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Evaluation Report

**Public Education Strategic Plan
Communications
February 1998**

**THE NATIONAL
PAROLE BOARD**

**LA COMMISSION
NATIONALE DES
LIBÉRATIONS
CONDITIONNELLES**

HV
9308
P83
1998



National
Parole Board

Commission nationale des
libérations conditionnelles

Canada

HV
9308
P83
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Evaluation Report

Public Education Strategic Plan Communications February 1998

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Note: This report was prepared in conjunction with *The Research Report* examining stakeholders perceptions of the results of the first year of the National Parole Board's Public Education Strategic Plan.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

In response to a lack of knowledge and awareness of the Parole System by a majority of stakeholders, National Parole Board (NPB) Communications embarked on a Public Education Strategy with selected audiences. An evaluation of the results of this program demonstrates that significant progress has been made with the target publics.

This document:

- Looks at the current public environment;
- assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the National Parole Board's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan*;
- articulates the opportunities and challenges;
- examines and profiles target populations;
- proposes future strategic directions;
- recommends strategic interventions for the next phase of the public education program; and
- defines an evaluation framework.

BACKGROUND

Criminal Justice issues are a major concern to the public, yet the Canadian public's knowledge of corrections and conditional release is somewhat limited. In an attempt to inform and educate the public about corrections and conditional release, the National Parole Board developed and implemented a strategic Public Education Action Plan.

The plan was designed to increase public knowledge about NPB, parole and corrections and conditional release, in general.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Action Plan was a living document which required assessment and adaptation, where required, in order to ensure that the plan showed results – increased public awareness about the work of NPB.

In order to complete that assessment and measure the effectiveness of the plan and its initiatives and activities, NPB Communications embarked on a formal evaluation process – divided into two Phases – by contracting with two separate groups (the final output of this process was to produce a written report which would provide the Board with both an evaluation of the plan and make recommendations on how to improve on it).

Phase I was designed to develop an evaluation framework to:

- Identify priority evaluation questions and a data collection plan to measure the success of the Public Education Action Plan; and
- assist in the design of evaluation mechanisms to aid in analyzing and measuring the quality and impact of the public education activities and initiative

Phase II utilized the Phase I evaluation framework to:

- Assess the quality and impact of the Board's public education initiatives and to measure the overall effectiveness of the Action plan;
- identify strengths and weaknesses of the Action Plan;
- make recommendations on future public education initiatives; and
- suggest activities for evaluating future public education activities.

APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

APPROACH

Based on the principles of cost effectiveness, high quality and responsiveness to the needs of the National Parole Board, the approach of this project was based on a close working relationship with key NPB staff with considerable emphasis on an interactive process for the three stages of the project, while taking the time constraints of all players into consideration.

Stage 1 – Research and Analysis

The research approach combined the use of existing information, qualitative methods of data collection and planning sessions. The primary sources of information were a review of the Board's recent analyses of public opinion polls, media coverage and correspondence and interviews with appropriate representatives from NPB, other government departments, target populations in order to greatly assist in identifying stakeholder needs priorities and opportunities.

Stage 2 – Drafting of Evaluation Report

Upon completion of the research phase, we drafted an Evaluation Report which included the following components:

- An **overview** (context and environment; definition of the role of the Board and its relationship to stakeholder groups);
- evaluation Report **objectives**;
- profile of **target populations**;
- **strengths and weaknesses** of the Public Education Action Plan;
- **opportunities and challenges** (given analyses of current environments and diverse stakeholder interests and activities);
- **recommendations on future public education initiatives** including refinement of key messages, identification of newsworthy information, events and milestones, new partnerships and launch of new information products, initiatives to support public relations and outreach activities of target populations such as victims groups;
- activities designed to **take advantage of existing communications vehicles** within the Ministry of Solicitor General, Correctional Services of Canada, etc. (i.e. newsletters, Web sites), information products and key contact program for stakeholder groups and media relations;
- **evaluation techniques** for future activities and initiatives.

DELIVERABLES

- A *Research Report* summarizing findings and recommendations, and
- an *Evaluation Report* to achieve increased awareness and understanding of the National Parole Board, Parole and corrections and conditional release, in general.

METHODOLOGY

A target list of 56 participants representing the National Parole Board (NPB), other federal government departments involved in justice issues, and the target populations of media, police groups and victims rights organizations was developed and researched, with input from the Communications Division, NPB and the five NPB regional offices.

Six survey questionnaires were drafted. The questions were designed to make it as easy as possible for respondents to complete the survey, given the heavy workloads of the individuals/organizations that were targeted, while still drawing out useful and factual information.

