized, and expressed in objective terms, they might enrich the current measures being utilized by the PPD, which many officers have cited as irrelevant based on their practical experience. Categories three through six of the most commonly cited criteria reflect more concrete, objectively measurable information, some of which is included on the RNA instrument: 3) criminal or violence history 4) family history or stability 5) gang or other social affiliations and 6) compliance with imposed conditions or honesty in reporting. Criminal and violence history is covered in the RNA by the categories: prior probation/ parole, number of revocations, felony convictions and convictions for assaultive offenses. Family history and social affiliation are both criteria which basically rely on the self-report of the client and compliance is recorded in the case notes or other portions of the file but not included on the RNA. It may be useful to conduct focus groups with PPOs at some point in time to discern whether any of the more subjective information they use as criteria for determining risk status can be delineated into more concrete, objectively measurable factors.

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Q 45a. Factors, Other than RNA Criteria, Used to Determine Offender's Risk Status		
	Frequency (152)	Percent
Personal Contact with Client (appearance, age, "gut feeling")	22	15%
Client Attitude	20	13%
Criminal History/ Violence History	14	9%
Family History/ Stability	14	9%
Gang or other Social Affiliations	13	9%
Compliance with Imposed Conditions/ Honesty in Reporting	13	9%
Substance Abuse History or Treatment Hx	12	8%
Employment, Education or Residential Stability	11	7%
Seriousness of Current Offense (weapon etc.)	8	5%
Community, Provider, or Victim Feedback	8	5%
Mental or Physical Health Conditions	6	4%
Past Performance on Probation & Parole	6	4%
Pre-sentence Report or Other Intake Assessment Forms	5	3%

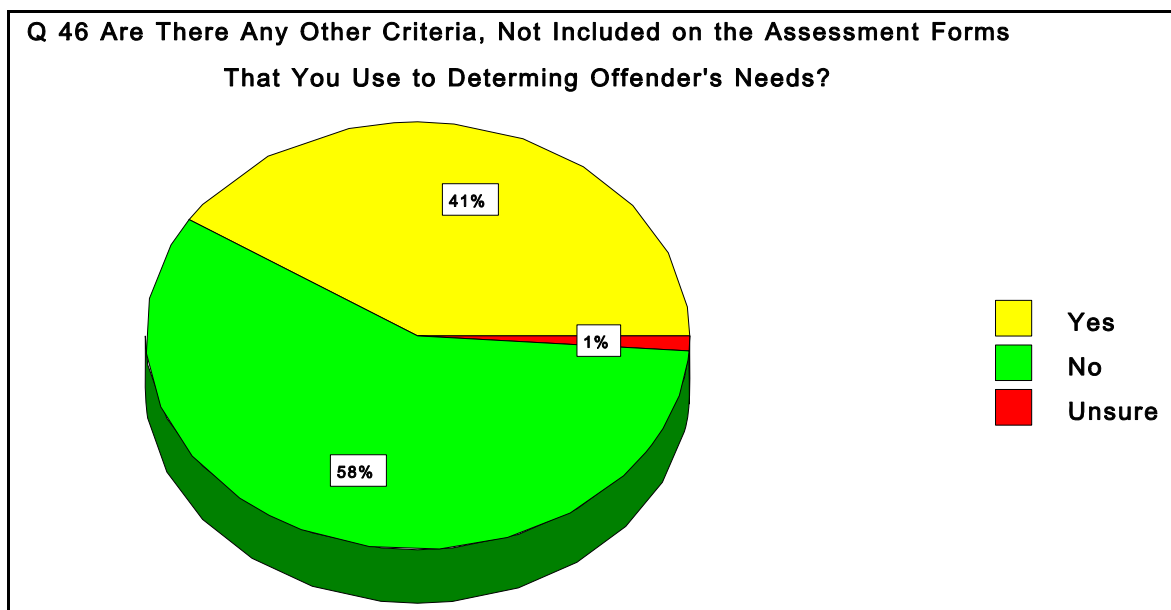
**Table 1**

**Question 46: "Are there any other criteria, not included on the assessment forms, that you use to determine offenders' needs?"**

In responding to this question, fifty-eight percent of officers told us that they do not use any other criteria besides what is included on the RNA to determine offender needs. This may indicate that the Needs portion of the RNA is more inclusive or comprehensive than the risk portion of the Instrument. Twenty officers chose not to respond to this question. We followed up by asking PPOs to describe the criteria they use to ascertain client needs.

