

Implementing the Next Generation of Parole Supervision

Findings from the Changing Attitudes and Motivation in Parolees Pilot Study

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Abstract

One strategy for addressing persistently high recidivism rates among individuals leaving prison is to incorporate interventions into the parole supervision process. This paper presents findings from the Changing Attitudes and Motivation in Parolees (CHAMPS) study, which examined the implementation of a pilot of one parole-based intervention, known as the Next Generation of Parole Supervision (NG), in three sites: Dallas, Denver, and Des Moines.

NG is intended to improve parolee outcomes by enhancing parole officers' knowledge and the strategies they use during their regular supervision meetings with parolees. The study uses a range of qualitative and quantitative data, including assessments of the knowledge and skills of parole officers who were trained in NG and a second group of officers who represented business-as-usual supervision, to assess the implementation of NG.

Results from the study show that, while there was some variation across sites, parole officers in the CHAMPS sites generally already knew many of the concepts that were part of NG, and changes to officers' supervision practices were limited. Only in Dallas did NG-trained parole officers exhibit practices that were substantially different from those observed among untrained officers, perhaps because the Dallas parole agency's supervision culture and parole officer training started out least aligned with NG, allowing more room for change.

The results in Dallas also suggest that coaching may be important to successfully implementing an intervention that involves changing parole officers' skills and practices. While NG-trained parole officers exhibited small changes in their supervision practices early in the study period, there were more noticeable changes once coaching was introduced. However, despite coaching for the entire study period in Des Moines and Denver, little change was observed there, suggesting that the presence of a coach is not sufficient to lead to change.

Overall, this study shows that parole officers are amenable to training and coaching to help them improve their supervision practices, but that consistent implementation can be challenging.

Summary

Despite an increasing emphasis on reentry services for individuals leaving prison, recidivism rates remain high, and policymakers are searching for ways to help parolees make more successful transitions from prison. One strategy is to incorporate interventions into the parole supervision process. This paper presents findings from the Changing Attitudes and Motivation in Parolees (CHAMPS) study, which examined the implementation of a pilot of one parole-based intervention, known as the Next Generation of Parole Supervision (NG).

MDRC conducted the study, which was funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). Drs. Caleb Lloyd and Ralph Serin developed the NG model with funding from NIJ, and the National Institute of Corrections developed the NG curriculum for parole officers. The Bureau of Justice Assistance funded the implementation of NG in the three study sites: Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and Des Moines, Iowa.

NG is intended to improve parolee outcomes by enhancing parole officers' knowledge and the strategies they use during their regular supervision meetings with parolees. Building on existing literature about best practices in parole supervision, the NG curriculum focuses on desistance — a process through which individuals who have been involved in crime change their self-perceived identity and cease participating in crime — and helps parole officers to use parolee-centered conversations to identify and reinforce a parolee's strengths and to identify potential stabilizing and destabilizing influences in the individual's life.

The study focuses on understanding how NG was implemented as it was piloted in the three sites and assesses NG-trained parole officers' fidelity to the NG model. In order to better understand NG's implementation and the business-as-usual practices it was intended to replace, the study also included a second group of parole officers who were not trained in NG. The groups were not randomly assigned. This paper uses a range of qualitative and quantitative data to describe how NG was implemented, including assessments of the knowledge and skills of the parole officers in the two groups over a nine-month period.

The results show that, while there was some variation across sites, parole officers in the CHAMPS sites generally already knew many of the concepts that were part of the NG training, as many of the topics were included in trainings that they had attended previously. The quantitative data suggest that changes to officers' supervision practices were limited; video observations provided evidence that only in Dallas were NG-trained parole officers exhibiting practices that were substantially different from those observed among untrained officers. In the other two sites, the practices of the trained and untrained officers were largely similar.

These results suggest that a parole agency's supervision culture and parole officer training can affect both the implementation of an intervention such as NG and the likelihood that it will lead to real change in parole officer behavior. For example, if parole officers are already receiving a good deal of training in practices similar to the new intervention being introduced and if the supervision culture is already aligned with the new intervention's approach, it may be unlikely that additional training in a curriculum will result in significant change. This scenario appears to have been the case in Des

Moines, where officers already received training in motivational interviewing and the agency's culture was rehabilitation focused. There, officers who did not receive NG training exhibited skill in NG-related strategies at medium to high levels, similar to officers trained in NG.

In contrast, parole officers in Dallas started out with the lowest levels of skill and least amount of experience. The Dallas parole agency's shift toward a rehabilitation culture and training in motivational interviewing was more recent. In that site, the supervision practices of NG-trained parole officers did appear to change over time to become more consistent with the NG curriculum.

The results in Dallas also suggest that coaching may be important to successfully implementing an intervention that involves changing parole officers' skills and practices. While NG-trained parole officers exhibited small changes in their supervision practices early in the study period, there were more noticeable changes once coaching was introduced. It is not surprising that the implementation of some strategies, such as changing the way a parole officer responds to a comment from a parolee, requires ongoing practice and reinforcement. The other two sites engaged coaches for the entire study period, but little change was observed in parole officer behavior, suggesting that the presence of a coach itself is not a guarantee for change in parole officer behavior when officers are already familiar with the skills the coach is supporting. Implementing coaching was challenging at all sites. Logistical issues, such as officers being out of the office and in the field or in training, made it difficult for coaches and parole officers to meet frequently.

Overall, this study shows that parole officers are amenable to training and coaching to help them improve their supervision practices, but that consistent implementation can be challenging.

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The Authors

Introduction

Of the nearly 600,000 people who are released from state prisons each year in the United States,¹ about two-thirds are rearrested and about half return to prison within three years.² Policymakers have sought to reduce these high recidivism rates, often by funding prisoner reentry programs operated by community-based organizations. An alternative strategy is to incorporate interventions into the parole system. Given that nearly 80 percent of state prisoners are released to parole,³ with nearly 900,000 adults on parole supervision in the United States,⁴ this strategy has the potential to affect large numbers of former prisoners. However, as it currently operates, parole supervision appears to have little effect on recidivism.⁵ New interventions that change the focus of parole supervision may be required if parole is to become more effective in reducing recidivism.

This paper presents findings from the Changing Attitudes and Motivation in Parolees (CHAMPS) study, which examined the implementation of a pilot of one parole-based intervention, known as the Next Generation of Parole Supervision (NG). MDRC conducted the study with funding from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).⁶ The NG model was designed to improve parolee outcomes by changing the way that parole officers work with parolees during supervision meetings and other interactions. Drs. Caleb Lloyd and Ralph Serin developed the model with funding from NIJ,⁷ and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) developed a curriculum to teach parole officers how to implement NG. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) funded the implementation of NG in the three study sites: Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and Des Moines, Iowa. This paper describes the implementation of NG in the three sites during this pilot and assesses parole officers' knowledge and use of NG skills over a nine-month period, comparing trained officers with untrained officers in order to better under-

¹Carson and Anderson (2016).

²Durose, Cooper, and Snyder (2014).

³Hughes and Wilson (2017).

⁴Kaebel and Bonczar (2016).

⁵Bonta et al. (2008).

⁶Funding for the CHAMPS study was provided under the Second Chance Act of 2008, which supports programs and research in this area. NIJ awarded the CHAMPS study to MDRC and George Mason University. Dr. Faye Taxman served as co-principal investigator during site selection and early design efforts. Dr. Shelley Listwan and Dr. Jennifer Hartman of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte led the video recording and coding of parole officer-client meetings for the project.

⁷An advisory group, funded by NIJ, also helped to refine the model, which was ultimately quite different from the original model proposed by Drs. Lloyd and Serin.

stand how the implementation of NG differed from business as usual.⁸ The study focuses on understanding the implementation and fidelity of NG in this pilot and does not assess whether successful implementation of NG would affect parolee outcomes.

The Next Generation of Parole Supervision (NG)

As depicted in Figure 1, the NG intervention is intended to improve parolee outcomes by changing the way that parole officers work with parolees during supervision meetings. The NG curriculum builds on existing literature about best practices in supervision by adding strategies that are explicitly designed to support desistance, a process through which individuals who have been involved in crime change their self-perceived identity and cease participating in crime.⁹ NG is expected to improve the quality of interactions between parole officers and parolees and to lead to better behavior, fewer sanctions, and reduced recidivism among parolees. However, the CHAMPS study focuses only on the implementation of NG (depicted by the shaded box in Figure 1) and does not assess whether NG led to changes in parolee outcomes.

NG is designed to train parole officers to support parolees in the process of desistance by working with them to recognize their strengths and build stabilizers, as well as address the destabilizing forces in their lives to support a noncriminal identity.¹⁰ Parole officers are expected to carry out this task during the regular face-to-face meetings and other interactions that they have with their parolees as part of the requirements of supervision. Typically, in the absence of NG, parole officers use these meetings to get a status update from parolees on housing, employment, and any special conditions attached to their parole requirements. In contrast, the NG approach asks that parole officers shift the focus from compliance to digging deeper and exploring the factors in the parolees' lives that promote, or threaten, a crime-free life. The curriculum includes training in strengths-based approaches that help parole officers to identify a parolee's strengths and reinforce them. Parole officers are also trained to identify potential stabilizers and destabilizing influences in a parolee's life through the use of open-ended questions, parolee-centered conversations, and worksheets. Parole officers are expected to work with parolees on developing ways to cope with destabilizers in their lives. NG also incorporates