Initial calls were made to every organization to confirm the organization's fax number, to speak to the person being faxed, to introduce the survey to them and to request their participation. If the contact person was not available, detailed messages were left with reception or on voice-mail. The surveys were then faxed to each organization.

At least two follow-up calls were made after the survey was faxed to encourage the individuals to respond and to ask if they had any questions. A telephone number was provided on the form with a note that the respondent could call if they had any questions. During these calls, the respondent was asked if they would prefer to complete the interview over the phone at that time or later at a more convenient time.

Of the 56 participants targeted, 51 interviews or 90% of the target number of interviews were successfully completed. The breakdown is as follows: 15 of 18 NPB officials targeted, were successfully interviewed; four of six individuals from other federal departments; two of two academics and 10 members from each of media, police and victims groups.

Participation from all target populations in all regions was also secured. Total interviews: eight people from Atlantic Canada, 10 from Quebec, 11 from Ontario, eight from the Prairies and five from Pacific. An additional nine people were interviewed from federal government offices in Ottawa, including NPB officials.

Once the surveys were completed the responses were encapsulated and conclusions drawn – the following Evaluation Report summarizes and provides an overview of those findings and offers guidance for future Public Education planning.

CONTEXT

The National Parole Board (NPB) is one component of a complex justice system that includes: The Correctional Service of Canada; Department of Justice; the Solicitor General; the courts; and national, regional and local police forces and others.

The integrated nature of these various components and the complex relationships and roles within the system makes public communications challenging for the National Parole Board.

The National Parole Board promotes the Government of Canada's "safe homes, safe streets" agenda by making quality conditional release and pardon decisions and clemency recommendations, thereby contributing to the protection of society by facilitating the timely integration of offenders as law-abiding citizens.

Public perceptions of the Parole System are most frequently shaped by high-profile exceptions which fuel public concerns and confidence in the Justice system as a whole. This is compounded by perceptions within the various components of the Justice system that laws, police, courts and prisons work together to protect the public and the parole system works to get offenders back on the street.

The National Parole Board's efforts to sustain public education initiatives are critically important not only to ensure that Canadians continue to support the parole system, as an effective mean of public protection, but also to increase public confidence in the justice system and reduce overall anxiety about crime. The research conducted on Phase 1 of the plan demonstrates that the strategy is making an impact with stakeholders. As one stakeholder noted:

"Over the past 5 years, the level of effort the NPB has expended in communicating its role and responsibilities has been well-above the average for other stakeholders in the justice and penal system." (University professor)

However, there remains a significant awareness gap amongst the public-at-large, which needs to be addressed if the goals of the public education strategy are to be accomplished.

The National Parole Board's *Report on Plans and Priorities 1997-1998 to 1999-2000* commits to the following communications components as key results for the organization: enhancing public education; continuing to meet with criminal justice partners, victims groups, community organizations, universities, and the media; sharing findings of audits and investigations, on request; providing information on conditional release outcomes; and obtaining stakeholder feedback.

Its corporate objectives are:

1. Commitment to quality;
2. effectiveness;
3. efficiency improvements; and
4. openness and accountability.

PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

POLLING

Canadians remain primarily focused on unemployment and the economy. Over the past few months, pollsters have found Canadians to be significantly more optimistic than they were in 1996, but this has not translated into confidence about the ability of governments to solve the issues and challenges confronting the country.

As in 1996, fear of crime remains a public concern even though Statistics Canada regularly reports that crime rates are dropping slightly. In a recent *Angus Reid Report (July/August 1997)*, an entire chapter is dedicated to justice and public safety issues. It notes:

"Crime is down. Fear is up. Why the contradiction?"

In the Reid Survey conducted in July 1997, Crime/Justice issues placed 6th on the public's issue list at the national level. However, on their local/community issues list, it placed 2nd behind unemployment/jobs. This would suggest that Canadians think about crime and violence from a community perspective, which implies that communications at the community level are likely to get the best results.

Canadians from Western Canada are more concerned about crime and violence and its impact on their lives than those living in Atlantic Canada. Figures range from a low of 10% in Atlantic Canada increasing progressively from East to West to 42% in British Columbia.

It is also important to note that overall concern has dropped since its recorded high in 1994.

Of the six justice institutions examined by the Reid survey, Canadians express the highest level of confidence in law enforcement authorities (80%) and a bare majority voiced confidence in the courts. In contrast, a modest majority indicated a lack of faith in the Canadian prison system; and over 70% indicated they had little or no confidence in the Young Offenders Act or the parole system. Negative perceptions about both the Young Offenders Act and the parole system are fuelled by high-profile, negative media coverage of specific cases.

