

About the CSA's Executive Steering Committees

As any chess player, military strategist, or athlete can tell you, being anticipatory gives you a distinct advantage. But what is the secret to developing anticipatory prowess, and how does an organization use it to gain strategic advantage?

These are key questions all organizations face. In our complex and rapidly changing society, being anticipatory and gaining strategic advantage requires sophisticated intelligence-gathering techniques, new models of decision making, and ways to judge the results. Collectively, these tools allow an organization to identify new opportunities, avoid being blindsided by external forces, and turn potential threats into opportunities. Failure to anticipate can be very costly. For these reasons the Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) has employed a number of approaches and processes to enhance organizational performance. One key process is the **Executive Steering Committee (ESC) Approach**.

The ESC Approach is **a model for making better decisions**. Anytime the CSA is involved in an activity, project or program that will be implemented and managed by others, the CSA's policy is to establish an ESC to oversee that process. ESCs are special committees appointed by the CSA, as the need arises, to carry out specified tasks and to submit findings and recommendations from that effort to the CSA. All ESCs are made up of professionals who are knowledgeable in the areas of activity, project or program impact. These local subject matter experts: advise the CSA in its evaluation of technical requirements for any planning or revision effort; assist the CSA in the design of criteria and approaches to be used in completing Administrative or Legislative assigned tasks; help the CSA determine the appropriateness of any formal review or rating process it plans to use; coordinate any necessary workgroup efforts; hold hearings; and, of course, submit findings and recommendations. It may seem unnecessary to some that the CSA seeks outside advice of local corrections professionals, given the full complement of local corrections specialists the Authority has integrated into its team. This would be a shortsighted view. As the technical advances in the many areas the CSA operates and regulates become ever more specialized and complex, and in that virtually all of the decisions the CSA make have an impact on the day-to-day professional lives of these local subject matter experts who make up all ESCs, it is essential that the CSA looks to this critical source of expertise which exists throughout the institution of local corrections for a comprehensive and balanced evaluation of any new activity, project or program being considered.

The bottom line is whether change will occur for your organization as a result of a series of crises or will you use foresight and anticipation to manage change in a calm, informed, open, and systematic manner. The CSA chooses the latter.

History of the CSA's use of ESCs

In September 1979, the CSA was charged with implementing the largest project in its history - The Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Program. The STC Program involved all 58 counties, 59 probation departments, 57 sheriffs' departments and 118 police departments. The law establishing the STC Program passed in September 1979, but was not effective until January 1980 and initial Program funding was to begin on July 1, 1980. In order to bring this program online on time the CSA needed a new operating philosophy.

In May 1980, the CSA adopted a new operating principle to guide its expansive new program and the entire CSA future. The new operating principle was articulated in the following way.

All decisions will be made using four basic approaches:

- *systematically involving those with the most specific knowledge;*
- *obtaining the participation of those who must carry out the decision;*
- *avoiding premature closures of any effort that could lead to the decisions going in undesirable directions; and,*
- *accomplish all this while still bringing the project in on schedule.*

This operating principle was designed to enable the CSA to:

- work collaboratively in changing environments;
- establish rapport and gain buy-in, support, and commitment;
- motivate others to "do more with less;"
- dissolve or overcome resistance; and
- create positive partnerships critical for success.