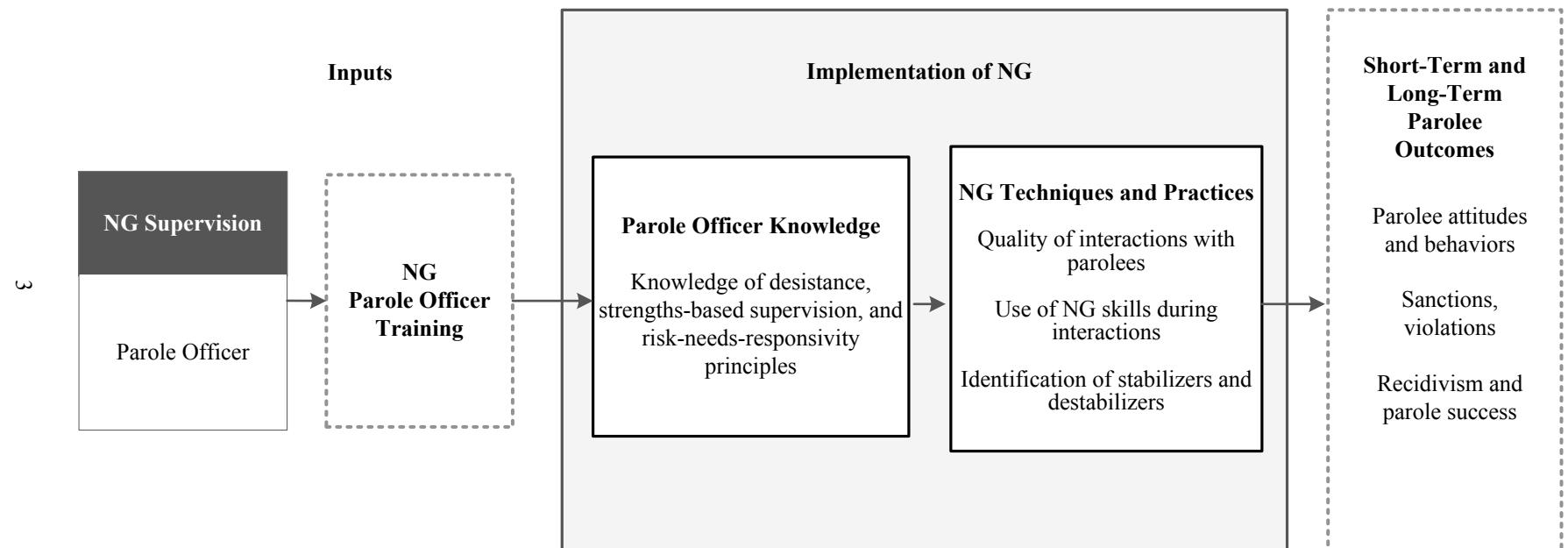
⁸The CHAMPS pilot implementation study was originally intended to be followed by an impact study to assess the effect of NG on parolee outcomes. BJA decided in January 2016 not to continue funding the sites past the implementation study, and the impact study did not take place. The termination of funding also had implications for data collection, as described in the paper.

⁹Maruna (2001).

¹⁰Stabilizers, which promote desistance, include a positive social group, meaningful employment, and sobriety. Destabilizers, which may make a parolee more prone to reoffending, include drug or alcohol use, interactions with people involved in crime, and unemployment.

Figure 1

Changing Attitudes and Motivation in Parolees (CHAMPS): Conceptual Framework



Note: NG = Next Generation of Parole Supervision.

motivational interviewing, core correctional practices, and other practices, described below, that are considered to be important to effective supervision

BJA selected parole agencies participating in CHAMPS through a competitive application process. The three sites were selected from among six finalists through an assessment involving site visits by a team consisting of staff from the evaluation team, NIC, and BJA. The assessment rated the sites on their capacity to implement the interventions, demonstrated by strong existing reentry programs and prior experience implementing evidence-based practices. It also judged the sites on their capacity to participate in a research study. BJA used the results from these assessments to select the three sites that ultimately participated in the CHAMPS study: Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Des Moines, Iowa. As described later in this paper, the three study sites had either started to shift supervision practices from an enforcement-oriented approach to a more rehabilitative approach, or had already undergone such a shift. Management staff at all three sites saw participation in CHAMPS as a way to support these efforts.

Using the NG model, NIC developed curriculum materials and trained parole officers who were part of the study. The training was designed to start with a short review of practices that many officers were already expected to know, such as core correctional practices, and build upon that knowledge with components more specific to NG, such as the desistance framework and the focus on stabilizers and destabilizers. At the beginning of the implementation period, officers participated in a series of trainings, including a four-hour online course introducing the desistance framework, a two-hour webinar about NG, and a three-day in-person training. To build on the training content and address the challenges officers' faced in implementing the curriculum, NIC also provided quarterly booster training sessions at each site, either in-person or via webinar.

Anticipating that the parole officers might need additional support to maintain their knowledge and translate what they learned from the training into supervision practices, NIC included onsite coaching as a core component of the NG model. In each site, NIC trained a coach, who was a full-time employee of the parole agency,¹¹ to provide coaching to the parole officers. Coaches were selected by the parole agency. Though the coaches had different career backgrounds, each had at least 10 years of experience working in corrections or law enforcement. Coaches completed the same initial NG training as the parole officers and also received additional training on effective coaching strategies, including an eight-hour online course and a two-day in-person training. The coach was expected to observe officers' meetings with parolees (either by video recording or attending in person) and to provide feedback to the officers on their use of the NG skills. The recommended frequency for these meetings was one per week in

¹¹While the coaches' main duties were coaching the parole officers, they also had administrative duties related to managing the site's CHAMPS grant.

the first quarter after the initial training, after which they could gradually reduce the frequency as appropriate for each officer.

The CHAMPS project included a second intervention, since the developers of NG anticipated that it might be necessary to add a more robust array of services to the parole officer training. In an effort to increase the treatment experienced by some of the parolees whom NG-trained parole officers supervised, the study team asked a subset of parole officers in the study to refer eligible parolees to a cognitive behavioral intervention — which combined one-on-one Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) and the group cognitive behavioral curriculum, Thinking for a Change (T4C).¹² However, the sites encountered a number of challenges to implementing this intervention that made it difficult to reach a substantial number of parolees. Therefore, this paper focuses only on the implementation of the NG intervention.

Research Context

The criminology literature points to a number of techniques that, if applied well by parole officers, have the potential to improve parolee outcomes. For example, motivational interviewing — which emphasizes responding to clients empathetically, and with a focus on strengthening clients' motivation to change, rather than using a confrontational style of interaction — has been applied effectively.¹³ Another example is the risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) approach, in which interventions are targeted to individuals based on their risk of offending, their criminogenic needs (risk factors such as low self-control that individuals have the potential to change), and their particular learning styles and abilities.¹⁴ According to the RNR framework, the most important needs are cognitive behavioral ones, and proponents of RNR argue that the best interventions for individuals involved in crime and at high risk of recidivism are cognitive behavioral therapies.¹⁵ Finally, the use of core correctional practices — which include five dimensions: effective use of authority, anti-criminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, use of community resources, and quality of interpersonal relationships between staff and client¹⁶ — have also been shown to be associated with lower recidivism.¹⁷ However, operationalizing principles into real-world practice is challenging and programs based in motivational interviewing, RNR, or core correctional practices may not achieve their desired

¹²Both MET and T4C have prior evidence of success. See Lowenkamp, Hubbard, Makarios, and Latessa (2009) and Marijuana Treatment Project Research Group (2004).

¹³McMurran (2009).

¹⁴Andrews and Bonta (2010).

¹⁵Andrews and Bonta (2010).

¹⁶Andrews and Kiessling (1980).

¹⁷Dowden and Andrews (2004).

outcome if the intervention is poorly designed or implemented.¹⁸ Additionally, though the principles underpinning these practices are broad, designing interventions to meet the needs of certain groups of parolees, such as those who present with mental health and substance abuse issues, requires specific types of intervention.¹⁹ NG was not designed for those with these conditions.

A handful of studies have shown that parole and probation officers can be trained to use effective techniques in their interactions with parolees.²⁰ For example, probation officers trained through the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) demonstration to use an RNR approach and focus on criminogenic needs, changed their techniques in supervision meetings, a difference that was associated with lower rates of recidivism among the probationers they supervised.²¹ An evaluation of the Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-Arrest (STARR) curriculum, which trained officers in a cognitive behavioral supervision approach grounded in RNR, similarly found that officers changed their practice and was also associated with lower recidivism rates.²² In addition, parolees who have a better “working relationship” with their parole officer are also less likely to violate the conditions of their supervision, suggesting that interventions such as motivational interviewing that are designed to improve this relationship could be effective in helping parolees successfully complete parole.²³

However, there are a number of challenges in training parole officers to deliver interventions. First, substantial resources may be needed to sufficiently train officers, who are likely to need ongoing reinforcement and regular observation and feedback to successfully implement interventions.²⁴ In addition, there is an inherent tension between parole officers’ dual roles to support parolees and enforce parole conditions, and parole officers may spend relatively more time ensuring that parolees are complying with parole conditions than providing services and support designed to facilitate desistance from crime.²⁵ Time may also be a factor, as parole officers may not be able to spend enough time in their meetings with parolees to successfully implement interventions.²⁶ Further, parole agency regulations often set strict guidelines about the frequency of meetings officers have with parolees (usually based on the parolees’ assessed

¹⁸Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Smith (2006); Andrews and Bonta (2010).

¹⁹Polaschek (2012).

²⁰Typically, parole supervision occurs after release from prison whereas probation supervision is served as a stand-alone sentence. Both forms of supervision occur in the community.

²¹See Bonta et al. (2011). Results have not been confirmed by an independent evaluation.

²²Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, and Lowenkamp (2011).

²³Skeem, Eno Louden, Polaschek, and Camp (2007); Blasko, Friedman, Rhodes, and Taxman (2015).

²⁴Bonta et al. (2011).

²⁵Bonta et al. (2008).

²⁶Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, and Gutierrez (2010).

risk of recidivism). Even among moderate- or high-risk parolees, the frequency of in-person meetings can be as little as once per month.²⁷ Therefore, while it may be efficient and systematic to provide services to former prisoners through the parole system, such efforts could be difficult to implement.

Study Design, Data, and Methods

The CHAMPS implementation study was designed to address the following two key research questions:

1. Were parole officers in the three sites able to implement the NG intervention with fidelity to the curriculum? In other words, did officers use NG techniques or strategies in their interactions with parolees?
2. Were there measurable differences in supervision knowledge, techniques, and practices of NG-trained parole officers compared with parole officers who were not trained in NG? In other words, how did NG practices compare with business as usual practices?

Parole officers were already conducting supervision using strategies learned from experience or from other trainings, and it is possible that those strategies could look very similar to NG. Therefore, rather than focus only on supervision by NG-trained parole officers, the study team also examined the practices of a second set of officers, who were not trained in NG and who represented what “business-as-usual” supervision looked like in the study sites.

Before the NG training took place, each of the three sites were asked to identify a subset of parole officers to participate in the study.²⁸ Among the group of officers identified by each site, the study team selected a group of 20 officers (ranging from 6 to 8 in each site) to be trained in NG and receive ongoing coaching in the use of NG strategies.²⁹ Other similar officers

²⁷For example, in Texas, parolees meet with officers a maximum of twice per month, once in the office and once in the home or elsewhere. See Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Parole Division (2016).