While public confidence in the parole system remains low, it would appear that the values that drive Canadians' sense of justice are parallel to the principles of the parole system. This would suggest that if they understood the system better, they would support it more.

These indicators include:

- Canadians' preference for increasing social development expenditures to help with crime prevention rather than the number of prison spaces;
- support for alternative penalties to prison for offenders who commit non-violent crimes;
- support for ideals of social tolerance, inclusiveness and fairness; and
- support for self-reliance, individual responsibility and accountability, and alternative penalties that enforce compensation in action such as community service.

However, a majority (52%) does **not support "early" release** and they remain extremely concerned about early release of violent offenders and child molesters in particular.

Canadians are divided on the goals of prison sentencing:

- 37% say the primary goal is the need to protect the public from criminals;
- 34% say the primary goal is to rehabilitate offenders;
- 17% say the primary goal is to punish offenders; and
- 11% say that it is all three goals equally.

It is clear that public safety is the primary driver affecting public perceptions about parole. The Goldfarb Study (March 1997) indicated the public believes the courts (83%) and the parole system (81%) are too lenient on criminals and feel these systems have to be toughened if the problems of crime and violence are to be eased.

Goldfarb reports: *"People want those who are convicted to serve their whole sentences as that is what they have been judged to deserve. There is a fundamental lack of understanding of the whole issue and how the system works. ...Hearing in the media about parolees who commit violent crimes exacerbates their fears and frustrations with the system..."*

...It will be essential to communicate what steps have been taken and the level of success. Most support government communicating to its citizens in this way.

...People want to hear about success stories and see the statistics on recidivism for graduates of these programs versus incarceration."

Goldfarb concludes that there is little understanding of the system, the laws that govern it, parole or the Young Offenders Act. At the same time, people do not know where one part of the system begins or ends nor do they understand the various jurisdictional issues. There is a need, therefore, always to put information in context and especially to explain the parole system in terms of the system as a whole. At the same time, since Canadians' view of crime is focused at the local level, information needs to be packaged for local consumption. He suggests that there is a desire for information on successes to help Canadians get a better perspective on the issues.

This study suggests that Canadians might support parole more if they understood the process better and could see the kind of effort that goes into parole decisions. Some effort needs to go into helping Canadians to see how prospective parolees are assessed, the effort that goes in to getting information from a number of sources, and the underlying principles that govern risk assessment. An explanation of Canada's system and comparisons with other systems around the world could also help to dispel the myths associated with Canada's parole system. These myths were articulated in the NPB's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan* as follows.

Many Canadians believe:

- That most inmates are released on parole;
- that crimes are often perpetrated by criminals who "had been freed by the system";
- that violent crime is on the increase; and
- that Canada imprisons fewer people than most other countries.

MEDIA

As was indicated in the NPB's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan*, public knowledge and understanding of corrections and conditional release is limited, and support for parole almost non-existent. This is likely due to the fact that the public's knowledge is based on the high-profile negative cases that appear frequently in the media.

While there is no evidence to suggest that this is changing at the broad public level, a review of the media since the inception of the public education strategy suggests that there has been a shift in coverage as a result of the implementation of the Public Education Action Plan. Generally, media coverage on parole issues reflected a growing recognition of/and better information on the range and complexity of the issues. Most media realize and accept their influence on public perceptions and strive for responsible, balanced reporting on community fears and the search for workable solutions.

In the research conducted to assess the effects of the NPB's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan*, most media indicated that they would be willing to do stories that explained the merits of the system. It is important to note here, however, that the media needs solid statistical information and evidence that the system works most of the time, if they are going to be true partners in providing better public information about parole. (For details on media coverage, see summary report entitled *Analysis of Media Coverage 1995 & 1996*, June 1997).

SPOKESPERSONS

Trust in spokespersons on crime and justice issues (*Goldfarb*)

- Information from victim groups – 66%
- Local police chiefs – 65%
- Statistics Canada – 60%
- Academic researchers – 57%
- Television reports – 43%
- Newspapers – 42%
- Federal and provincial government officials – 30%

ENVIRONMENT/CONTEXT SUMMARY

Activities flowing from NPB's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan* have been well received by stakeholder organizations. However, public attitudes about parole have not yet shifted and the public remains concerned about the parole system.

