



Phase II Strategic Planning Report

September 2018



LACHMAN CONSULTING

714 N. Henry Street Alexandria, VA 22314 | www.lachmanco.com | info@lachmanco.com | (202) 412-0579

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Executive Summary

The District of Columbia is home to approximately 67,000 previously incarcerated residents¹ in addition to the estimated 6,000 people who are released each year from the DC Department of Corrections (DOC) and Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) combined.² On any given day, there are nearly 22,000 justice-involved individuals in the District of Columbia.³

These people, especially those who have served longer sentences in the Federal prison system, often have an extraordinary constellation of needs as they return to society. Many do not have stable housing or employment, mental health issues are common, and oftentimes families have been fractured. If one adds to this the stress of re-integrating into a society that holds strong bias against those who have been previously incarcerated, we have a window into the discrimination and challenges that many previously incarcerated people face. Returning Citizens – and their families - need and deserve the best services we can provide in order to re-integrate into and reconnect to society. Through excellence in re-entry supports and services, we will improve the lives of previously incarcerated people while simultaneously reducing recidivism rates.

The Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA) was established in 2007 by D.C. Law that mandates the office to "coordinate and monitor service delivery to ex-offenders ... and make recommendations to the Mayor to promote the general welfare, empowerment, and reintegration of ex-offenders in the areas of employment and career development, health care, education, housing, and social services."⁴ With the passage of this law, the District of Columbia established the first legislatively-mandated office across the country whose focus is to ensure that every Returning Citizen – regardless of where they served or how long ago they were released - can be connected to programs and services tailored for that individual's needs.

Previous reports and studies⁵ have well documented the challenges that MORCA has faced in fulfilling this legislative mandate – including a lack of adequate

¹ Gognato, Greene, Raderstrong & Sagers. *A Data Needs Assessment for the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs*. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 2015.

² Information provided by Brian Ferguson, Director of MORCA, D.C. Mayor's Office of Community Affairs.

³ (2018). *One-Day Estimate of Justice System-Involved Individuals within the District of Columbia* (2017) White Paper. Washington D.C.: Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

⁴ Council of the District of Columbia. (2007). D.C. Act 16-243. Codification District of Columbia Official Code.

⁵ OIG. (2015). *Office on Returning Citizen Affairs: Report of Inspection* (OIG) No. 15-I-0069. Washington D.C.: OIG

Kearney, M.S. & Whitehead, T.L. (2015). *Ethnographic assessment of the D.C. Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs* White Paper. Washington D.C.: University of Maryland.

organizational capacity, funding, support, and coordination. Recognizing the challenges it has faced and driven by a desire to do more for the Returning Citizen community in the District, MORCA set out to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process starting in May 2017. The two primary goals of this process were to a) develop a strategic plan to solidify MORCA's vision and mission and establish programmatic and administrative goals and priorities for the office and b) strengthen MORCA's capacity to successfully achieve its stated goals and create the organizational change required to be successful. The Strategic Planning process was facilitated by Lachman Consulting, a consulting firm that helps mission-driven organizations create sustainable and transformational change by offering strategic planning, organization development, and leadership development and coaching services.

The first phase of this project (Phase I) involved a thorough organizational assessment of MORCA that gathered a variety of perspectives (MORCA staff, Returning Citizens, advocates, re-entry service providers, governmental officials, and others) to paint a clear understanding of MORCA's current reality and the challenges and opportunities to be addressed through strategic planning. Phase I was conducted in partnership with the Council for Court Excellence (CCE), a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic organization committed to enhancing the justice system in the District of Columbia to serve the public equitably, and thanks to grant funding from the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG), Executive Office of the Mayor, District of Columbia. The central findings and recommendations that resulted from Phase I are detailed in Section II below.

In Phase II of this project, Lachman Consulting partnered with MORCA to develop a strategic plan that directly addressed the findings from Phase I and provides a blueprint for MORCA to more effectively fulfill its mission and vision. The activities of Phase II were also aimed at strengthening the capacity of MORCA's leadership to implement its plans and make strategic decisions on an ongoing basis, because even the best strategic plans are insufficient for creating the results and changes an organization desires. Over the course of four months (June – September 2018), LC and MORCA held weekly planning and coaching meetings (involving the MORCA Director and Director of Operations), two all-staff meetings (including an all-day planning retreat), and several meetings with critical outside stakeholders including advocates and DC government officials. Phase II of this project was made possible by the decision of DC Council to allocate dedicated resources in MORCA's FY18 budget for the development of a strategic plan.