²⁸Sites were given a few criteria to use in selecting officers: Officers should be willing to participate in the study, not be about to retire, not be completely resistant to using new corrections strategies with their parolees, and not have specialized caseloads, such as mental health or intensive supervision caseloads.

²⁹Each site selected nine primary CHAMPS parole officers (six NG-trained officers and three business-as-usual officers), and some sites also selected one to two additional “backup” parole officers who would be active in the study if a primary study officer left the position. The backup parole officers were trained and coached in the NG curriculum and were included in study data collection. Therefore, the sample includes both primary and backup parole officers. Some parole officers left their positions during the study. By the end of data collection in July 2016, one NG-trained officer had left Des Moines, three NG-trained officers and two business-as-usual officers had left Denver, and one NG-trained officer had left Dallas.

— representing business as usual — were not trained in NG. A total of 11 officers (3 to 4 in each site) were in this group.

Officers were not randomly assigned to be trained in NG. In selecting which officers would be trained, the study team sought to ensure that the trained and business-as-usual officers were as similar as possible on a few observable characteristics: age, gender, years of experience as a community supervision officer, and style of parole supervision.³⁰ While considering the characteristics of the two groups, the study team tried to limit the number of parole officers who would have to be reassigned to different teams or supervisors in order to balance the characteristics of the two groups.³¹ Nonetheless, some officers had to be reassigned in order to ensure a balance of officer characteristics and styles between the two groups.

Although the two groups of parole officers were similar on key observed characteristics at the outset, the two groups likely differed on other, unobserved characteristics.³² Therefore, it is possible that differences in supervision that arose during the study period were due to characteristics of the officers in each group rather than to the NG training itself. In addition, because parolees were not randomly assigned to officers, differences in caseload characteristics could also lead to differences in officers' supervision behavior. For example, parole officers with larger caseloads might have less time to spend in meetings with each parolee, reducing the time they could spend using NG techniques. Given these potential baseline differences and other limitations of the study design, the comparisons of the practices of the two groups should be interpreted with caution.

³⁰Supervisors provided a rating of each parole officer's supervision style. The supervisor rating was collected during a meeting with all of the supervisors in each parole office (three to four supervisors per site). The supervisors were asked to rate each parole officer's supervision style on a scale from "most enforcement oriented," meaning that the officer focused primarily on surveilling parolees to make sure that they were compliant with parole conditions, to "most social work oriented," meaning that officers focused primarily on helping parolees obtain services and successfully meet their goals. The closer to the social work end of the scale, the more the officer's style would be considered compatible with NG.

³¹Before the study began, parole officers were already typically assigned to teams of a few officers who all had the same supervisor. Since the supervisors for the NG officers were also trained in NG, and the officers within a team worked more closely together than the officers across teams, the study team ensured that NG officers were placed together in teams with NG-trained supervisors. The study team attempted to keep officers in their pre-study teams as much as possible to avoid requiring officers to switch supervisors for the study.

³²An alternative way to allocate parole officers to be trained in NG would have been to randomly assign them. However, there were not enough officers included in the study for random assignment to have resulted in equivalent groups. With such a small number of individuals, purposeful selection based on observed characteristics was more likely to lead to groups that were similar on key characteristics.

Data

As depicted in Figure 2, the study team collected a range of qualitative and quantitative data to assess the implementation of NG.³³ This section describes the data used in the study; a discussion of methods used to analyze the quantitative data follows.

- Interview data: During site visits that took place four to five months after the NG training, the study team interviewed NG coaches, parole officers in the study and their supervisors, and key management staff. The study team conducted follow-up interviews with parole officers in Dallas and Denver 16 months after the NG training.³⁴ Ongoing phone calls with coaches provided additional information.³⁵
- Parole officer questionnaires: Parole officers in the study sample filled out three questionnaires, including a pre-test collected from both NG-trained and business-as-usual officers before the NG training took place, a post-test collected from NG-trained officers on the last day of the NG training, and a follow-up questionnaire collected from NG-trained officers about one year after the training. The questionnaires included questions related to knowledge about concepts that are part of the NG curriculum and views of the appropriate role of a parole officer. The follow-up questionnaire also included questions about parole officers' experiences with coaching.³⁶
- Coaching logs: The coach in each site kept activity logs, which provide measures of whether officers received coaching and the frequency with which this occurred. The study team collected the coaching logs for the 10 months following the NG training.

³³Parolees whose meetings with parole officers were recorded were also asked to fill out the short, nine-question version of the Dual-Role Relationship Inventory (DRI-R). See Skeem, Eno Louden, Polascheck, and Cap (2007). Due to a lack of variation in the responses to this questionnaire, the research team concluded that the data from the questionnaire were not informative to the study, and the findings are not reported here.

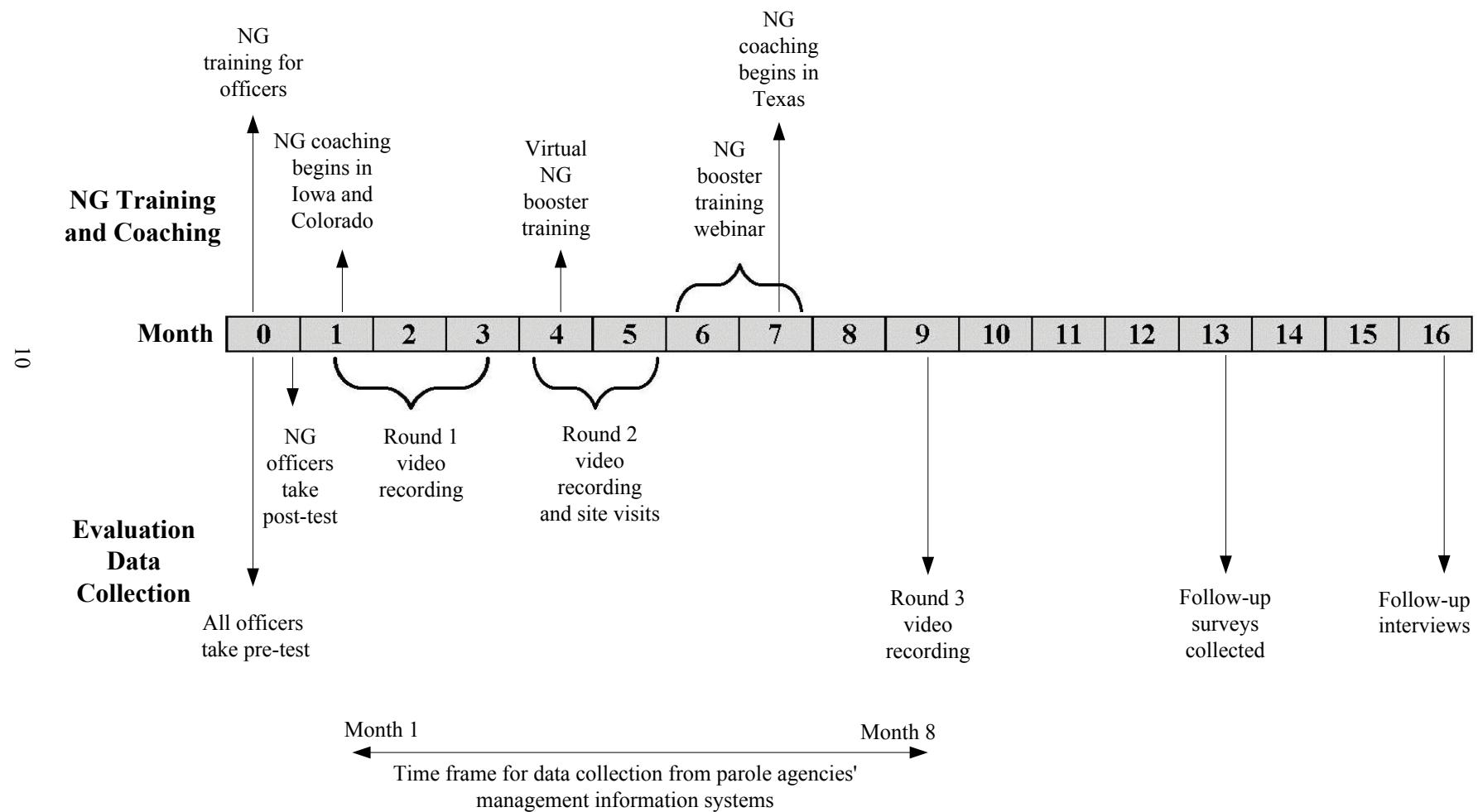
³⁴Due to funding issues, the parole agency in Des Moines ended its CHAMPS activities earlier than the other sites. Coaching ended in January 2016 and the site did not participate in the follow-up interviews in month 16.

³⁵The parole agency in Des Moines ended calls with the coach in February 2016, and the parole agencies in Dallas and Denver ended calls with the coaches in July 2016.

³⁶The questionnaires were derived from a variety of published instruments. See Lowenkamp et al. (2013), Walters, Alexander, and Vader (2008), and Fulton, Stichman, Travis, and Latessa (1997).

Figure 2

Timeline of CHAMPS Activities



- Video recordings of parole supervision meetings: The study team recorded meetings between parolees and parole officers from both the NG trained officers and the officers not trained in NG at three points during the study period: Round 1 took place between one and three months after training, Round 2 took place four to five months after training, and Round 3 (in the Dallas and Denver sites only) took place nine months after training.³⁷ Using a fidelity rating tool that was created with input from the NG curriculum developers, the study team coded each of the video recordings to assess the presence and quality of NG skills used by the parole officers during the meetings.³⁸
- Parole caseload data: The study team collected administrative data from each parole agency's management information system. These data provide information about parole officers' caseloads and the frequency with which parole officers held supervision meetings.

Quantitative Methods

There are two main quantitative analyses used in this paper to assess how the NG training and coaching are associated with parole officers' knowledge and practices. The study team conducted both analyses separately for each site since the parole agency context, availability of coaching, and other factors varied by site. The first is an analysis assessing whether NG-trained officers' scores on the pre-test questionnaire were significantly different from their scores on the post-test questionnaire. The analysis uses ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation, with standard errors that are adjusted to account for the clustering of measures by parole officers.³⁹

The second main quantitative analysis assesses the extent to which the level of NG skills exhibited during supervision meetings differed between NG-trained officers and the business-as-usual officers. The analysis uses OLS estimation, with models that include a covariate to control for the supervisors' baseline rating of parole officers' approach to supervision (described above). The data include between 4 and 13 video observations per officer. Because the video observations for a given parole officer are correlated, the standard errors are adjusted to account for clustering by parole officer.

