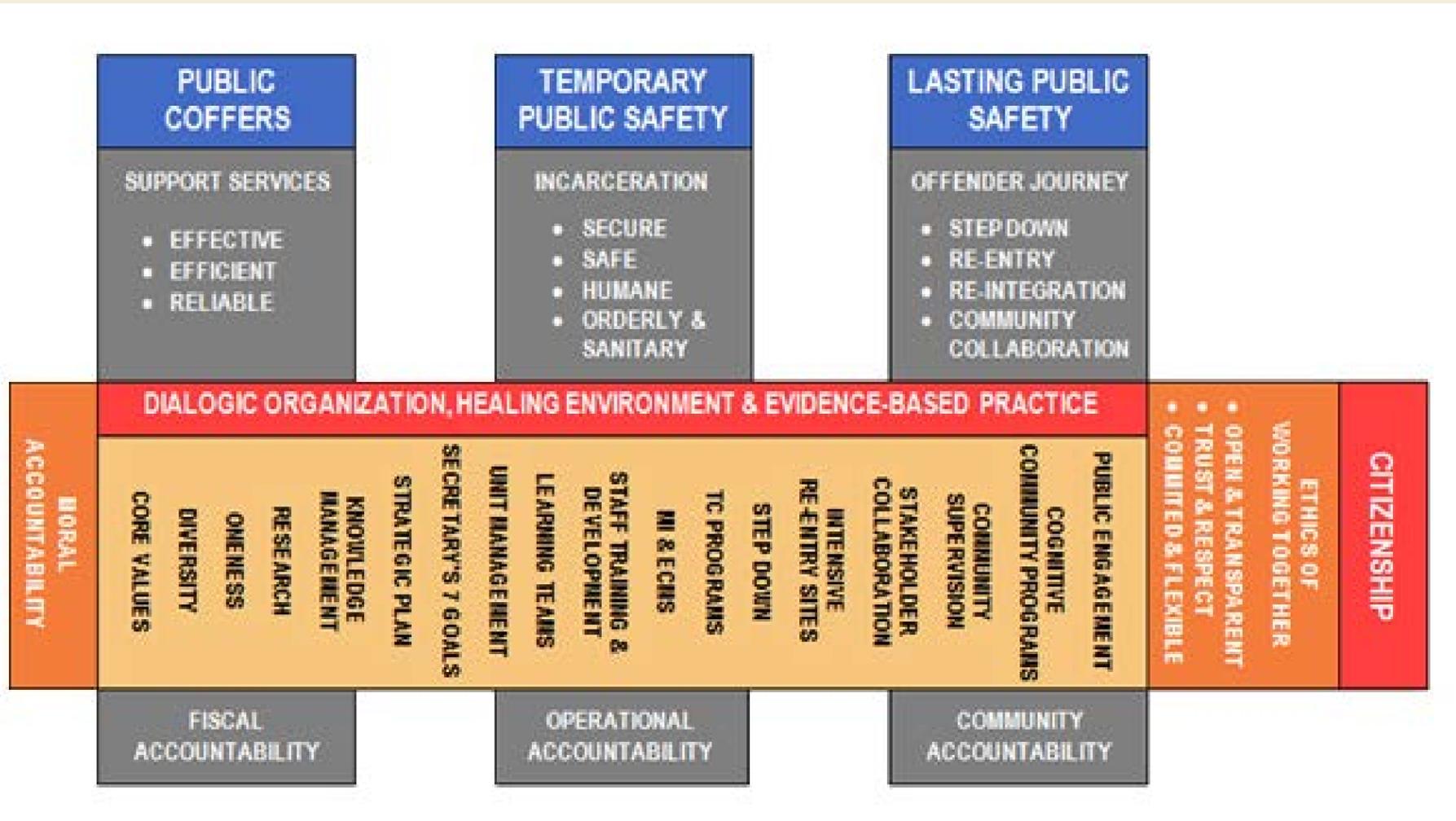


SERVING THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA



There are so many demands and challenges every day at work that it is easy to become pre-occupied with how to get things done – without paying much attention to why we need to do the things we do, and in service of what? This is unfortunate because clarity about purpose will invariably reduce the daily workload. A simple example of this is that a meeting is shorter, or achieves more in the same time, if that meeting is clear about its purpose.

The VADOC falls within the Department of Public Safety, and this defines its primary purpose. The agency provides *temporary public safety* through the supervision of nearly 60,000 offenders and the incarceration of a further 30,000. It provides *lasting public safety* through the way it treats those offenders while they are in the care of the Department, and how it helps them to reenter the community as *returning citizens*. Also, being a public agency, it must respect the *public coffers* and is charged with the responsible use of its allocation of public funds. The VADOC provides a good service in relation to all three aspects of its primary purpose. In terms of recidivism, for example, Virginia has the second lowest rate of any state in the country. One could rightly say that corrections is a noble profession and that the staff of the VADOC can be proud of their work. Of course there is always room for improvement and this article is about serving the Commonwealth even more successfully.

There is a poster you may have seen, entitled *Serving the Commonwealth of Virginia*, that displays this graphically, including the many activities and initiatives currently underway in the Department to deliver its mission, including the moral accountability inherent in creating a Healing Environment. This poster is being used in the Offender Resettlement Journey (see details below) events that track the fiscal, operational, community and moral accountabilities, and in the Dialogic Coaching Training (see details below) that is concerned with leadership and staff development.