During the course of this Strategic Planning process, we are pleased to report that MORCA has already made strides towards strengthening the office's work and meeting the needs of our Returning Citizen community. In FY18, MORCA hired a Director of Operations to oversee and improve the office's functioning and two Case Managers to provide a standardized needs assessment, guided reentry, and ongoing support to Returning Citizens. Thanks to additional FY19

funding approved by DC Council, MORCA also recently hired an additional Outreach Specialist whose role will be to frequently visit BOP facilities to ensure that more District residents are aware of the services that MORCA offers. MORCA also launched a new Paralegal Initiative, in partnership with Georgetown University's School of Continuing Education, to provide 20 individuals with paralegal training and placement in a DC law firm for a 1-year fellowship. In FY18 MORCA implemented an electronic sign-in and registration process in the office, which significantly improves the efficiency of the process and allows the office to more easily and effectively capture and track client information and data. MORCA has seen a 30% increase in foot traffic between July and September 2018, which is likely attributed to not only MORCA's improved capacities, but also the perception that MORCA has competent staff offering important re-entry referrals and programs.

As MORCA looks to the future, this strategic plan provides a roadmap to guide the office's mission-driven work and continued efforts to strengthen its capacity to serve Returning Citizens in the District. However, MORCA cannot create these changes on its own. Our hope is that this plan, and the progress that MORCA has made already, will encourage the Mayor, DC Council, and other key stakeholders and will clarify and specify the supports that MORCA needs from others to be successful.

Phase I Learnings and Recommendations

Research Protocols

During Phase I, Lachman Consulting worked in collaboration with the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) and MORCA's leadership and staff, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors in MORCA's internal and external environments that are impacting the office's ability to serve Returning Citizens in the District.

The project team reviewed the previous publications and reports on both MORCA and the larger Washington, D.C. re-entry landscape and simultaneously conducted research into staffing and procedures in municipal or county-level re-entry offices nationally. In addition, we conducted 21 confidential interviews of local external stakeholders identified by MORCA, including D.C. and federal government officials and staff, re-entry advocates, and re-entry service providers. We also conducted confidential interviews with all MORCA staff (and have since interviewed all new MORCA staff).

MORCA hosted two client focus groups of approximately twelve clients each, which were designed by Lachman Consulting and facilitated with CCE. Lachman Consulting facilitated a third focus group of nine re-entry service organizations.

CCE, Lachman Consulting, and MORCA also collaborated to develop two surveys: the first for clients of MORCA, and the second for re-entry service

providers in D.C. CCE distributed these surveys, collected 54 Returning Citizen responses and 17 service provider responses, and analyzed the data gathered.

Findings

Based on the research outlined above, the findings included:

1. One of MORCA's greatest strengths is that the majority of staff are Returning Citizens themselves, allowing them to create a comfortable and welcoming environment and client relationships built on trust and hope.
2. There is no clear and common understanding of MORCA's mission and the work that it does (and doesn't do) to operationalize that mission. This lack of clarity has led clients, staff, partners, advocates, and others to have a wide variety of expectations of MORCA, many of which have not been met.
3. MORCA is unreliable and inconsistent in its communications, follow-through, and delivery on commitments. Many people are aware and forgiving of the fact that MORCA has limited resources, but they also are frustrated by the office's lack of accountability.
4. MORCA's clients rely on MORCA for basic services (getting IDs, a mailing address, and training classes), and would also like to see the office provide more robust services and/or referrals for social reintegration, housing, and employment.
5. Organizations serving and advocating for Returning Citizens would like to build deeper relationships with MORCA and would like to see MORCA be a stronger advocacy partner on issues that impact Returning Citizens.
6. Stakeholders across the board would like to see more consistent and reliable data and information about MORCA's work and accomplishments.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, Lachman Consulting's recommendations included:

1. Develop and communicate, internally and externally, a clear and common understanding of MORCA's mission and vision.
2. Focus on a limited number of priority services and programs that MORCA can and will deliver with excellence. Deeply consider client needs, political realities, and capacity constraints when making these decisions.
3. Build or rebuild critical stakeholder relationships, focusing on government and community-based partners, the re-entry advocacy community, and clients.
4. Develop and sustain accountability structures, behaviors, and beliefs among MORCA's staff (starting with leadership) that result in an observable difference in MORCA's ability to deliver on agreed-upon expectations.
5. Reassess and potentially revise roles and responsibilities for staff and leadership based on shared mission and priority services and programs.