**Question 46a: “If you answered *Yes*, please specify the factors you use most frequently in choosing the services from which an offender may benefit and rank them in order of importance.”**

This question was asked to determine whether additional factors, which fell outside of the current RNA instrument, were integral to determining beneficial services for offenders. The two most frequently cited categories, mental health status and social factors (12.5% each), are reflected in certain categories on the RNA but officers do not feel the categories are defined appropriately or that they have the skills or opportunity to gather all relevant information in these areas. For instance, many officers reported that they do not feel they have the training to evaluate clients Emotional Stability or Mental Ability, the two categories that reflect mental health status in the RNA. Officers also indicate that it would be useful to have additional and more in-depth information on client’s mental health, i.e. from counselors or other service providers. In terms of information on social factors, the only category that reflects this information on the RNA is Companions, the information for which may be obtained from client self report which is notoriously unreliable. In addition, the Companions category only contains information on offender associations, not providing any other information on background or cultural factors which may play a role in creating supervision management strategies. Education as a social factor is covered in the RNA category Academic/ Vocational Skills but officers state that they often do not feel trained to evaluate skill



levels. The category cited third most frequently by responding officers is family situation (12%), which is reflected in the RNA category Marital/ Family Relationships, again relying on self-report, as does most of the data collected on the needs portion of the RNA. The fourth most frequently cited category is that of past and current criminal record, an area of information which is not reflected on the needs portion of the RNA, but which is readily available to officers through other sources of information. Both Employment and Financial Situation are replicated as categories on the Needs

section of the RNA, but the information obtained from the client in these areas may again be unreliable. In the case of information from other agencies, there is no place on the needs portion of the form to incorporate this data, which officers have deemed relevant to provision of services. The information on substance abuse is also potentially tainted by self-report. There is no place on the needs assessment form to include information on client attitude or information obtained during field contacts, two sources that PPOs also deem valuable.

Q 46a. Factors Used Most Frequently in Choosing Services for the Offender		
	Frequency (112)	Percent
Information on Counseling or Mental Health Status	14	12.5%
Social Factors (Associations/Culture/Education)	14	12.5%
Information on Family Situation (Spouse or Kids)	13	12%
Criminal Record, Past or Current Offenses	12	11%
Employment or Financial Situation	11	10%
Information from Other Agencies	10	9%
Substance Abuse History	9	8%
Client Attitude/Compliance	9	8%
Field Contacts/Information on Living Situation	9	8%
Officers Intuition/Gut Instinct	6	5%
PSR, ASI, or Other Forms	5	4%

**Table 2**

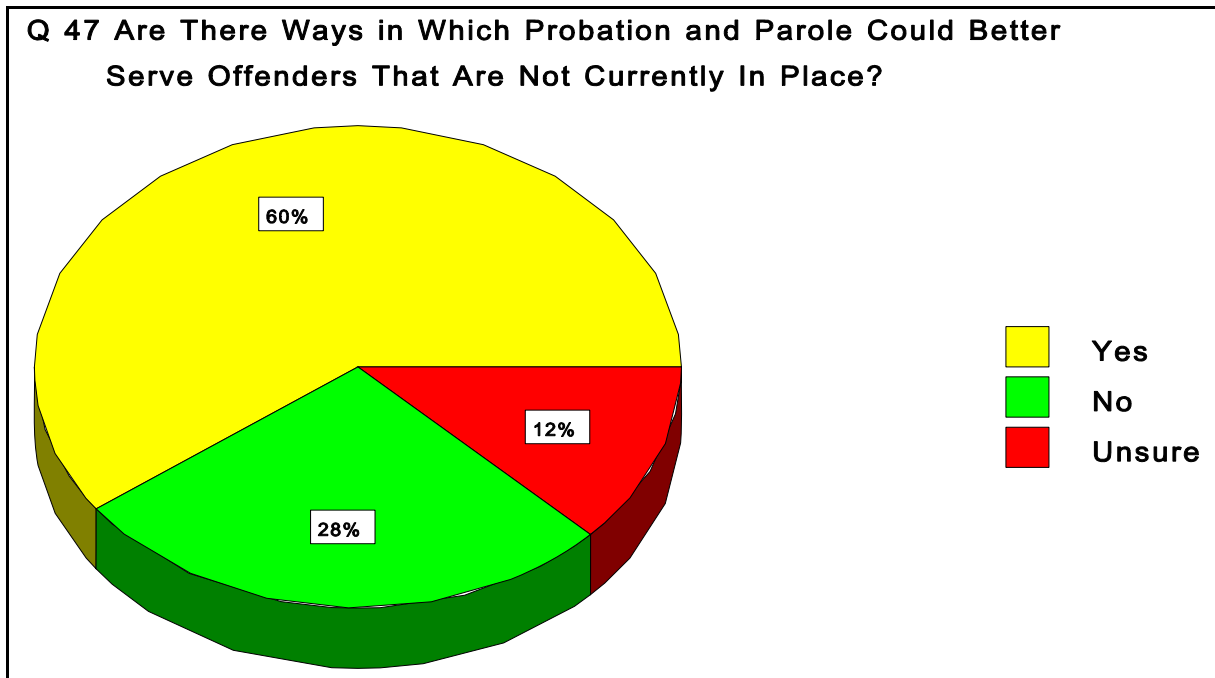
**Question 47: “ Are there ways in which Probation and Parole could better serve offenders that are not currently in place?”**