This would suggest that the National Parole Board needs to consider broadening their communications beyond the stakeholder groups and begin to tackle the massive job of informing Canadians directly. At the same time, it should be recognized that integrated communications about the justice system as a whole, and the National Parole Board's roles and responsibilities within it, would likely get the best results.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

GENERAL

- ◆ The *Public Education Strategic Action Plan* is a solid strategy. Re-working its objectives; making its messages stronger; broadening its target audiences; and expanding its information tools can, however, strengthen it.
- ◆ The human and financial resources the NPB can devote to public education activities at the national, regional and local levels are limited. As a result the *Public Education Strategic Action Plan* has to focus on initiatives that can be used by both Board officials and intermediaries to get the Board's messages out.
- ◆ The NPB has many strengths and successes that are not being fully exploited.
- ◆ There is a need for NPB to:
 - ◇ Demonstrate its openness and accountability more proactively, and to be seen to be more transparent;
 - ◇ improve internal communications to provide all NPB staff with information on initiatives and decision making;
 - ◇ improve communications alliances with other partners, particularly CSC, in order to present Canadians with a more comprehensive view of the justice system and how it works (there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the difference between statutory release and parole, for example: the public equates all releases with parole);
 - ◇ better inform CSC people about parole (National Parole Board regional staff felt that CSC often lacked knowledge about the specifics of the parole system as evidenced in joint presentations; and, it is important that they be knowledgeable in their role as intermediaries); and

- ◇ develop two evaluation mechanisms: a questionnaire to evaluate presentations by Board Members and staff; and a tracking tool for communications activities.

ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Senior management needs to:

- ◇ Send a strong message that public education activities are to be a priority for everyone in the organization; and
- ◇ acknowledge that there is a lot of hard work being done in this area; and that it is being done effectively.

ROLE OF HQ COMMUNICATIONS

There is a need to:

- ◇ Broaden the target populations to include youth, Aboriginal groups, social service agencies, community service and church groups;
- ◇ promote/market the NPB Web site and establish more hot links with stakeholder groups;
- ◇ produce information videos (*this tool was repeatedly cited as the single biggest information tool that would be useful to both Board officials and intermediaries like police, victims groups, and community agencies*);
- ◇ provide communications training and support to regions so they can develop their own communications action plans to complement the national plan;
- ◇ improve linkages with its communications colleagues in other partner departments;
- ◇ rework key messages so that they are stronger and more convincing;
- ◇ focus on providing good information products and tools for provincial and regional people and intermediaries to use;
- ◇ expand distribution of print products to include groups like colleges and universities who teach criminal justice courses; and
- ◇ market the Web site – low level of awareness about it and opportunity to hot link to sites.

ROLE OF REGIONS

- ◆ Local Board Members and officials deliver the most effective public education activities at the community level. *(Note that many of the items listed under HQ Communications also apply to the regions' work.)*

TARGET POPULATIONS

- ◆ The Board needs to be more proactive with the media.
- ◆ A great deal more work needs to be done with police groups; there still seems to be a sense of an adversarial relationship.

RECOMMENDATION FOR PHASE II OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVES OUTLINED IN PHASE I OF THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

- Design a public education action plan to disseminate information to target public(s).
- Identify key spokespersons to communicate corporate messages.
- Identify key public education opportunities for NPB as well as joint activities for participation of both CSC and NPB.
- Identify strong corporate messages to be utilized in all public opportunities.
- Identify and design collateral/support materials.

All of these objectives appear to have been met to some extent in Phase 1 of the Action Plan and should be carried through to Phase 2. The research results indicate that NPB is making progress on these fronts and there is nothing to suggest that the plan objectives should change substantially.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Add the following objectives:

1. **To work to achieve a Horizontal or Portfolio approach to Justice/Crime communications** for the Government of Canada to address the twin challenges of educating the public and educating partners in the justice system.

This is being recommended because it is clear that Canadians need to better understand how the system works if they are going to return their trust to it. An integrated and coordinated approach is far more likely to achieve results with the public-at-large. As NPB has already learned through Phase 1 of the strategy, many of those who work within the system do not clearly understand how the pieces fit together. As insiders told the researchers, "*the system is so complex.*" To convince Canadians that crime/justice issues are being well managed, the government will need to demonstrate that:

- it is being tough on those who commit violent crimes (both youth and adults);
- sentences and punishment fit the crime;
- criminals do not have more rights than law-abiding citizens; and
- everything possible is being done to maintain Canada's law abiding values and tradition.

2. **To develop regional action plans** flowing from the NPB's *National Action Plan* and establish "best practices" reporting.

Since Canadians relate to crime and justice issues at the local level, the packaging of information targeted at the community level is likely to achieve the best results. The goal is to change public perceptions about parole – they are most likely to hear and believe the message that relates to their own community. Sharing information from region to region about *what works best* can help generate new ideas and help people to focus their communications and public education efforts.