These recommendations provided a course of action that will help move MORCA towards greater organizational strength at the same time as developing a strategic plan. We used these recommendations to design Phase II of strategic planning, beginning with a clear focus on MORCA's mission and vision. Once

those guiding statements were developed, Lachman Consulting worked with MORCA to develop a set of programmatic and administrative priorities that responded to Phase I findings and will continue to improve MORCA's functioning. Alongside this planning work, Lachman Consulting held regular meetings with MORCA's leadership, aimed at building their capacity to lead these changes into the future.

Revised Mission and Vision Statements

Responding directly to what was learned during Phase I, MORCA devised the below guiding statements to communicate, both externally and internally, a clear set of priorities and a deepened sense of purpose. In crafting the mission and vision statements, MORCA leadership considered their various stakeholders while, at the same time, holding the needs of Returning Citizens as primary.

Mission:

As the District of Columbia's coordinating and advisory agency for reentry, MORCA removes barriers to reentry and empowers residents to break the cycle of recidivism by providing guided re-entry and ensuring that previously incarcerated people are connected to essential programs and services in areas such as employment, health, education, housing assistance, and social services.

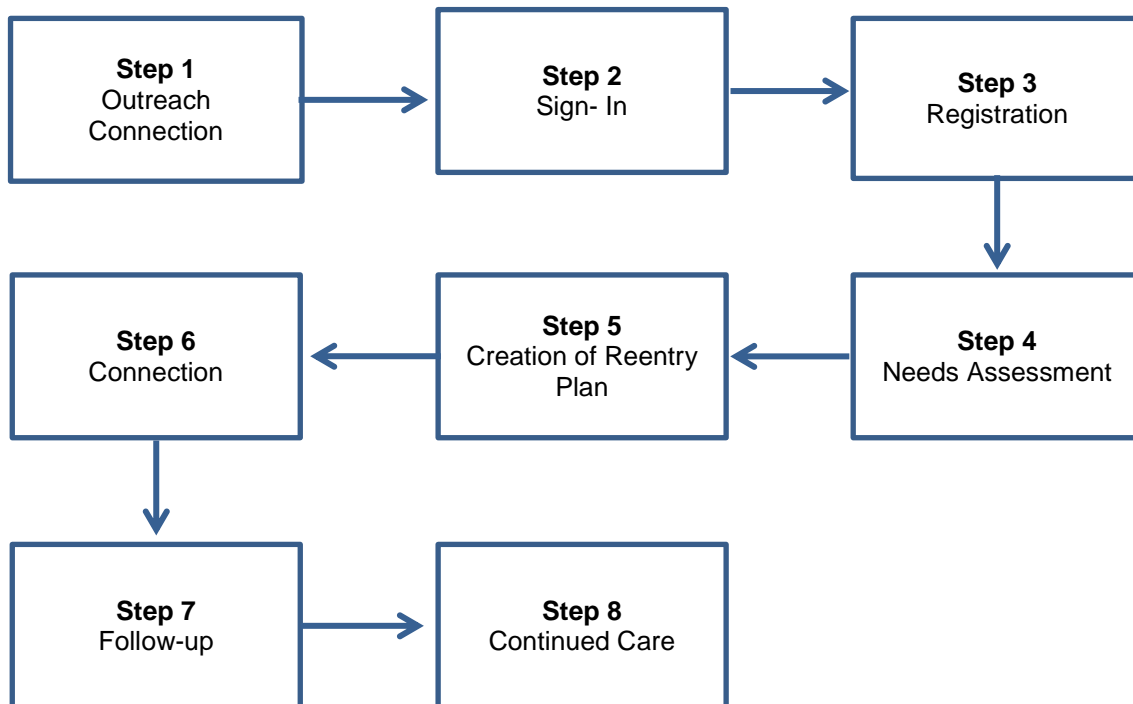
Vision:

We envision a District of Columbia where all Returning Citizens are valued members of society, where the barriers to successful reentry have been removed, and where all people returning from incarceration have full access to the resources needed for a seamless transition back into society.