³⁷Data from the third round of video recording in Denver are not presented in this paper, as the study team was only able to obtain video recordings with a few officers.

³⁸A single researcher coded all three rounds of video recordings to ensure consistency across time periods, groups, and sites. This researcher had no contact with any of the site staff and did not know the parole officers' research group assignments. To assess the quality of the original researcher's coding, a second researcher coded 10 percent of the video recordings. The Cohen Kappa score for inter-rater reliability was 0.70.

³⁹A sensitivity analysis using paired t-tests produces substantively equivalent results.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 shows selected baseline characteristics of parole officers in the study sample, by training status and site. The study team used the first four variables listed for each site to select which officers would be trained in NG, as described above. The team collected two additional measures before the NG training using the pre-test questionnaire. The first is a scale calculated using parole officers' responses to seven questions designed to measure the extent to which they viewed their job as being primarily about enforcement rather than service provision. The scale ranges from zero (most enforcement-oriented) to three (most social work-oriented). The second is a scale, also ranging from zero to three, that measures officers' baseline knowledge of concepts included in the NG curriculum. The scale is calculated using parole officers' responses to 15 questions, including both direct knowledge questions and questions about how a parole officer would respond to a given hypothetical scenario with a parolee. See Box 1 for a more detailed explanation of the scales used in this paper.

Overall, the baseline characteristics are similar for the NG-trained officers and the business-as-usual officers within each site. The one significant difference between the two groups is age in the Denver sample, with the NG-trained officers being somewhat older than the untrained officers, on average. The two groups within each site were very similar on both the supervisor-reported and the parole officer-reported ratings of the parole officer's approach to supervision, and on the measure of NG concept knowledge.

There are some notable differences in parole officer characteristics across sites. For example, because of higher rates of turnover, officers in Dallas were relatively less experienced in community supervision, averaging about three years of experience, compared with officers in the other sites, who averaged between eight and nine years of experience.⁴⁰ Parole officers varied in their self-reported approaches to supervision across sites, with the most social work-oriented officers in Des Moines. This finding is consistent with how parole officers and staff in Des Moines described the parole agency's culture of supervision, which has long emphasized a focus on parolee rehabilitation (as opposed to enforcement).

Parole officers' behavior and actions could reflect not only their characteristics and views, but also the types of parolees they supervise. Therefore, after the study team selected officers to be trained in NG, it then assessed whether those officers had caseloads with similar characteristics to the officers who were not trained in NG. Table 2 shows selected caseload characteristics. Although these characteristics were not used to select which officers would be

⁴⁰All of the site-level differences discussed in this section are statistically significant at the 5 percent level or lower. Statistical significance was calculated using a two-tailed t-test.

Table 1
Characteristics of Parole Officers at Baseline

Characteristic	NG-Trained Officers	Officers Not Trained in NG	Full Sample	Sig.
Dallas				
Age (years)	33.7	38.7	35.3	
Male (%)	33.3	33.3	33.3	
Years as a community supervision officer	1.5	5.7	2.9	
Supervisors' rating of approach to supervision (0 to 3) ^a	1.1	1.7	1.3	
NG-compatible view of role (0 to 3) ^b	1.7	1.5	1.6	
NG concept knowledge and practice (0 to 3) ^c	2.4	2.4	2.4	
Sample size	6	3	9	
Denver				
Age (years)	42.0	35.8	39.4	*
Male (%)	85.7	80.0	83.3	
Years as a community supervision officer	8.4	10.5	9.3	
Supervisors' rating of approach to supervision (0 to 3) ^a	1.3	1.2	1.3	
NG-compatible view of role (0 to 3) ^b	1.4	1.4	1.4	
NG concept knowledge and practice (0 to 3) ^c	2.6	2.4	2.5	
Sample size	7	5	12	
Des Moines				
Age (years)	35.7	34.0	35.1	
Male (%)	57.1	33.3	50.0	
Years as a community supervision officer	7.4	8.7	7.8	
Supervisors' rating of approach to supervision (0 to 3) ^a	1.8	1.4	1.7	
NG-compatible view of role (0 to 3) ^b	2.2	2.3	2.2	
NG concept knowledge and practice (0 to 3) ^c	2.6	2.6	2.6	
Sample size	7	3	10	

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on parole officers' responses to a baseline questionnaire, parole supervisors' responses to a parole officer supervision style questionnaire, and parole officers' responses to the CHAMPS pre-test questionnaire.

NOTES: In order to assess differences in characteristics across research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables, and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables. Statistical significance levels (Sig.) are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aSupervisors were asked to rate each parole officer's supervision style on a scale from most "enforcement oriented" to most "social work oriented." The closer to the social work end of the scale, the more the officer's style would be considered compatible with NG. The scale ranges from 0 (most enforcement oriented) to 3 (most social work oriented).

^bThis measure is calculated as the average of parole officers' responses to seven Likert scale questions designed to measure the extent to which they viewed their job as being primarily about enforcement (less NG compatible) rather than service provision and helping the parolee (more NG compatible). The scale ranges from 0 (least NG compatible) to 3 (most NG compatible).

^cThis measure is calculated as the average of four subscales measuring different categories of knowledge that are part of the NG curriculum. The measure ranges from 0 (no knowledge of NG concepts) to 3 (full knowledge of NG concepts).

Box 1 provides a detailed description of all of the scales used in this paper.

Box 1

Definitions of the Scales Used in This Paper

Parole Officers' Knowledge and Supervision Approach

Parole officers' NG concept knowledge and their views of their role and NG were calculated using their responses to the pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

NG Concept Knowledge: This measure is calculated as the average of four subscales measuring different categories of knowledge that are part of the NG curriculum. The measure ranges from 0 (no knowledge of NG concepts) to 3 (full knowledge of NG concepts). All underlying questions were converted to a scale of 0 (most incorrect) to 3 (most correct), depending on the scale of each particular question. The four subscales include:

1. Identifying, encouraging, and affirming strengths: average of two items, one that asks the parole officers to identify the best response to hypothetical statement by a parolee about the parolee's experience looking for work, and one that directly asks about the role of strengths in helping parolees to remain crime free.
2. Addressing stabilizers and destabilizers: average of three items, one asking the parole officer to correctly identify a stabilizer, one asking the officer to correctly identify a destabilizer, and one asking the officer to identify steps a parolee can take to develop prosocial supports (a stabilizer).

(continued)

Box 1 (continued)

3. Employing respectful interaction that encourages parolee responsibility: average of two items that ask parole officers to identify the best response to a parolee's statement about a situation the parolee has encountered. The best response is respectful of the parolee and also encourages the parolee to take responsibility for the situation.
4. NG supporting practices: average of eight items, each asking about a supporting practice, including (1) establishing a collaborative tone, (2) eliciting change talk from the parolee (2 questions), (3) providing feedback appropriately, (4) practicing a skill (for example, behavioral history review), (5) clarifying roles, and (6) addressing criminogenic needs (2 questions).

NG-Compatible View of Role: This measure is calculated as the average of parole officers' responses to seven Likert scale questions designed to measure the extent to which they viewed their job as being primarily about enforcement (less NG-compatible) rather than service provision or helping the parolee (more NG-compatible). The scale ranges from 0 (least NG-compatible) to 3 (most NG-compatible).

Positive View of NG: This measure is calculated as the average of parole officers' responses to four Likert scale questions designed to measure the extent to which they (1) are motivated to use NG, (2) think NG will help them with their job, (3) think the NG training will improve their job skills, and (4) think NG will make their job harder (reverse coded). The scale ranges from 0 (least positive view of NG) to 3 (most positive view of NG).

Parole Officers Use of NG Skills

Parole officers' skills in using NG practices are assessed using three measures based on the study team's observations of video-recorded meetings between parole officers and parolees. The study team used a fidelity rating tool to score each video. The individual items on the fidelity rating tool were grouped together as described below to create the measures of NG practices.

Use of NG Critical Practices: This measure is an average of five sets of factors identified by the curriculum developers as being critical to properly implementing NG. The measure ranges from 0 to 3 (0 = exhibited a low level of skill, 1 = medium, 2 = high, and 3 = very high). The five critical practices include:

1. Identifying, encouraging, and affirming strengths: average of three items measuring the extent to which the parole officer (1) takes stock of a parolee's strength factors, (2) encourages actions toward building strengths, and (3) provides praise and reinforcements for progress.
2. Addressing internal and external motivators: average of two items measuring the extent to which the parole officer (1) addresses internal states or emotions and (2) addresses external motivators, prosocial supports, or goals.

(continued)

Box 1 (continued)

1. Addressing desistance factors: average of two items measuring the extent to which the parole officer addressed one or two desistence factors (for example, sobriety) during the meeting.
2. Addressing stabilizers and destabilizers: average of two items measuring the extent to which the parole officer (1) addresses stabilizers (for example, supportive family) and (2) addresses destabilizers (for example, antisocial peers).
3. Employing respectful interaction that encourages parolee responsibility: average of four items measuring the extent to which the parole officer (1) listens to the parolee, (2) is respectful of the parolee, (3) encourages the parolee to take responsibility, and (4) avoids a disengaged tone.

NG Supporting Practices: The curriculum developers identified a number of practices that are not specific to NG, but that characterize basic skills that the NG critical practices can build upon. The NG supporting practices measure is an average of 14 items measuring the extent to which the parole officer (1) establishes a collaborative tone, (2) displays compassion, (3) elicits change talk from the parolee, (4) provides feedback appropriately, (5) uses case planning, (6) practices a skill (for example, behavioral history review), (7) appropriately uses rewards, (8) appropriately uses sanctions, (9) avoids anger, (10) avoids shaming or criticizing the parolee, (11) avoids using an authoritative style, (12) avoids monitoring conditions, (13) avoids using sarcasm, and (14) avoids being distracted. The measure ranges from 0 to 3 (0 = exhibited a low level of skill, 1 = medium, 2 = high, and 3 = very high).