3. **Develop statistical information for sharing with media** and other stakeholders. The public and the media are skeptical about parole and tends to group all types of releases in with parole. It is essential, therefore, to provide them with the context and an understanding of the true statistics regarding parole. They are unlikely to "buy" the information immediately, but if statistical reporting becomes a part of the communications mix (such as Report Cards, Stats on the WEB etc, see below), Canadians will begin to put parole in perspective. This will take time, but ultimately, regular reporting of statistical information is the most likely way to build awareness and improve trust.

TARGET POPULATIONS

The target populations listed in NPB's *Public Education Strategic Action Plan* sought to increase public awareness and knowledge through third parties by increasing the knowledge and awareness of third-party spokespersons. The primary list focused on opinion leaders who would most likely be interviewed by the media. That list, as research shows, also reflects the list of spokespersons considered most credible by the public-at-large. (*Goldfarb*)

This list, initially developed by NPB Communications, continues to be the most important to achieving the NPB's public education objectives. The list includes:

- Media – crime and justice beats
- Victims Groups
- Police Associations and Police Forces
- Parliamentarians
 - Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs
 - Members of Parliament
 - Senators
- Judges and Crown Councils
- After-Care Agencies – John Howard Society, Elizabeth Fry, St Leonard, Native Groups and other community groups*
- Municipal Politicians
- Universities and Colleges – law and criminology faculties

RECOMMENDATIONS

a) Add the **public-at-large and youth to the list** of target publics and add one or two communications initiatives in Phase 2 that will directly target information towards the broad population. The principles of parole, careful analysis of parolees (process), and the ratio of successes over failures are important messages to get to the broad population. For example, articles following a typical hearing or a day in the life of a Parole Board member could give Canadians a "picture" of how things really work.

Youth is being suggested as a key audience for two reasons. One, they will better understand the system when they become adults; two, the government is focusing a lot of attention on communications to youth, so a number of reasonable cost venues are available.

b) **Increase emphasis on media** as key public. The media is the main conduit of information to the public at large about Canada's justice system. Discussions with them indicated that they would be willing to undertake "context setting" articles, and that these would be of interest to their readership. However, reporters are also faced with managing the daily crises, and there is a need to give them support in the form of backgrounders, facts and statistics to minimize the amount of research they need to do themselves. Continued editorial board meetings with major newspaper chains are also helpful in eliciting more awareness and understanding of the system and establish context and recognition that "big picture" reporting is needed to offset the high profile "case that went wrong".

c) **Increase outreach at the community level** to include ethnic organizations, youth serving organizations and agencies, service clubs, Aboriginal groups and community action groups like Block Parents. By offering speakers and information to these intermediary groups, NPB will be able to get their messages to a broader audience.

KEY MESSAGES

The list of messages in the Action Plan is quite extensive. Consider reducing the number of messages and focus on those that are key to achieving a change in perceptions. In the research the messages were considered the weakest part of the Plan. The messages need to use stronger language and be more convincing. Research participants also suggested that words like risk assessment are loaded and may cause unnecessary anxiety. For many, "any risk" is too much, particularly if the risk people think about is risk to their children and family.

NPB should consider developing a few key messages that the Minister can use to effectively to position parole in his communications with Canadians.

MESSAGES FOR CONSIDERATION

Short-form

- Parole is not automatic. People are only granted parole after a careful review.
- Parole does not mean total freedom...
- Offenders continue to serve their sentence in the community under supervision.
- Parole is an effective way of returning offenders to the community slowly... Slow re-entry is the key to public safety because...
- Parole decisions involve many...
- The vast majority of those released on parole do not re-offend. For example:
 - In the past year x people were released on parole...x committed another crime.
 - X% of parolees are non-violent offenders.
- Parole hearings are open, come to hearings, see what we do, judge for yourself.

Police

- Parole is a part of Canada's justice system. The law requires that offenders be considered for parole once they have served a third of their sentence. Parole is not automatic.
- Police are partners in the parole system. NPB members carefully consider their recommendations before parole decisions are taken.
- Police are advised when an offender is about to be released **under supervision** into the community.

- For each case, the parole panel:
 - Seeks reports from the police;
 - Examines information provided by victims which decision-makers use to challenge the offender;
 - Examines parolees' attitudes towards the crime they committed, the effects it had on the victim, and determines his/her plans for re-entering society as a law-abiding citizen;
 - Ensures that the offender has a community support network to help them make the transition back to society; and
 - Establishes rules for the offender who is re-entering society.