Program Priorities

As stated in MORCA's mission statement above, the office primarily fulfills its purpose by providing guided re-entry and ensuring that previously incarcerated people are connected to essential programs and services. MORCA offers its services to all Returning Citizens of the District who present at the office – regardless of where they served or how long ago they were released – and connects them to programs and services tailored for that individual's needs. The flow chart on the following page illustrates how a Returning Citizen is guided through the MORCA system.

MORCA Workflow



Step 1- Outreach Connection: MORCA connects with incarcerated or previously incarcerated individuals at various events, such as BOP facility trip, CSOSA video conferencing, DC Jail, Halfway Houses and other community based organization events.

Step 2- Sign In: MORCA signs all visitors into the office to ensure we are identifying the reason for the visit into MORCA.

Step 3- Registration: MORCA creates a profile in MORCA's database and identify services needed.

Step 4- Needs Assessment: MORCA case managers complete a full needs assessment.

Step 5- Creation of Reentry Plan: MORCA creates a reentry plan that allows the individual to know what next steps are recommended to guide their reentry.

Step 6- Connection: MORCA provides referrals to resources, services and programs including referrals to in-house programs (Pathways to Work and Workforce Development).

Step 7- Follow Up: Case managers conduct follow-up to ensure success with reentry plan items. Program Coordinator follows-up on outcomes of referrals.

Step 8- Continued Care: MORCA provides continued case management to support clients' longer-term reentry needs.

This workflow was developed recently as MORCA added critical staff positions, including two Case Managers and an additional Outreach Specialist. The following programmatic goals and activities will support MORCA to continue building and strengthening this new system, and ultimately improve its service delivery to Returning Citizens of the District.

1. Expand MORCA's outreach efforts to ensure a higher proportion of Returning Citizens in the District are aware of and making use of MORCA's service offerings

Key Activities:

- Continue outreach to DOC and FBOP facilities
- Expand MORCA's outreach efforts into the community by partnering with organizations who provide services to Returning Citizens and by deploying outreach specialists to targeted community spaces and gatherings
- Solidify an outreach partnership with the Ready Center, so that individuals are connected to MORCA for longer-term support and services they may need
- Improve MORCA's registration process to ensure the office collects information about how all registrants heard about MORCA
- Strengthen family reunification programs
- Consider devising specific services for women and young people

Success Metrics:

- Number of outreach visits conducted each month
- Number of new outreach partnerships brokered or outreach locations added
- Number of new registrants at MORCA each month as a result of outreach efforts
- Number of highly satisfied participants who are part of family reunification experience(s)

2. Continue to build the capacity of MORCA's new case management program to provide high-quality needs assessments, reentry plans, service connections, and continued care to Returning Citizens

Key Activities:

- Ensure all MORCA registrants are provided with the option to enroll in case management support and initiate a call-back system to reconnect with visitors who don't enroll on their first visit
- Formalize follow-up protocols after referrals are made
- Ensure that clients are referred to organizations that have the capacity to serve Returning Citizens' specific needs
- By January 2019, implement and begin to use Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) software, a client database that is in-use by 10 Community

Based Organizations serving Returning Citizens, which will help MORCA more effectively and efficiently initiate and follow-up on referrals to those organizations

Success Metrics:

- Number of individuals enrolled in case management monthly
- Number of case management clients receiving needs assessment and reentry plans
- Number of individuals enrolled in or receiving referred services
- Level of satisfaction concerning case management, as gathered by client feedback surveys

3. Strengthen MORCA's ability to connect Returning Citizens to their most critical needs of obtaining vital records, housing, and employment

Key Activities:

- Formalize a referral partnership with DOES that provides MORCA clients with tailored employment opportunities and support
- Create partnerships with housing agencies and landlords to connect individuals with tailored housing placements (following the hiring of a Housing Specialist or Ombudsman)
- Strengthen MORCA's CDL and flagger training programs, so that they lead to more employment opportunities
- Continue MORCA's new Paralegal Fellowship program to place more individuals with high-quality training and employment opportunities
- Continue the partnership programs that reduce and waive fees for Returning Citizens to acquire Driver's Licenses and other vital records
- Seek out additional partnership opportunities with organizations interested in providing education/ training specifically for Returning Citizens