Sometimes people get confused trying to understand all the activities and initiatives underway at any one time in any unit. Why are we doing them? How do they fit together? Why are we doing so many at the same time? Will they ever stop bringing in new ones? The poster seeks to simplify this by showing they are all in support of the fiscal (public coffers), operational (temporary public safety) and community (lasting public safety) accountabilities. Also, they are all based on the use of evidence-based practice (EBP) and Dialogue to create a Healing Environment. The list of activities and initiatives may change but they all weave together into a single fabric of purposeful activity in serving the Commonwealth of Virginia. The value of the poster is that it puts on one page all the primary areas of service and accountability, along with the activities and initiatives to meet them.

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SERVING THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA continued

If we do put purpose first in our thinking, it raises some interesting questions:

Could we stop doing some things?

If a member of the staff is doing something that does not directly support what is represented on the *Serving the Commonwealth of Virginia* poster, then why is he doing it? Why not check to see if there are some things you are currently doing that you can stop doing. That could free up the space and time for things that are necessary for the Department's success.

Could our work be planned more reliably, resourced more efficiently or add more effective overall value?

We are stewards of public funds, so we are obliged to ask ourselves this question about every area of activity in the Department to ensure that we are pragmatic in the short-term while at the same time investing for extended reliability. It is undeniable that careful planning, good resourcing and open communication mean things are completed more effectively, reliably and efficiently - yet we probably all know of areas in the VADOC where we believe these are not fully in place and perhaps have not been for years. Understanding who is accountable for what, and proactively supporting and challenging each other to meet our **fiscal accountability** is in everyone's interests, even if it feels uncomfortable doing it.

Is the quality of our supervision and incarceration the best that we could provide?

Most offenders in the Department's care are supervised in the community. There are various levels of supervision, all of which support public safety. Others are incarcerated to withdraw them temporarily from society, as (not *for*) punishment and so that they cannot harm members of the public. There is a duty of care to provide a secure, safe, orderly, sanitary and humane environment within which the movement of offenders is restricted. How might we improve the quality of our incarceration and our supervision? How can we ensure the steady progress of offenders (and reduce regressive journeys) as they step down through the levels of security in prison? How can we better monitor offenders in the community and ensure they are taken back into custody in a timely manner should they pose a risk to public safety? These relate to our **operational accountability**.

Does every encounter we have with an offender contribute to lasting public safety?

We recognise that the large majority of incarcerated offenders will reenter the community, and that most of those under supervision will need support to resettle and become responsible contributors to our society. These are our future or current neighbours, and we are charged with engaging with them in a professional way to support their journey of reentry and resettlement. Are there ways in which we can improve the respect we offer to them, to hear their needs and aspirations and help them to realise them? Can we ourselves more effectively support and challenge them to be accountable for their actions? Could our own behaviour more accurately demonstrate the qualities of social responsibility that we want them to acquire while in our care? These are questions about how to meet our **community accountability**.

If my brother, mother, son or some other close relative or friend were being treated as we now treat offenders or members of staff, would I feel uncomfortable?

Although their freedom to act is constrained in many ways, offenders continue to be citizens every day they are in our care, whether incarcerated in prison or under supervision in the community. Some will never leave prison - they can still be responsible citizens in prison. Others will resettle in their community as outstanding contributors to society. How can we support each of them, along with every member of the staff, to be responsible citizens, and to treat each other as responsible citizens? What are the ethics we need to hold to live and work together well? These certainly include much that is conveyed

through the Dialogue Skills Training (DST). Central to this is: being open, transparent and genuine; offering respect and acting in a trustworthy manner; being committed to a just society, and being flexible enough to meet the daily challenges and demands made upon us. And if we are comfortable with the way we individually and as a Department are treating both staff colleagues and offenders, then we are meeting our **moral accountability**.

And finally...

Are you proud of the Virginia Department of Corrections and the role you play in its success?

Everyone has a part to play to enrich the quality of the Healing Environment by supporting right behaviour and challenging poor behaviour in support of the fiscal, operational, community and moral accountabilities that enable the Department to meet its purpose and mission.

ORJ: The Offender Resettlement Journey is being piloted by Dialogue Practitioners at Wallens Ridge State Prison, Nottoway Correctional Centre and Patrick Henry Correctional Unit / Martinsville P & P / Danville P & P. The session is a way of operationalizing the Healing Environment at Unit level by tracking and enhancing the journey of offenders whilst they are in that Unit's care and thoughtfully addressing the fiscal, operational, community and moral accountabilities. Participants include a cross-section of Unit staff and a representation of other stakeholder groupings.

DCT: The Dialogic Coaching Training is a one-day session for staff development. It is currently being delivered by Regional Administrators and Dialogue Practitioners to Unit Executive Teams and will, in due course, be made available to all staff who manage others.

Submitted by Peter Garrett

Resettlement Demonstrations Schedule

In late September, Dialogue Associates will facilitate three events that demonstrate how offenders transition through the prison system and back to their communities. Ex-offenders will explain their own personal offender resettlement journeys to a select group of corrections stakeholders.

Offender resettlement events are planned for the last full week of September. The dates and locations are:

Wallens Ridge State Prison	September 22
Patrick Henry Community College	September 23
Nottoway Correctional Center	September 24