Sixty percent of the officers responding to this question told us that they felt there were other ways in which the system could better serve offenders, besides the mechanisms already in place. This is a substantial proportion of the survey population, indicating that there may be problems with service provision that compromise offender success under supervision. The following question will detail the modifications officers feel would be helpful in promoting improved service provision. Fourteen officers did not answer this question.



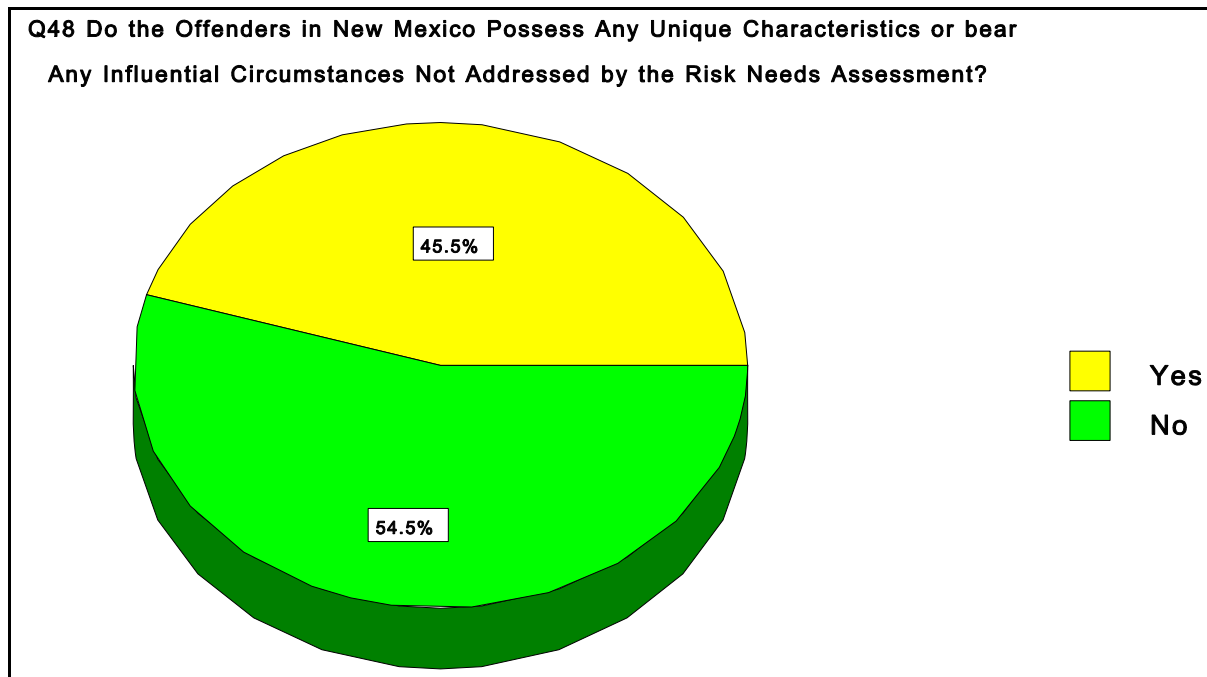
**Question 47 a: “ Please describe the most important changes you would make to the system in order to better serve offenders.”**