Success Metrics:

- Number of individuals receiving employment through MORCA referrals
- Number of individuals receiving housing through MORCA referrals
- Number of new housing partnerships brokered
- Number of individuals receiving CDL and flagger certifications
- Number of individuals employed after completion of Paralegal Fellowship program*

**The new paralegal program provides MORCA with an opportunity to conduct research on its' impact in order to a) decide whether the program should be continued and if so b) how to strengthen outcomes. This could also lead MORCA to understand what other partnerships they might pursue in order to develop a cluster of programs that represent a pathway to the Middle Class.*

Program Criteria

In the Strategic Planning process, MORCA developed a set of criteria to use in evaluating and making decisions about its existing programs. These criteria helped to illuminate two important facets of MORCA's offerings – how critical and responsive they are to Returning Citizens' needs and how well MORCA is doing in delivering these services. As MORCA moves forward with executing its strategic plan, it will continue to use the below set of questions to evaluate and continually improve its current programs, as well as make strategic decisions about how to respond to opportunities for new or expanded programs. The below criteria are not intended as a checklist, but rather, they will serve as a guiding framework and tool to support MORCA in making decisions

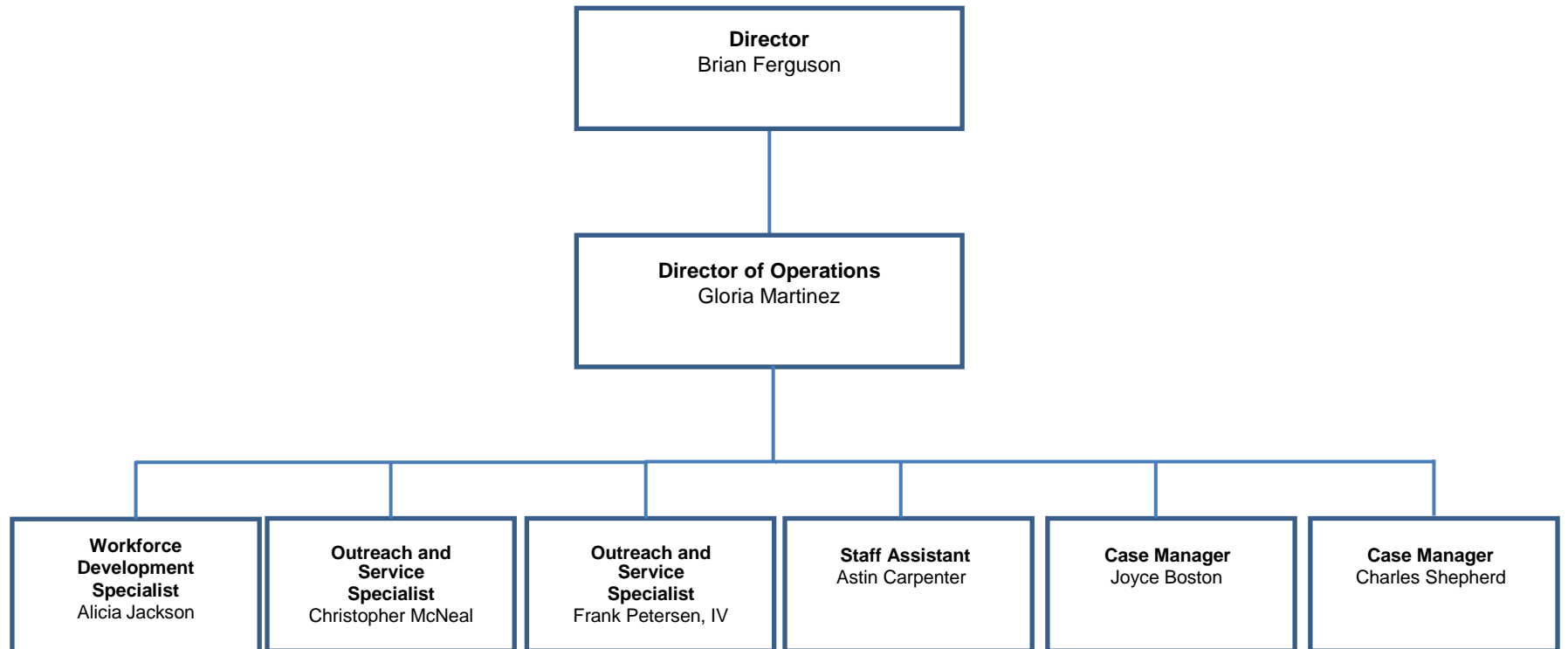
- Is the program or service aligned with the legislation that created the Office?
- Is the program responsive to expressed constituent needs?
- Does the program fill a gap in the current landscape of what's available for Returning Citizens in the District?
- Does the program have the potential to significantly impact Returning Citizens' lives for a reasonable investment of time and money?
- Can MORCA deliver the program well?
- Does MORCA currently have the capacity to deliver the program, or is it able to secure additional resources to build the necessary capacity?
- Does MORCA have the resources and ability to develop a formalized plan and process for the program?
- Is the program aligned with mayoral priorities?