- Parole is an effective way of returning offenders into the community slowly... Slow re-entry is the key to public safety because...

- The vast majority of those released on parole do not re-offend. For example:
 - In the past year x people were released on parole...x recommitted.
 - X% of parolees are non-violent offenders.

- Parole does not mean total freedom. Offenders continue to serve their sentence in the community under supervision.

Victims

- Canada's system of justice is based on the rule of law. The National Parole Board applies the laws related to parole.
In Canada's system of justice:
 - an offender has his/her day in court; if found guilty, is sentenced;
 - when sentence has been completed, returns to society; and
 - parole is a way to mediate the offenders' return to society – to help them integrate back to society while still being supervised by the system.

- Parole is an effective way of returning offenders into the community slowly... Slow re-entry is the key to public safety because...

- Parole does not mean total freedom. Offenders continue to serve their sentence in the community under supervision.

- The National Parole Board shares information about the offender with victims who want to be kept informed and uses victim information when reaching decisions.

- The National Parole Board can set conditions so that the offender may have no contact with victims or their families. If they break these conditions, they can be returned to jail.

OVERALL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR PHASE 2

The evaluation research indicated:

- Strong support for the information products and activities flowing from Phase 1 of the strategy;
- high praise for NPB staff for courteous service and quick turnaround responses to requests for information;
- high priority attached to attendance at hearings and face-to-face communication through presentations and visits;
- community outreach activities recognized as a substantive commitment by the Board to become more open and accessible and are seen as vital to ensure better understanding and more support for parole;
- groups strongly support videos as a viable alternative to face to face meetings particularly in rural areas;
- there is a need for CSC and the Board to present to the public a coherent and integrated explanation of what they do; and
- the fact sheets are highly valued and the Parole booklet is broadly used as a resource.

In summary

The information products and activities underway are properly targeted, on track, effective, and should be continued.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

HIGH PROFILE MEDIA CASES

The primary challenge faced by NPB will continue to be the media coverage of high-profile cases that do not give Canadians confidence in the parole system. Clearly, these cases are likely to continue to emerge.

Tactics

- Continue to provide quality information to stakeholders and ensure that spokespersons are equipped to explain the system, provide accurate statistics on successes, and seed stories on the process when high-profile cases are not dominating the agenda.
- Ensure that every case is put in context by spokespersons.

PUBLIC CONCERN FOCUSED ON RELEASE OF VIOLENT OFFENDERS

The underlying values that drive Canadians' opinions on crime and justice support rehabilitation and the orderly re-entry of offenders into society. Their primary concern centers on the re-entry of violent offenders. This would suggest that statistics about successes and facts about the numbers of offenders convicted of violent offences who actually get parole could help to dissipate fears.

Tactics

- Provide the media with strong articles reflecting the facts about the parole system. In the research conducted, the media appeared willing to do these types of stories.
- Provide a statistical section on the Web site so that stakeholders and interested Canadians can access this information easily.
- Consider doing a quarterly or annual Report Card. Publish it, distribute it to target populations and post it on the Web site.
- Consider using the information from the Report Card and the NPB's Fact Sheets in a series of "Did you know..." public service announcements for radio and community newspapers.
- Develop speech modules for the Minister based on the Report Card data.

COMPLEXITY OF SYSTEM

Complexity of information: a number of respondents in the research alluded to the complexity of the parole system.

Tactics

- Develop a simple chart that explains the process that could be used in presentations and given to the media to use when discussing parole issues.

HEARING ATTENDANCE, POPULAR WAY TO EXPLAIN PROCESS

There is significant stakeholder interest in attending hearings. Many suggested that going to a hearing was most beneficial to their understanding of the process and role of parole in the justice system.

Tactics

- Increase effort to notify stakeholders, particularly the media, about times and dates of hearings. Consider posting this information on the Web site.
- Develop a series of short videos that can be used at the community level to give more people the experience of being an observer without actually attending the hearing. The speaker/presenter could stop the video before the decision, and get the audience to discuss what their own decision would be, then play the last part of the video so the audience can see what was actually decided.

PUT A HUMAN FACE ON "THE SYSTEM"

A number of respondents in the research suggested that Parole Board Members **when seen as individuals** were viewed more sympathetically and this spills over into the system itself.

Tactics

- Consider putting profiles and photographs of Parole Board Members on the Web site.

PARLIAMENT REACTS TO PUBLIC PRESSURE

Public demands to get tougher on crime and offenders will influence Parliamentarians.

Tactics

- Continue to ensure that Parliamentarians have the facts about the parole system so that they can make informed decisions.