Officers responded most frequently to this question by stating that further employment, education, housing and transport services are needed for clients, 13% of all responses. The second modification noted most frequently was a lack of treatment providers and treatment options for offenders (12.5%) and the third priority stated by officers is that PPO offices are understaffed and work conditions and training provided by the department are in need of improvement (12.5%). Officers also stated that smaller caseloads and computer facilitation of case data would enhance their ability to serve offenders (11%). The told us that more substance abuse treatment and halfway houses were needed to address substance abuse issues, which were deemed crucial to offender success (9%). PPOs also noted that a reduction of the paperwork filled out for each case, increased autonomy, and a clarification of their role would help them to make better use of their time and would allow them to be more focused and directed in providing treatment or other services to offenders (9%). These six categories reflect that PPOs don’t feel they have access to all the service their clients need and that workplace atmosphere, staff interaction, and antiquated procedures may inhibit their ability to service offenders appropriately, thereby maximizing their potential for successful completion of probation or parole.



Q 47a. In What Ways Can PPD Better Serve Offenders That Are Not Already in Place		
	Frequency (170)	Percent
Increased Employment, Education, Housing & Transport Services	22	13%
More Treatment Providers & Treatment Options (rural, specialized)	21	12.5%

Hire More PPOs,/ Provide Better Training & Work Conditions	20	12.5%
Smaller Caseloads & Computerized System for Quality Supervision	19	11%



Increase Substance Abuse Treatment Services & Halfway Houses	15	9%
Reduce Paperwork & Bureaucratic Interference/ Clarify PPO Role	15	9%
Update Equipment for both Office and Field Calls	12	7%
Increase Severity of Punishment/ Consequences	12	7%
Improve Mental Health/ Counseling Assessment & Services	11	6%
Collaboration with Other Agencies or Community	9	5%
Increased Time in The Field/ Contact with Clients	9	5%
Increase available Government Financial Assistance/other resources	5	3%

**Table 3**

**Question 48: “Do you think the population of offenders in New Mexico possess any unique characteristics or bear any influential circumstances that are not addressed by the Risk and Needs Assessment procedures currently in use?”**

Forty-six percent of responding officers told us that, in their estimation, the population of offenders they work with do possess unique characteristics that are not reflected by the categories in the Risk Needs Assessment Instrument. With almost half of the officers stating that their clients exhibit relevant circumstances which can not be taken into consideration by the current assessment

instrument, it may be useful when reviewing the noted circumstances to determine whether there are other ways that these characteristics can be incorporated into the configuration of the supervision plan. The following question asks officers to detail the circumstances which they feel set this population of offenders apart from others. These discrepancies may be meaningful in terms of adopting an instrument that was validated in another geographic region of the country or a state which exhibits different crime trends and demographics. Fifteen officers chose not to answer this question.

**Question 48 a: “Please describe the most important characteristics or circumstances unique to New Mexico offenders that you have come across in your work?”**

Thirty-one percent of officers who feel the New Mexico population possesses unique characteristics that should be reflected in the RNA instrument, state that cultural and linguistic diversity amongst offenders in the state, and the rural residence of many offenders, are relevant to the specifics of case management. Officers state that cultural factors and language differences impact rapport between clients and officers and contribute to certain patterns of behavior which should be considered when developing treatment plans and providing services. PPOs also told us that the population of offenders in New Mexico exhibit high rates of alcohol abuse and arrests for DWI (12%) and that this affects the services they need and the protocol for their supervision. Ten percent of officers told us that higher rates of poverty and welfare dependence in New Mexico have an impact on how offenders can be best supervised and 8% told us that higher rates of unemployment and lack of education affect the need for particular resources and the development of treatment plan goals. High rates of hard drug use and drug trafficking were cited by 7% of officers as a factor in how they manage their clients and approach their caseload, while officers also told us that high rates of gang involvement and a poorly functioning correctional system (6% each) necessitate certain approaches or compromise their ability to effectively supervise offenders. It may be useful to take some of these factors into consideration when revising the current RNA instrument, or adopting or creating a new one. If these factors are reflected in the risk and needs portion of the instrument, they may more accurately reflect circumstances which contribute to offender success and failure and officers may be able to create more effective supervision strategies. Taking some of these factors into consideration may allow officers to isolate more relevant caseload management techniques and geographic or culturally specific strategies may provide officers with a means for increasing success rates, attributable to addressing the unique features of offenders in New Mexico.