Missed Opportunities: The videos were also scored on how often parole officers missed opportunities to use NG skills on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently).

trained, they are also largely similar between the trained and untrained officers. As with parole officer characteristics, there are some interesting differences across sites in caseload characteristics. Caseload sizes were largest in Dallas, with an average of 84 parolees per caseload, compared with caseload sizes in the 50s, on average, in the other two sites. Dallas caseloads also included very few parolees who had recently been released from prison. Finally, compared with the other two sites, Denver had more parolees assessed as medium or high risk.

Parole Policies and Practices in Study Sites

Parole system policies, determined at the state level, may have affected the implementation of NG. Parole policies vary, for example, regarding how parolee risk levels are assessed, differences in how often parolees must report to their parole officers, rules around drug and alcohol testing, and rules about how parole can be revoked.

Some parole policies were similar across the study sites. At each site, parole officers administered a risk assessment to new parolees to determine their risk of recidivism, which in turn determined the frequency that they were required to meet with their parole officer. Higher-risk parolees were required to report to their parole officer more frequently than those determined to be low risk, though most parolees still did not meet with their parole officers more than twice a month. As shown in Table 2, parole officers met with parolees a little more than once per month, on average.

The parole agency in Texas was undergoing a period of transition in the years before the CHAMPS study took place. In 2007, in an effort to reduce the number of returns to state prison that resulted from parole violations, the state substantially increased funding for “diversion” programs within the community that were intended to serve as alternatives to revocation.⁴¹ Apparently as a result, parole revocation rates in Texas have been on the decline since 2008.⁴² In 2015, just before CHAMPS began, Texas rolled out the Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS). The TRAS is designed to improve allocation of supervision resources by assessing parolee risk level. With the TRAS, low-risk parolees receive less supervision than they did under the previous system. The TRAS is also intended to gather more complete information about a parolee’s criminogenic needs for better case planning. Parole officers were trained to use motivational interviewing when administering the TRAS. Staff in Texas described the TRAS being a major change in supervision practices in Texas.

Colorado, which had the highest proportion of parolees returning to prison each year among the three CHAMPS states,⁴³ was also undergoing a shift toward a more rehabilitative approach to parole. A key part of this shift included the implementation of Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS). EPICS is a curriculum for parole officers that, similar to NG, includes core correctional practices and cognitive behavioral approaches.⁴⁴ Officers in Colorado also receive training on motivational interviewing. In 2015, Colorado made changes to its parole revocation policy in an effort to reduce the prison population.⁴⁵ The state legislature passed a new law intended to limit the number of technical violations that resulted in parolees returning to prison. In the same year, the Colorado Department of Corrections consolidated decision making about when to seek parole revocation into the hands of the parole director and

⁴¹Texas Legislative Budget Board (2017), p. 383.

⁴²Texas Legislative Budget Board (2009); Texas Legislative Budget Board (2015).

⁴³Kaeble and Bonczar (2016).

⁴⁴Latessa, Smith, Schweitzer, and Labrecque (2013).

⁴⁵Data are not available to assess the impacts of these changes, but early data suggest it had a dramatic impact on the number of parolees who returned to prison for technical violations. Phillips (2016).

Table 2
Characteristics of Parole Officer Caseloads at Baseline

Characteristic	NG-Trained Officers	Officers Not Trained in NG	Full Sample	Sig.
Dallas				
Number of meetings held per parolee per month ^a	1.4	1.2	1.3	
Caseload size (number of parolees)	84.2	84.3	84.2	
Recent parolee (%)	3.3	6.4	4.3	**
Parolee risk level (%)				
Low	47.3	38.3	44.3	
Medium	26.3	34.1	28.9	
High	26.4	27.6	26.8	
Female parolees (%)	12.7	5.6	10.3	
Eligible for MET and T4C (%)	44.0	57.1	48.3	
Sample size	6	3	9	
Denver				
Number of meetings held per parolee per month ^a	1.3	1.3	1.3	
Caseload size (number of parolees)	50.9	53.7	51.7	
Recent parolee (%)	26.7	29.0	27.4	
Parolee risk level (%)				
Low	3.5	1.8	3.0	
Medium	34.1	43.5	36.9	
High	62.4	54.7	60.1	
Female parolees (%)	14.1	7.2	12.0	
Eligible for MET and T4C (%)	81.8	90.1	84.3	
Sample size	7	3	10	
Des Moines				
Number of meetings held per parolee per month ^a	1.0	0.6	0.9	
Caseload size (number of parolees)	62.3	43.3	56.0	
Recent parolee (%)	13.4	36.5	21.1	**

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Characteristic	NG-Trained Officers	Officers Not Trained in NG	Full Sample	Sig.
<u>Des Moines</u>				
Parolee risk level (%)				
Low	36.1	35.0	35.8	
High	63.9	65.0	64.2	
Female parolees (%)	2.2	7.6	4.0	
Eligible for MET and T4C (%)	60.2	57.9	59.4	
Sample size	6	3	9	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data provided by the parole agency in each site.

NOTES: In order to assess differences in characteristics across research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables, and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables. Statistical significance levels (Sig.) are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Data on caseload characteristics for Denver were not available for Month 0 (May 2015). The numbers provided reflect caseload characteristics in September 2015 (Month 4).

^aThese data represent the average number of meetings over the entire study period.

deputy director. Before these changes, parole officers and supervisors had more discretion over these decisions. During interviews, staff expressed frustrations with the process and public safety concerns as a result of these changes.

Iowa's parole agency had adopted a rehabilitative focus years before the start of CHAMPS. Unlike in Colorado and Texas, parole officers in Iowa do not carry weapons or conduct checks on parolees in the community. A fugitive unit conducts checks on parolees, effectively separating parole officers from the enforcement aspect of parole. Some officers referred to themselves as "case managers" rather than parole officers, reflecting how they understood their role. A year before CHAMPS was implemented in Iowa, the agency had begun using an additional risk assessment tool, the Dynamic Risk Assessment Offender Re-entry Tool (DRAOR). The DRAOR gathered information on protective factors — characteristics that help an individual to avoid negative outcomes such as recidivism — in addition to risks, and was administered at regular intervals to monitor a parolee's progress. Iowa's rehabilitative focus was also reflected in the types of trainings provided to parole officers. Officers in Des Moines received training in a number of areas aligned with NG: motivational interviewing, core correctional practices, and evidence-based practices.

Implementing NG

Successful implementation of the NG approach to parole supervision depends on whether parole officers are able to learn the key concepts of the curriculum and ultimately translate that knowledge into practice. This section describes how the NG training and coaching were implemented and the extent to which NG-trained parole officers' knowledge and views changed over time and assesses how well NG-trained parole officers applied NG strategies in their supervision meetings with parolees. In order to strengthen this assessment, NG-trained parole officers' views, knowledge, and practice are considered alongside those of the group of parole officers who were not trained or coached in NG.

Training the Parole Officers

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) ran a series of trainings for parole officers assigned to the group receiving the NG intervention as well as their supervisors. The initial training took place in late April 2015 (Month 0 of the study timeline). The training aimed to improve the knowledge of the parole officers in key concepts related to the NG approach. It also aimed to make them think about their role as parole officers in a way that was compatible with NG, namely considering their primary function to be one of facilitating parolees' internal motivation to change rather than surveilling parolees and enforcing rules.

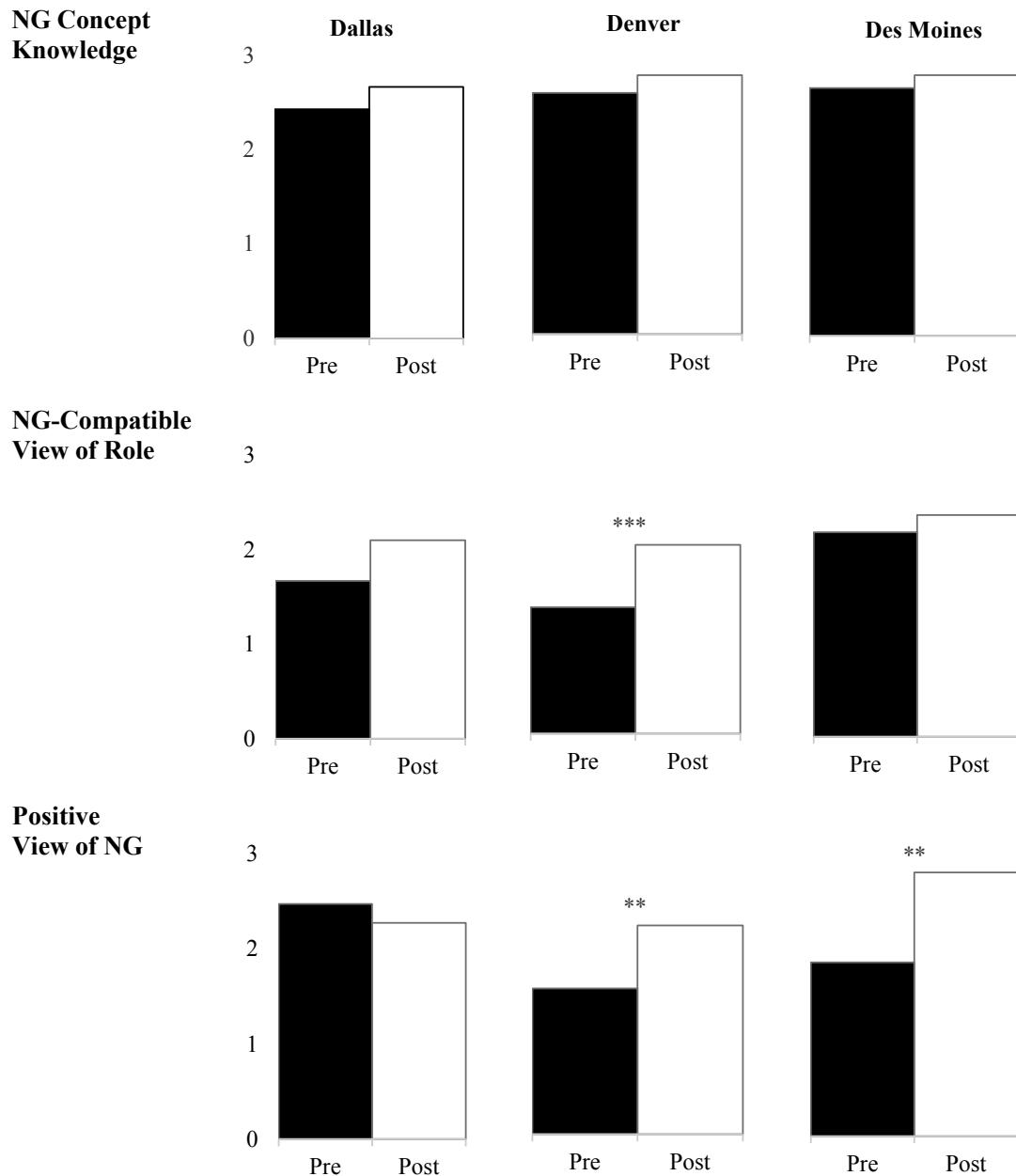
In interviews, parole officers generally expressed positive views of the initial NG training. However, they also felt that it did not necessarily provide much new information and that it focused on concepts central to motivational interviewing, in which nearly all officers had received training from their agencies before CHAMPS.