PORTFOLIO COMMUNICATIONS TO INCREASE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

The public-at-large assimilates information best when it provides context and responds to their concerns. The justice system is complex and knowledge-limited to the public.

Tactics

- Seek opportunities for horizontal/portfolio communications on the criminal justice system.
- Develop and publish a speaker's list, preferably speakers who can speak to all facets of the justice system, so that communities have ready access to integrated information. Distribute to stakeholder groups.

Canadians need context to put issues in perspective. Explaining parole's role in the system only provides them with a small piece of the picture. There is a need to inform them in a way that links all the pieces of the system together. This is particularly important as it relates to CSC, since many offender releases are not under the jurisdiction of the NPB, and the public gets confused.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS RECOMMENDED FOR PHASE 2

1. MEDIA RELATIONS: MORE PROACTIVE APPROACH

a) Professionally managed media hits

Since reaching the broader public with information about the parole system is essential if public perceptions are to change, consideration should be given to one or two professionally managed media hits.

Carefully managed, proactive media relations campaigns can generate significant coverage and help to dispel the myths around parole. Some national media, including broad readership magazines like Maclean's, should be targeted, but significantly more media coverage will be generated, in both electronic and print media, at the local level if properly focused and targeted.

Consider one hit on the "Report Card" (see below) and another on the "hearings process" featuring National Parole Board members.

Methodology:

Lists of interested reporters are generated and kits carefully designed from the national, regional and local perspective. Tailored kits are sent to individual reporters and then follow-up phone calls are made to see whether they received the kit, want more information, or would like an interview with an expert, would like to attend a hearing etc.

By carefully positioning the kits to the reporter's beat/audience, there is far more likelihood that they will use the material and develop an article or story. Kits would include backgrounders including statistics and information directly related to the interests of the reporter's beat.

b) Maintain quality service and continue to correct misinformation

The work started with the Public Education Action Plan to maintain direct contact with journalists, especially to correct misinformation should continue. The majority of journalists interviewed are reasonably familiar with the role of parole in the criminal justice system.

All indications are that NPB staff provide fast responses to media queries and are clear about what information they can and cannot provide. Given limited resources, priority should continue to lie with these activities.

c) **Support for journalists**
Notification of hearings

Journalists across the country expressed strong interest in attending hearings. Many attend hearings frequently. Writing about the work of the Board and the parole process is more understandable for their readers or listeners against the backdrop of actual hearings about real offenders and crimes that happened in their own communities. Facilitating journalists' attendance at local parole hearings as often as possible could have many advantages.

Many journalists would like to receive a list of hearings coming up in their region, at least a month in advance. They indicate they and their assignment editors could plan better to attend hearings. Potentially, the Internet site or e-mail might be a solution. If this cannot be done, the facts need to be better explained to journalists via a Fact Sheet on the Internet site. It might be useful to have a site for reporters specifically named on the Internet site.

A majority of journalists compare notice on parole hearings to court notices of trials and think that the public has the right to know what is happening at the back end of the justice system like the open trial system at the front end.

Improve the process for applications, to attend hearings

Journalists suggested that the NPB should move to an e-mail system.

A fact sheet for journalists to explain the hearing notification process, its limitations and reasons, and how to access the Decision Registry. Consider posting this on the Internet site.

Backgrounders for story ideas

To encourage and support journalists, a series of backgrounders, including appropriate contacts and other sources of information, should be prepared to help eliminate some of the research time required to do stories on the justice system, and parole in particular.

Success stories index

Success stories would be welcomed by journalists who indicate difficulty finding offenders willing to go public with their stories once they re-enter society. Identifying people and/or after-care agencies that would be willing to participate could help to get the positive stories into the media.

Editorial board meetings

As discussed earlier, editorial board meetings are a good way to get media decision-makers to understand the need for "context reporting" to improve public confidence in the parole system.

2. ENHANCED STAKEHOLDERS' STRATEGY: COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Use various stakeholders and community groups to get the *Parole Board's story out*.

a) Articles in victims groups' newsletters

For example, Victims of Violence have a monthly newsletter that goes to about 80 members/groups as well as media and politicians and indicated a willingness to publish articles from the Board. An interview of the Board Chairman by Steve Sullivan could be the first in a quarterly series of articles.

b) Quarterly interviews of Chairman for police newsletters

Some police interviewed were able to recall, in considerable detail, negative articles they read in police newsletters and magazines on parole. A quarterly interview series by the editor of Blue Line, or the RCMP Gazette, for example, on specific parole/police related topics with the Board's Chairman could have credibility with the readership and would probably be read.

c) Articles for community organizations' newsletters

Most community organizations issue newsletters to their members and often will print articles of interest to them in their entirety if provided. Weekly newspapers, especially those in rural and remote communities, will often do the same thing since many of them have low budgets for editorial staff.

d) Video series

Develop five short (5-10 mins.) videos over the course of the next few years.