Administrative Priorities

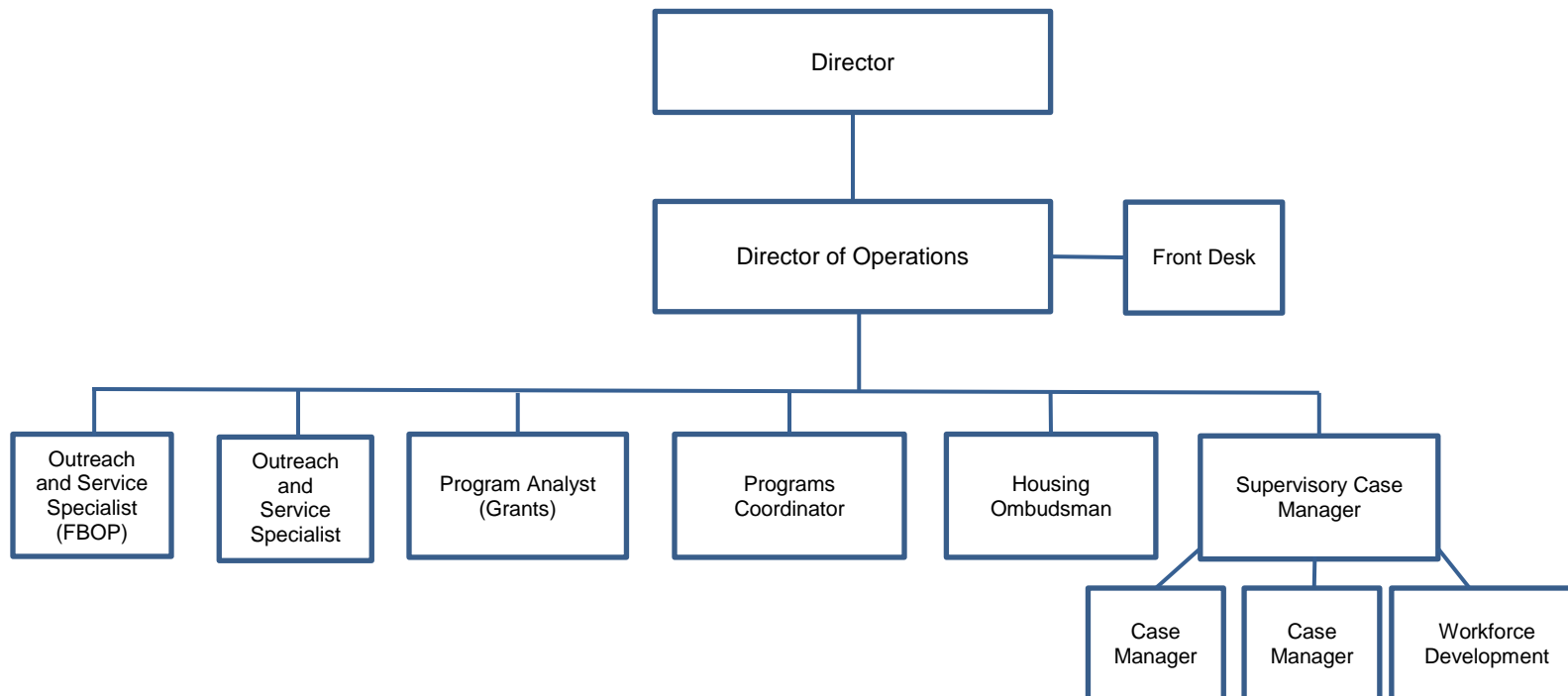
In order for MORCA to fulfill its mission and achieve the above goals in service to Returning Citizens, it must continue to improve its administrative functioning while also growing its staffing capacity. This section details the work MORCA needs to prioritize internally, as well as the financial and systemic support it needs from others, in order to continue to strengthen its capacity.