Data from the questionnaires that assessed parole officers' knowledge before and after the training are consistent with their assessment of the content. Parole officers who were trained in NG completed a pre-test questionnaire in the week before the initial training and a post-test questionnaire immediately following the initial training. Figure 3 shows parole officers' pre- and post-test scores, by site, on scales measuring their NG concept knowledge, the extent to which their view of the parole officer's role was compatible with NG, and their overall opinion of NG. The figure includes nine graphs, one for each of the three measures in each of the sites.

- Parole officers in all three sites already knew many of the concepts that are part of NG before the initial training.**

The top row of graphs shows parole officers' knowledge of NG concepts in each site. Officers in all three sites started with a similar, high level of knowledge, ranging from 2.4 to 2.6

Figure 3
**Pre- and Post-Training NG Knowledge and Views,
 NG-Trained Officers Only**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from the NG pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

All items scored on a scale of 0 to 3.

Box 1 provides a detailed description of all of the scales used in this paper.

Sample sizes were six officers in Dallas, seven officers in Denver, and seven officers in Des Moines.

on a scale of 0 to 3, which was consistent with their self-assessments that they already knew much of the information in the NG curriculum.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, given these high levels of baseline knowledge, officers did not show significantly more knowledge of NG concepts after the training, as measured by their responses to the post-test questionnaire.

The middle row of graphs in the figure shows parole officers' view of their role, by site. As the middle graph shows, parole officers in Denver reported a somewhat different view of their role after the training. Of the three sites, officers in Des Moines had the most NG-compatible view both before and after the training. This finding is not surprising given that, compared with the Denver and Dallas parole agencies, the Des Moines agency's rehabilitation-focused approach to parole supervision was more established. Perhaps because their view was already highly compatible with NG, Des Moines officers' views changed the least from before to after the training.

Finally, as the third row of graphs in Figure 3 shows, NG group parole officers in Denver and Des Moines were more positive about NG after the training than they were before it, when they had little information about what it would entail. However, there was little change among NG group officers in Dallas, where they were already highly positive about NG before the training. While parole officers' post-training opinions about NG averaged more than 2 on a scale of 0 to 3, in interviews, some parole officers expressed reservations about the training, saying that while it included a lot of information, there was not enough time to practice the skills.

Overall, it appears that while parole officers learned some new concepts during the NG training, much of the content was not new to them, suggesting that changes in officers' behavior were not likely to result from new knowledge alone. More substantial changes in behavior might require coaching, the second component of NIC's strategy to affect parole officers' supervision behavior.

Coaching the Parole Officers

Coaching was expected to begin in each of the sites right after parole officers were trained. While this expectation was met in Denver and Des Moines, turnover in the coach position in Dallas meant that regular coaching did not begin in that site until seven months after the training.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, when coaching was taking place, coaches in all three sites encountered similar challenges.

⁴⁶The NG knowledge scale was developed for this study and has not been validated.

⁴⁷Because there was no coach in Texas, NIC staff provided some additional support in early months, but this support did not consist of regular, in-person coaching.

- **Scheduling coaching activities at the frequency recommended in the NG model proved challenging, but parole officers were positive about the coaching experience.**

The NG model specified that coaches should meet with each parole officer once per week during the first quarter post-training, after which the intensity could gradually decrease based on the individual needs of each officer. Before each meeting, coaches were expected to observe at least one of the parole officer’s supervision meetings with a parolee, either in person or by video recording the meeting. However, in practice, it was difficult to schedule coaching activities at this frequency. Some challenges were present in all sites. For example, coaches reported that administrative duties related to the CHAMPS project limited the time they had to focus on coaching.⁴⁸ In addition, vacations, conferences, and other trainings, for both the parole officers and the coaches, made it difficult to schedule a meeting with each officer every week.

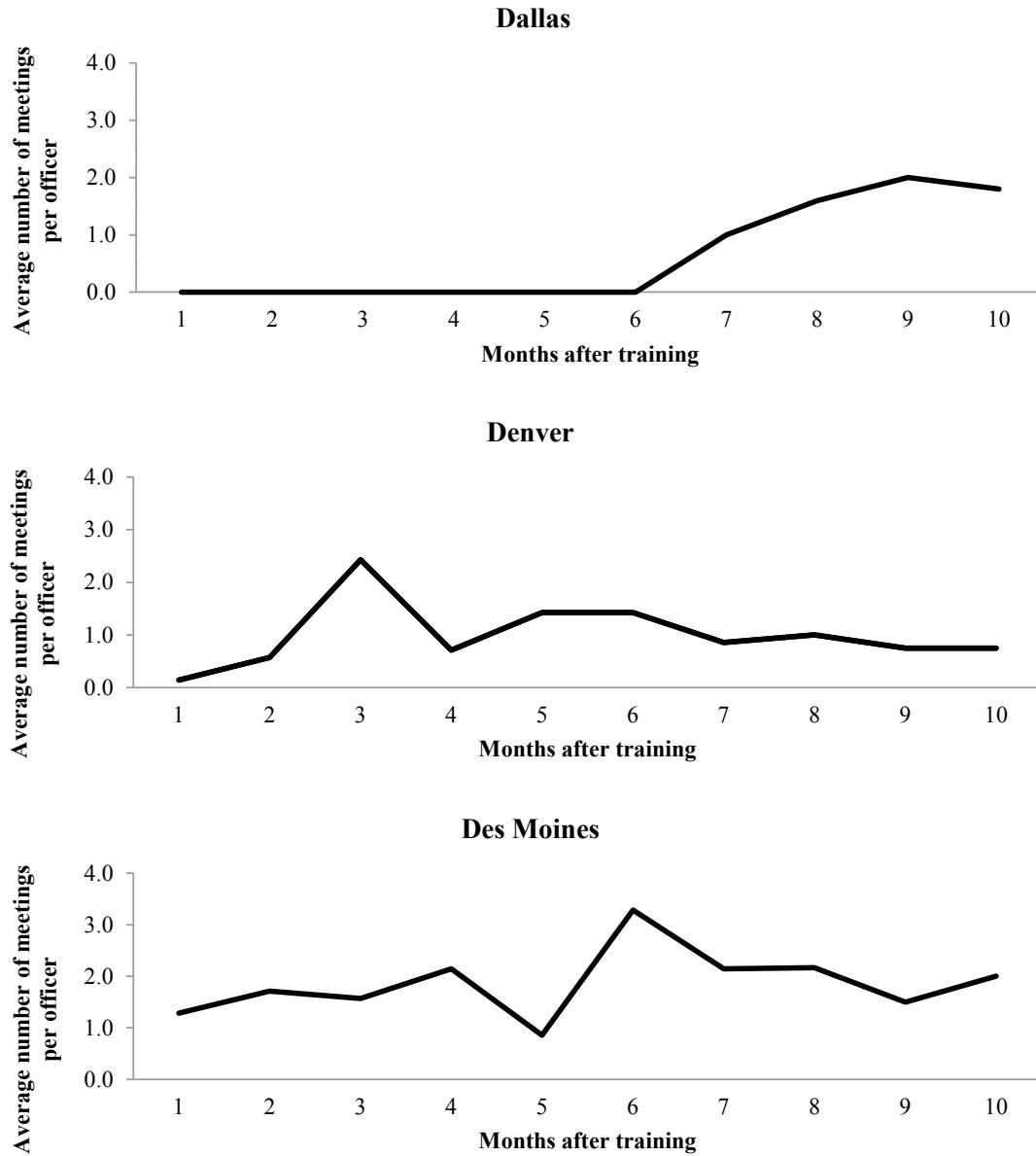
Other challenges were site specific. In Dallas and Denver, parole officers spent a substantial amount of time in the field conducting home visits, limiting the opportunities for the coaches to observe in-office parole supervision meetings and to meet with the parole officers. In Denver, some parole officers had supervisory responsibilities and smaller caseloads, providing fewer opportunities to observe supervision meetings and making it more difficult to schedule coaching meetings. These challenges may explain why coaching was unevenly distributed in Denver, with three officers receiving two to three times more coaching than the other officers.

Data from logs provided by coaches demonstrate that the frequency of coaching meetings fluctuated over time and almost never reached the recommended weekly level. Figure 4 shows the average number of coaching meetings per officer in Months 1 through 10 of the study. In all sites, when coaching was taking place, the parole officers typically met with their coach between one and two times per month. The recommended rate of four times per month during the first quarter post training was never achieved.

Although coaches experienced difficulties in scheduling coaching meetings, parole officers seemed to have a different perspective. On the follow-up questionnaire, more than three-quarters of parole officers said that it was either “often” or “always” easy to schedule meetings with their coach. The difference in perspectives is not inconsistent. While coaches were trying to meet the recommended coaching frequencies and schedule a meeting with every officer

⁴⁸Coaches had duties related to administering the CHAMPS grant at their parole agency and coordinating with the research team on data collection. At some sites, coaches had additional responsibilities outside of CHAMPS.

Figure 4
Average Number of Coaching Meetings per NG-Trained Officer



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on coaching logs kept by the NG coaches.

NOTES: NG training occurred in late April, 2015. Months shown are May 2015 (Month 1) through February 2016 (Month 10).

The coach in Dallas was hired in September 2015 (Month 5) and began coaching in November 2015 (Month 7).

The sample sizes changed during the time period due to officer departures. Dallas had six officers in Month 1 and five officers in Month 10; Denver had seven officers in Month 1 and four officers in Month 10; and Des Moines had seven officers in Month 1 and six officers in Month 10.

every week, parole officers were likely to be less focused on the weekly requirement. Since the coaches' main function was to coach the parole officers, the officers likely found that the coaches were available when they wanted to meet.