- ◆ Overview of the criminal justice system, using simple diagrams;
- ◆ Parole Board's role in community safety;
- ◆ Role of victims and Board services for them;
- ◆ Feature two or three successful paroled offenders, their contribution to society and their views on parole; and

- ◆ An actual or mock hearing. With this video, audiences could watch the video up to the point where the Board leaves to deliberate and make a decision. The audience could be invited, like the Board members, to make their decision. The tape would stop and audiences would weigh the various pieces of information and come to a group or individual decisions. They could then watch the remainder of the video to learn the actual decision. With the proper video companion resources, such as discussion guides and FAQs, all of these videos could be used by victims and other groups and be part of their lending libraries. They could also be used by Board members and staff in their community relations activities.

3. NATIONAL CRIME/PAROLE SURVEY

To begin to correct widespread misconceptions about levels of crime, the criminal justice system and parole, a *'test your knowledge on parole'* national campaign, like ones for Safe Driving and AIDS is suggested. A sufficient number of regional questions will need to be built into the survey.

4. PROMOTION AND EXPANSION OF NPB WEB SITE

Few surveyed were aware of or had visited the Board's Web site. However, its potential as an effective information and communications vehicle was recognized. Journalists and national groups, in particular, as provincial-based stakeholder groups, now use Internet technology on a regular basis. Some, like CAVEAT are linked to the Board's site and others expressed an interest in being linked. The tremendous growth in Internet use means that within the next two years most of the Board's stakeholders will be using the Internet as a significant source of information and communication. The site offers good information products and should be marketed to stakeholders. A promotional strategy should be developed, including a ready reference guide to the types of information and hot-links to other sites for key stakeholders.

5. INTERACTIVE GAME/QUIZ ON PAROLE

To build on the information products now available, an interactive game/quiz on parole, creatively designed with appropriate graphics, could be developed for use on the web site. This could also be linked to the School Net site, which reaches educators, parents and students. It might be possible to get a multimedia class at Algonquin College to develop this for the NPB. Alternatively, Industry Canada might be able to help through their Connections program.

6. REPORT CARD

Journalists and others need access to up-to-date statistics on parole success rates etc. This information would likely be widely used by Parliamentarians as well as part of their "Safe Homes, Safe Streets Agenda. Optimally, the information should be broken down nationally and regionally. This could be published in booklet form and be made available on the Web site.

7. NPB COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION PLANNING

Board management and staff surveyed expressed interest in several vehicles that could facilitate communications planning at headquarters and in the regions.

- ◆ **"Best Practices" Report** - from headquarters and each region based on an assessment of public education and community outreach activities carried out over the last three-month period. This could be as simple as "what worked well; and why did it work."
- ◆ **"Best Practices" on an Intranet site** - for sharing reports and regions' lessons learned.
- ◆ **Planning workshop to facilitate development of regional plans** - based on the key elements of the National Action Plan.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

1. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR USE BY PRESENTERS

Research indicated support for development of a short leave-behind questionnaire, in consultation with regions, to help evaluate the effectiveness of Board and staff public presentations. Many felt a questionnaire would be most useful for larger audiences, especially in determining if the messages are getting through, and if the best vehicles are being used.

2. INTERNAL MONITORING

- Feedback from staff regarding communication in general and the specific tools and activities, such as the planning workshops, the Best Practices Intranet site, and the Best Practices Quarterly Report set up to help facilitate internal communications and joint planning;
- tracking reports of public education/communications/outreach activities by HQ and Regions; and
- amount and quality of support and participation in public education activities, including proactive stakeholder relations.

3. EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

- Nature, accuracy and tone of media coverage;
- movement in public opinion over time to more support for parole;
- amount and tone of coverage on parole/issues in stakeholder publications and speeches from local, provincial, regional and national key stakeholder spokespersons;
- number of speech/presentation requests;
- attendance at hearings by journalists, victims/groups, police and other stakeholders;
- hits to the Board's Web site, feedback, and requests for/appropriate new links to the site;

- stakeholder assessment of information products, vehicles and Board services at regional and national level;
- questionnaire results from public presentations;
- growth in collaboration with CSC/service providers as partners; and
- amount of joint strategic communications planning within the federal criminal justice family—NPB, CSC, Justice and RCMP.