The visuals on the following pages illustrate MORCA's present organizational chart followed by an organizational chart, demonstrating the additional staff needed during the next four years in order for MORCA to more clearly delineate roles and responsibilities, serve more Returning Citizens who would benefit from case management, and better serve the critical housing needs of its clients. In addition, there is a real and present need, given increased walk-ins, for a permanent employee whose sole role is to man the front desk.

Current MORCA Organization Chart



Future MORCA Organizational Chart



The following administrative goals and activities will guide MORCA as it builds additional internal capacity, adds needed staff, and continues to improve its services to Returning Citizens of the District of Columbia.

1. Expand MORCA's communication efforts to ensure that key stakeholders are aware of MORCA's activities and service offerings

Key Activities:

- Create a monthly newsletter informing partners about important and relevant happenings at MORCA
- Hold quarterly open-house events for Returning Citizens, with the goal of communicating the services that MORCA provides
- Craft high-quality materials for staff to distribute to external partners
- Devise a new one-page summary of key services for Returning Citizens
- As new staff are hired, and roles clarify, ensure that all staff are internally referring clients to appropriate MORCA staff
- Devise a strategy for collaborating with the READY Center

Success Metrics:

- Number of external partners who believe that newsletter is helpful and informative
- Number of attendees at open-house events and attendee satisfaction
- Number of new outreach partnerships brokered or locations added
- Number of Returning Citizens who felt satisfied with the information they received

2. Commit to internal practices of continual evaluation and improvement

Key Activities:

- Use research tools (surveys, focus groups, etc.) to track client satisfaction
- Grow successful programs and services with care and deliberation
- Commit to ending or diminishing programs and services that are low impact or are not aligned with strategic goals and criteria
- Thoroughly vet potential new partners for capacity, potential impact for clients and their capacity to follow through

Success Metrics:

- Data on client satisfaction used to guide changes in services and programs
- Written plan for each program and service that will expand with a corresponding accountability structure
- Written plan for each program and service to shrink or end with a corresponding accountability structure

- Number of partners vetted and number with which MORCA has chosen to engage

3. Advocate for the information sharing across government agencies that MORCA needs to be successful in serving Returning Citizens

Key Activities:

- Devise a list detailing information that would be most helpful to MORCA in serving Returning Citizens
- Collaborate to convene the agencies involved (potentially facilitated by Vera staff) to surface and address challenges to information sharing
- Surface other issues (hardware, software, etc.) related to data sharing
- Devise a plan in concert with partner agencies to share agreed upon data

Success Metrics

- Thorough list of data that would be valuable to MORCA in serving Returning Citizens more efficiently
- Convening occurs, all issues surfaced
- Written plan for information sharing with accountability structure (timeline, budgetary responsibilities, etc.)

MORCA is poised to grow and tackle new challenges. MORCA moved during this last year towards a culture of internal, continuous improvement, and because of this shift, there have already been large steps forward. The recommendations above are intended to further the path that MORCA is following towards accountability and self-assessment in order to better serve Returning Citizens.

Additional Recommendations

MORCA, in order to fully achieve this legislated mandate, clearly needs substantially more funding and, as a result, the capacity to hire more staff in order to meet the needs of Returning Citizens. This expansion may additionally require that MORCA adjust its physical space as, for example, confidential case management is already a challenge in MORCA's present location.

MORCA would be able to better serve Returning Citizens if it had access to relevant data regarding their clients across the various agencies who serve the same population. While it may not be feasible to share all data due to legal, privacy and other reasons, it is surely possible to convene these agencies to discuss the data that *can and should be shared* amongst them so that MORCA and other agencies can avoid duplication of services and engage in knowledge sharing to benefit Returning Citizens. This same recommendation was made in

the recently-published Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) report, *Framework for Reducing Recidivism in the District of Columbia*.⁶

Recent reports have raised the question of where MORCA is best positioned within the DC Government to fulfill its mission. Again, referencing the Vera recidivism report of Sept. 14, 2018:

“...if it is determined that MORCA does have a distinct role to play, it might be better situated within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. Its current placement within the Mayor’s Office of Community Affairs suggests that its main purpose is to address the political concerns of a particular constituency, while placing it within the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice would enhance its position as a public safety agency and better emphasize its primary purpose of coordinating programs and services for returning citizens.”⁷

This view is shared by the Council for Court Excellence:

“The Council for Court Excellence has been excited to see how MORCA’s leadership, with an increased budget and staff capacity, has begun to improve the quality of services since our 2016 report, Beyond Second Chances. This strategic planning effort is an important investment to continue moving MORCA and its work forward. One critical way to increase MORCA’s efficiency and ability to fulfill its statutory mission is to re-assign the office to the Mayor’s Public Safety and Justice cluster. In that setting, MORCA will be surrounded by agencies with complementary missions and, and will have access to the information sharing, substantive expertise, and reporting and accountability procedures, better suited to the needs of this unique office and the returning citizens it serves.”⁸

Finally, it is important to note that MORCA’s originating legislation not only gives it extensive responsibilities but also *required it to be funded in order to meet those responsibilities*. This mandate has never been met. MORCA has consistently operated under state of woeful underfunding which, without doubt, led to its’ underperformance in the face of so much need. And this lack of funding has proven a self-fulfilling prophecy for MORCA. It is easy to blame a chronically underfunded agency for its lack of impact.

In 2017, when DC Council approved a budget for MORCA to devise a strategic plan and then additional dollars were budgeted for MORCA to add staff, this provided an opportunity for MORCA leadership and staff to work on capacity building with an outside consultant while simultaneously growing as an agency. MORCA has made immense strides in the last year and, with even more support, both financial and systemic, as well as appropriate placement within District government, we believe that MORCA can grow into an agency that can truly meet a set of critical, unmet needs in the District of Columbia.

⁶ Framework for Reducing Recidivism in the District of Columbia, Vera Center on Sentencing + Corrections, September 14, 2018, pg. 38.

⁷ Ibid, pgs. 37-38.

⁸ Misty Thomas, CCE Executive Director, Email to authors, October 3, 2018

Relationship to the READY Center

When strategic planning work began with MORCA in 2017, the then-named Portal was in its initial stages of development. At this time, the READY Center (as the Portal has been renamed) is going to be placed, physically, at the Department of Corrections. It will, at least initially, serve Returning Citizens as they exit the DC jail, connecting them with a variety of services and supports. It is planned that MORCA will have a presence at the Ready Center.

While the READY Center will doubtless be an important resource for people released from the DC jail, MORCA will remain a critical resource for those whom the READY Center will not touch, including:

- Returning Citizens released from the BOP
- Returning Citizens residing in the District of Columbia who were released before the opening of the READY Center
- Returning Citizens released from the DC Jail who do not choose to avail themselves of services at the READY Center

Thus, while the READY Center is a welcome addition to the landscape of services for Returning Citizens, MORCA will remain the critical link to services for the vast majority of Returning Citizens in Washington, D.C. In fact, MORCA will provide a critical role in a “continuum of care” model, with the READY Center serving as a first step for Returning Citizens and MORCA positioned to facilitate longer-term case management as well as providing the referrals and resources that Returning Citizens need as they move through the longer process of successful reintegration.

Conclusion

During the last year, MORCA has begun to make significant changes while simultaneously planning for a more strategic future. MORCA has added needed staff, streamlined registration, undertaken case management, devised new partnerships, and evaluated all of its present programming. MORCA has also, through the process of strategic planning, devised a roadmap for continuing this progress during the next four years. These strategic efforts are grounded by a renewed sense of purpose and vision for the office and the constituents it serves.

As MORCA moves into the implementation phase of strategic planning, a timeline for executing the above priorities and activities will be developed in order to maintain forward momentum and track progress along the way. Leadership and staff will continue to use the criteria they have established in order to assess new opportunities and evaluate their work. In addition, MORCA has developed metrics to track and evaluate their impact at the programmatic level, and as an office. As change is a process, MORCA leadership and staff will no doubt need

to adjust their strategies based on their learnings as they move through the implementation process. Nonetheless, with this plan in place, and with the support of critical stakeholders and partners, MORCA is well positioned to more efficiently and effectively serve the District's Returning Citizen community.