Regardless of scheduling issues and frequency, in interviews and questionnaires, parole officers from all three sites expressed positive views of their coach and said that they found the coaching to be helpful. Interviews conducted with NG group officers in both Dallas and Denver over a year after the initial training and after the study period ended revealed that they felt positively about the coaching they had received. Both sites praised their coach for providing feedback in what they described as a "strengths-based" approach, in which the coach led with comments about what the officer was doing well. Parole officers in Dallas also felt that their coach gave feedback on ways to improve supervision practices, including identifying places where an officer had missed the opportunity to use skills acquired in NG in a meeting with a parolee. While the study team did not conduct interviews with parole officers in Des Moines late in the study period, during interviews conducted five months after the training, NG group officers in that site also reported positive impressions of the coaching. They said that it was helpful in reinforcing the concepts that they had learned in the NG training, and, similar to the other sites, that the coach pointed out what they did well in addition to areas for improvement.

Data from the follow-up questionnaires correspond with the interview data. In all three sites, NG-trained parole officers rated the coaching experience very highly (not shown). All officers who responded to the questionnaire said that their coach was "often" or "always" knowledgeable about NG skills and that they felt comfortable discussing NG with their coach. Nearly all found the coaching to be often or always a good use of their time and that they used what they learned from the coach often or always in their supervision meetings with parolees.

Practicing NG

The goals of the NG training and coaching were to improve parole officers' knowledge about NG concepts and to help them translate that knowledge into practice, using particular strategies during their supervision meetings with parolees. This section assesses the extent to which parole officers' behaviors during supervision meetings were consistent with NG, and examines how those behaviors changed over time and differed between those who were trained and those who were not trained in NG. This section also discusses the site-specific challenges that affected officers' ability to integrate NG strategies into their supervision practices. Because of local contextual factors, NG implementation, and the challenges that affected it, differed substantially by site. As a result, findings from each site are discussed separately. The analysis relies on qualitative data from interviews with parole officers and coaches as well as the data from coded video recordings of officers' meetings with parolees.

The analysis focuses on two categories of NG skills: critical practices and supporting practices. Critical practices are those that the curriculum developers identified as both central to properly implementing NG and possible for parole officers to integrate into their supervision in the relatively short period of the study. For example, critical practices include discussion techniques that focus on parolees' strengths as well as internal and external motivators. Supporting practices, on the other hand, are those that are necessary as a foundation for implementing NG but that are not specific to the NG curriculum. For example, supporting practices include core correctional practices and motivational interviewing, both of which are considered best practices in parole supervision. Box 1 provides a more detailed discussion of critical and supporting practices and how they are measured using the video observations.

Practicing NG in Dallas

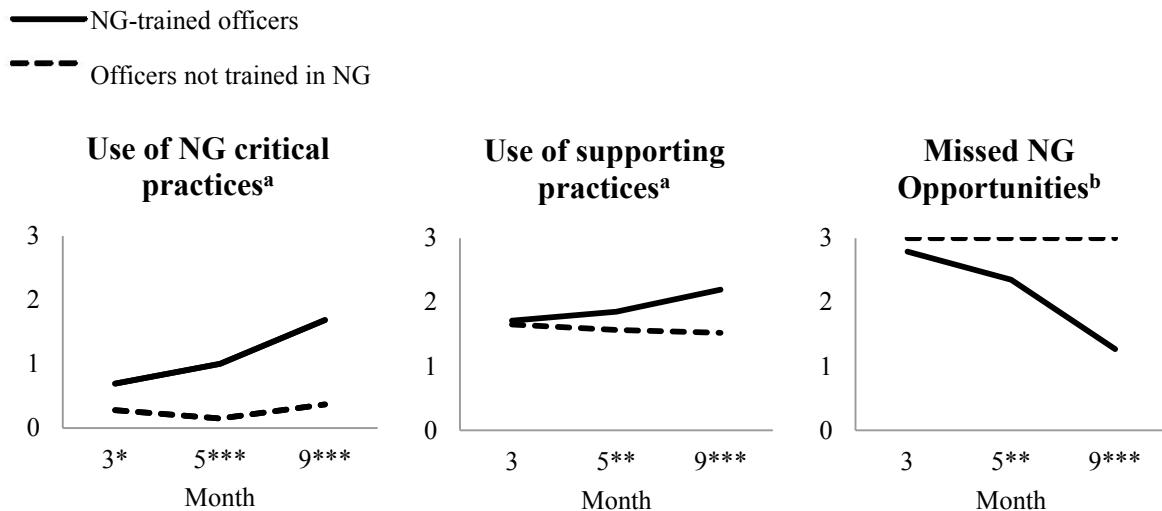
As described earlier, the implementation of NG in Dallas coincided with a broader set of changes that the Texas parole agency was undertaking in order to shift the focus of its culture and policy away from ensuring parolees were in compliance with parole conditions and toward parolees' rehabilitation. Both interview and video data suggest that the NG curriculum helped NG group parole officers increase their use of strategies designed to encourage parolees to make positive behavioral changes.

- **NG-trained parole officers in Dallas exhibited a higher level of NG skills than the officers who were not trained, especially after regular coaching began in the site.**

NG-trained parole officers felt that the NG training and coaching had an effect on the approaches they took during meetings with parolees. They noted that the approach they learned in the NG training was different from what they learned at the Parole Officer Training Academy that they attended when they were first hired and that focused on compliance and paperwork. Almost all NG-trained officers described implementing new rehabilitative-focused strategies during meetings, such as asking about stabilizers and destabilizers, using a strengths-based approach, and asking open-ended questions. They felt that as a result they learned more about their parolees during meetings, beyond assessing whether the parolees were compliant with parole conditions. One officer said that NG had made her job easier because it "gives you more skills to help the parolee and help them change their behavior and thinking." Describing how NG helped her at her job, another officer said, "when you ask the right questions, when you start feeling like you care, that's when they start to be open. Before, I didn't know the techniques or what words to say or what things to say to actually get them to talk."

Findings from the video data are consistent with parole officers' assessment that NG had changed their behaviors during supervision meetings. Figure 5 shows the skills in using NG

Figure 5
Parole Officer Exhibited Level of NG Skills in Dallas



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a rating tool assessing parole officers' behavior during video-recorded parole supervision meetings.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThe measure ranges from 0 to 3 (0 = exhibited low level of skill, 1 = medium, 2 = high, and 3 = very high).

^bThe measure rates how often parole officers missed opportunities to use NG skills on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently).

There were eight parole officers recorded, with a total of 30 videos for Month 3, 32 videos for Month 5, and 25 videos for Month 9.

practices that were exhibited by parole officers in Dallas, as observed in video recordings of a sample of their supervision meetings.⁴⁹ The left graph in the figure shows officers' scores on the use of NG critical practices. In Months 3 and 5, small differences between the NG-trained and untrained officers emerged; NG-trained officers averaged a medium level of NG skills, compared with a low level among the untrained officers.

⁴⁹The analysis only includes data for those parole officers for whom video recordings were made at all three points in time.

NG-trained parole officers exhibited even greater improvement in NG skills by Month 9, when they exhibited a high level of NG critical skills, compared with an unchanged, low level among business-as-usual officers. The introduction of NG coaching in Month 7 may have been important to this change. In follow-up interviews, officers attributed some improvements in their NG skills to the coaching. The coach, they said, provided them with specific, actionable feedback about how they could improve their use of NG skills. One officer said, “you may think you’re doing everything right but you’re really not. But that doesn’t mean that it’s bad, you just realize next time I could talk to [the parolee] about this or that. [The coach] doesn’t make it seem like we’re doing a bad job, she lets us know that there was more that could’ve been said or done.” These findings suggest that the NG training may have affected officers’ supervision practices and that the introduction of coaching may have accelerated this change.

The difference between the two groups of officers in their use of supporting practices also expanded over time, though to a lesser extent. As the middle graph of Figure 5 shows, both sets of officers exhibited a high level of skill in supporting practices early in the follow-up period, and, by Month 9, NG-trained officers had reached just above a high level of skill in those practices. The fairly high ratings for all officers throughout the study period may reflect the training in motivational interviewing that they received as part of the introduction of the Texas Risk Assessment System.

The pattern of results for missed opportunities to use NG strategies reflects, in mirror image, the pattern in use of NG critical and supporting practices. As the right graph in Figure 5 shows, while both sets of officers frequently missed opportunities early in the follow-up period, NG-trained officers missed fewer opportunities over time, especially after coaching started. Overall, it appears that NG-trained officers in Dallas did improve in their use of NG techniques over time, particularly after coaching was introduced.

Practicing NG in Denver

As noted above the implementation of NG in Denver came at a time of flux for the parole agency. There were statewide changes that restricted parole officers’ discretion on parole revocations, which officers described as having had an effect on officer morale and receptiveness to new initiatives. Additionally, the introduction of the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) curriculum at the same time meant that both NG group and comparison group parole officers were receiving similar training and coaching, which may have limited the difference that NG could make over and above the difference that EPICS might have also been making.

- **NG-trained parole officers in Denver described NG as having had a limited influence on their supervision practices, an assessment that is consistent with video observations of their supervision meetings.**

In interviews, NG-trained parole officers gave two primary reasons why the curriculum had made little difference to their supervision practices. First, they found it difficult to use NG strategies given the limited amount of time they had to meet with parolees. In Denver, the average amount of time that parolees wait for their appointments factors into officers' performance assessments, which gives officers incentive to rush through meetings if another parolee is waiting. Second, some officers said that NG did not change their supervision practices because it was similar to their approach before the training. They noted that they had received EPICS training and training in motivational interviewing before the NG training.

Video observations also suggest that NG made little difference to parole officers' supervision practices in Denver. The left graph in Figure 6 shows the skills in using NG practices that were exhibited by parole officers in Denver, as observed in the video recordings of a sample of their supervision meetings. As the left graph in the figure shows, parole officers in both groups exhibited a medium level of skill in using NG critical practices in Months 2 and 4 of the study period.⁵⁰ The study team was not able to collect video data from most parole officers in Denver during the third round of video collection; however, interviews and the few videos that were collected suggest that parole officers' use of NG practices had not substantially changed by Month 9.