Q 48a. The Most Important Characteristics /Circumstances Unique to New Mexico Offenders		
	Frequency (109)	Percent
Cultural/ Language Diversity, Rural Populations	34	31%
Higher Levels of Alcohol Abuse and DWI	13	12%
More Poverty/Welfare	11	10%
Lower Levels of Education/Employment	9	8%

More Hard Drug Use and Trafficking	8	7%
More Gang Involvement	7	6%
Lax Sentencing, Poorly Functioning Correctional System	7	6%
More Violent Crime, Recidivism, Young Offenders	5	5%
Illegal Actions	4	4%
More Mental Health Issues	4	4%
Lack of Inpatient Drug Treatment	2	2%
More Sex Offenses	2	2%
More Domestic Violence	2	2%
Don't Know	1	1%

**Table 4**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

In the previous status report we discussed the tools and strategies used by PPOs to track offender progress and manage client outcomes. We ascertained that there is a lack of consistency in terms of how officers establish or use intermediate objectives to facilitate offender goals and PPOs told us that although they feel increased involvement with offenders would improve outcomes, smaller caseloads and less paperwork are necessary to make this increased involvement possible. We also found that all officers do not possess a uniform philosophy that underlies their supervision strategies and clarification may be needed in this area. Officers also told us that division funds could be more effectively distributed to support risk management and offender treatment. This report has covered the criteria officers use to determine risk status, refer to treatment and otherwise serve offenders as compared to the criteria included in the Risk Needs Assessment instrument. We specifically asked about any characteristics that officers felt were unique to the New Mexico population of offenders. It may be useful to conduct focus groups with officers to ascertain whether any additional factors could be included on a revised RNA to more accurately reflect relevant circumstances of offenders in this state that contribute to success or failure on probation and parole. Almost half of the officers told us they use other criteria, such as knowledge gained from personal contact with offenders and evaluation of client attitude, to enrich the current measures provided on the RNA instrument to make a determination of risk status. Officers indicated that the needs portion of the RNA is better suited to its purpose than the risk portion and that mental health status and social factors are the most important criteria for assessing offenders needs. They also stated that they are not qualified to evaluate mental health status and that categories meant to reflect social factors are not comprehensive enough or appropriately defined.

Officers feel they need additional or more in-depth information than what is provided through client self-report, which is notoriously unreliable. Officers told us that more information from service providers would be helpful and that relevant information on clients' culture or other background influences may provide insight, further their understanding, or help to build rapport with offenders.

PPOs mentioned that often information from field contacts and client attitude play a role in informing service provision. Sixty percent of officers believe that there are ways to better serve offenders not currently in place and that a lack of services may compromise success under supervision. The most notable deficits in service provision fell under employment, education, housing and transport services and a general lack of treatment providers or treatment options available. PPOs also told us that their offices were understaffed and that they would benefit from improved training and working conditions. Officers state that compromised staff interaction, a negative workplace atmosphere and antiquated procedures detract from their ability to service offenders appropriately. To contextualize the foregoing answers, we closed this status report by asking whether offenders in New Mexico possessed any unique characteristics that influenced supervision strategies and 46% of officers responded affirmatively. The most commonly cited characteristics that have an influence on case management strategies were the effects of cultural and linguistic diversity, combined with rural residence. Also noted as contributing to the necessity for specific supervision tools or an increased need for certain services were high rates of alcohol abuse and DWI arrests and higher rates of poverty and welfare dependence than in other states. Lastly, officers cited the high rates of unemployment and lack of education among offenders as further evidence that it may be useful to develop culturally or geographically specific assessment and supervision strategies to address the specific risks and needs of parolees and probationers in New Mexico and potentially increase success rates.