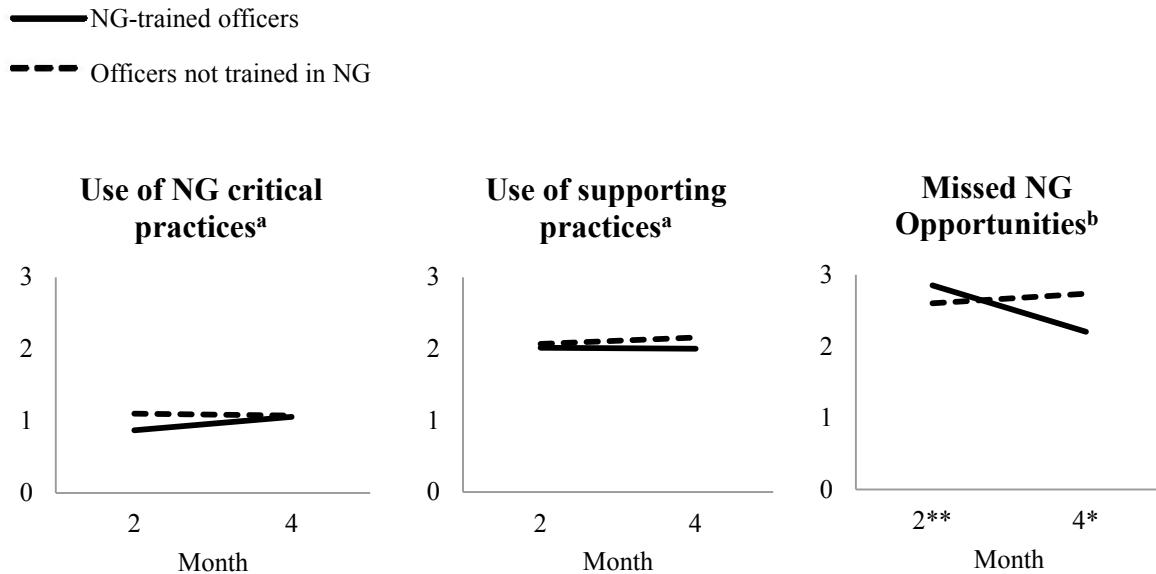
As the middle graph in Figure 6 shows, both NG-trained group and business-as-usual parole officers exhibited a high level of skill in supporting practices. It may be that the universal training in EPICS and motivational interviewing gave all officers in Denver a strong foundation in supporting practices. In interviews, the officers who had not been trained in NG described taking a parolee-driven approach in their meetings, including asking open-ended questions, learning about the parolee's life, and finding ways to connect with the parolee. In addition, NG-trained officers in Denver said they found it easiest to use the skills from the NG training that were most related to motivational interviewing, perhaps because they already had a background in it. This finding may help to explain why the officers who received the NG training looked very similar to those who did not in their use of both NG critical and supporting practices.

Practicing NG in Des Moines

The parole department in Des Moines has long had a parolee-focused, less surveillance-oriented culture of parole supervision, and it was not undergoing reform. The supervision

⁵⁰Because the study team was not able to collect video data from most parole officers in Denver during the third round of video collection (in Month 9), Figure 6 shows measures from the first and second rounds only (Months 2 and 4).

Figure 6
Parole Officer Exhibited Level of NG Skills in Denver



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a rating tool assessing parole officers' behavior during video-recorded parole supervision meetings.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThe measure ranges from 0 to 3 (0 = exhibited a low level of skill, 1 = medium, 2 = high, and 3 = very high).

^bThe measure rates how often parole officers missed opportunities to use NG skills on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently).

There were seven parole officers recorded, with a total of 22 videos in Month 2 and 26 videos in Month 4.

culture in Des Moines meant that although the NG curriculum was relatively easy for parole officers there to absorb, it was also difficult to make much difference in the way parole officers were conducting supervision.

- In Des Moines, the parole officers who were trained in NG and those who were not described taking similar approaches in their meetings with parolees, and both exhibited a medium level of skill in NG critical practices.

In interviews, both NG-trained and business-as-usual parole officers emphasized the importance of understanding the parolee's situation, using motivational interviewing techniques, role-playing, and using strengths-based approaches. Describing his approach with parolees, one comparison group officer said, "my goal is to make them feel heard and like someone is understanding." The similar responses to questions about supervision techniques between the groups likely reflect the training that officers in Des Moines received before NG. One officer said, "motivational interviewing is second nature for most [parole officers]. We were doing that pre-NG. They've been preaching that, evidence-based practices, and core correctional practices for three years."

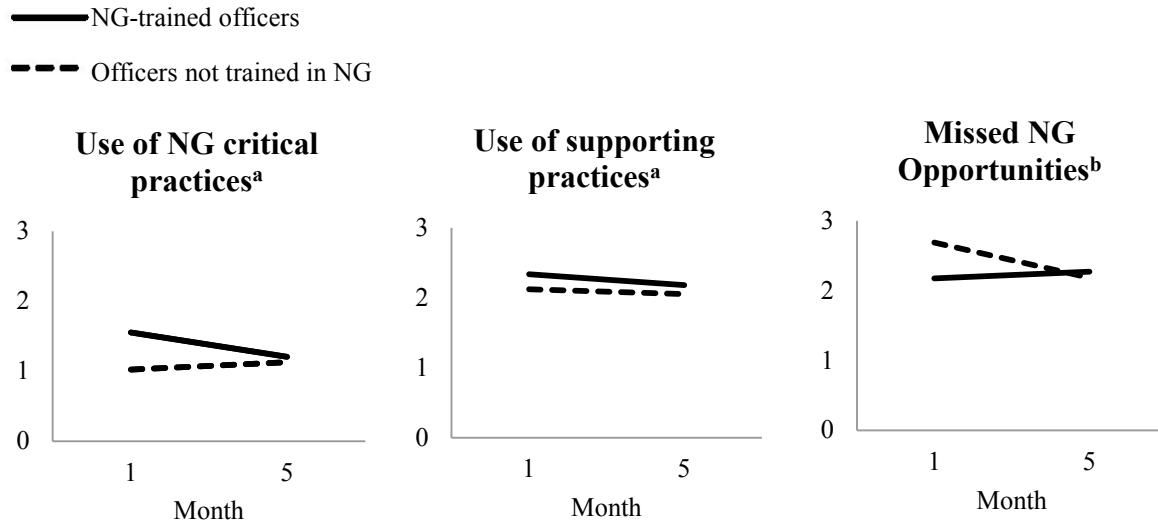
The graphs in Figure 7 show the skills in using NG practices that were exhibited by parole officers in Des Moines, as observed in the video recordings of a sample of their supervision meetings. Video data were only collected in Des Moines during the first two rounds of data collection. In both time periods, officers in both groups exhibited a medium level of skill in NG critical practices, and they exhibited a high level of skill in supporting practices. As in the other two sites, it appears that officers in Iowa were able to implement supporting practices well, probably because they already had a strong basis in them, but they had more trouble incorporating NG critical practices. Officers in both groups in Des Moines missed some, but not all, opportunities to use NG critical practices.

Conclusion

Despite an increasing emphasis on reentry services for individuals leaving prison, recidivism rates remain high, and policymakers are searching for ways to help parolees make more successful transitions back into their communities. One strategy is to harness the reach of the parole system by incorporating interventions into the parole supervision process. The NG curriculum is designed to improve parolee outcomes by training parole officers to have more productive interactions with parolees and by offering additional supportive services aligned with the risks and needs of the individual. The implementation study described in this paper shows that while it is possible to change the way parole officers approach supervision, there are a number of challenges to successfully applying this strategy.

A parole agency's supervision culture and parole officer training can affect both the implementation of an intervention such as NG and the likelihood that it will lead to real change in parole officer behavior. For example, if parole officers in a site are already receiving a good deal of training in practices such as motivational interviewing and if the supervision culture is already focused on parolee support and rehabilitation, it may be unlikely that additional training in a curriculum such as NG will result in change. This scenario appears to have been the case in

Figure 7
Parole Officer Exhibited Level of NG Skills in Des Moines



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a rating tool assessing parole officers' behavior during video-recorded parole supervision meetings.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThe measure ranges from 0 to 3 (0 = exhibited a low level of skill, 1 = medium, 2 = high, and 3 = very high).

^bThe measure rates how often parole officers missed opportunities to use NG skills on a scale from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently).

There were 10 parole officers recorded, with a total of 37 videos for Month 1 and 33 videos for Month 5.

Des Moines, where even the officers who had not been trained in NG exhibited skill in NG-related strategies at medium to high levels, similar to the officers who were trained in the curriculum.

In contrast, parole officers in Dallas started out with the lowest levels of skill and least amount of experience. In that site, the supervision practices of NG-trained parole officers did appear to change over time to become more consistent with the NG curriculum.

The results in Dallas also suggest that coaching may be important to successfully implementing an intervention that involves changing parole officers' skills and practices. While the NG-trained parole officers exhibited small changes in their supervision practices early in the study period, there were more noticeable changes once coaching was introduced. It is not

surprising that the implementation of some strategies, such as changing the way a parole officer responds to a comment from a parolee, requires ongoing practice and reinforcement. However, the other two sites engaged coaches for the entire study period, suggesting that the presence of a coach itself is not a guarantee for change in parole officer practice, particularly when parole officers are already familiar with the skills. An intervention such as NG might make the most difference in settings where the supervision culture is most focused on enforcement and where officers have had less exposure to related training.

This implementation study focused on whether the NG training and coaching was associated with changes in parole officer practices. But ultimately, the goal of the intervention is to affect *parolee* outcomes. In all of the sites, the frequency of supervision meetings was low, with officers conducting about one meeting with each parolee per month. The NG curriculum provides guidance for the frequency of meetings, which is higher than what actually took place; but in practice, parole officers do not have discretion to meet with parolees more often than what agency policy prescribes. Given this reality, and the small differences observed in parole officer practices, the intensity with which individual parolees experienced the NG intervention was low. Without significant increases in the number of officer-parolee meetings, it may not be realistic for an approach such as NG to be successful at improving parolee outcomes, though increases in reporting requirements may pose other challenges for parolees.

Overall, this study shows that parole officers are amenable to training and coaching to help them improve their supervision practices and that these strategies may be effective at improving officers' interactions with parolees, especially when prior experience and receipt of similar trainings is limited. However, it would likely be difficult to make a difference in parolee outcomes without addressing other characteristics of parole supervision, such as caseload sizes and frequency of meetings. Nonetheless, given the wide reach of parole supervision, it is worth considering how the parole system could be leveraged and made more effective in improving parolee outcomes.

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