Building on early concepts of team management, this approach was created to offer CSA members and staff a process to operationalize proven communication strategies for working with a diverse group of constituents. Historically, the CSA had made regulatory and programmatic decisions with only occasional assistance from the outside. Independent advice was limited to difficult issues on an as-needed basis and usually only to compensate for a lack of specific expertise at the CSA. But starting in the early '70s, the CSA began to realize that it could better protect the public safety if the people it served understood its functions, as well as its limitations, and the CSA began to understand that if it partnered with local corrections in a common enterprise it would improve its ability to manage its operation and to anticipate future changes that would be necessary in order for the CSA to survive and prosper. On an informal basis, the approaches formally adopted by the CSA in 1980 had been developing for some time and had already served the CSA well in a more limited capacity. In fact, during the 70's the CSA was a very small organization and as the issues in local corrections became more frequent and complex, the CSA found that in order to assure the relevance, currency, feasibility, and applicability of any changes to the minimum jail standards, local corrections technical assistance was critical. In order to address this, the CSA began using informal task forces made up of professionals who worked with the standards every day to assist during the review and revision of the minimum jail standards as required by law. By 1978 those efforts created what the American Correctional Association called "***the most well thought out, comprehensive, and usable jail standards in the nation.***" A fact the CSA is still proud of to this day. In order to formalize that process and make it the instrument for the implementation of its new approach, the CSA adopted what is now referred to as ***The Executive Steering Committee Approach.***

Why has the CSA continued to use this approach for over two decades?

It works! It has successfully implemented:

The STC Program.

Five Jail Bond Projects.

Eleven Minimum Jail Standards Revisions.

Transfer and revision of the Minimum Juvenile Detention Standards plus three revisions.

Both the Jail Profile and Juvenile Detention Profile Surveys.

Two Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grants.

Four federal and two state Juvenile Detention Facility Construction Grant Programs.

Three Adult/One Juvenile Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction Grant Projects.

Four DMC Reduction Grants.

And numerous smaller efforts over the last two decades.

What the CSA discovered was that when giving people a chance to take direct responsibility for their piece of change, they'll do much better if they have a chance to choose a new direction, rather than just being told what's going to happen to them.

The Purpose of ESCs

Executive Steering Committees are special committees appointed by the CSA, as the need arises, to carry out a specified task and to submit its findings and recommendations from that effort to the CSA, at the completion of which they automatically cease to exist. It is the intent of the CSA that when an ESC is appointed it will be chaired by a sitting Corrections Standards Authority member who shall represent, as much as possible, the points of view of the Authority's membership. Each ESC member is selected from the CSA's critical stakeholders so that the recommendations from that ESC will reflect the opinions of the CSA broad-based constituency.

Typically, ESCs are charged with:

- developing the technical requirements for any planning or revision effort;
- designing the criteria and approach to be used in completing their assigned task;
- determining any formal review or rating process to be used;
- coordinating workgroups and holding hearings; and
- submitting recommendations to the CSA.

ESC's are also responsible, when appropriate, for conducting hearings. An ***ESC Hearing*** is a meeting. The meeting time and place is announced to allow interested parties the opportunity to appear before the ESC to give oral or written testimony and to explain issues or concerns anyone may have about the activity, project or program being investigated or developed by the ESC. It is also the time interested parties can answer any clarifying questions the ESC may have regarding the information or material presented. After any open hearing the ESC will meet in an executive session to review and consider all testimony and to prepare recommendations for consideration by the CSA. Finally, there are times the complexity of an assigned task and the time frame for completing it create a need to

expand the data collection and issue discussion efforts beyond the ESC. Foreseeing this, the CSA's policy is to empower each ESC with the ability to establish working subgroups as needed. Using additional subject matter experts, ESCs make every effort to assure that those most knowledgeable and those who will be impacted by the ESC's recommendations have as much input as possible. These subgroups of an ESC are called **ESC Workgroups**.

The idea behind the use of Workgroups is to expand understanding and awareness, and to increase the ESC's ability to respond to all issues under consideration. As all of us have become more accustomed to the fast delivery and explosion of information, we have come to expect quick, easy solutions. Rarely do our organizations set-aside time to truly think about all of the data confronting us. The Workgroup approach is designed to allow for a more sophisticated thinking and active discussion process intended to make sense of a complex environment quickly. Workgroups also allow for more informed decisions based on extensive experience, reflection by contemporary professionals, and the inclusion of current real time practical data. This allows the ESC access to information, which enables them to view challenges from an expansive variety of different perspectives. These interactions unlock creative problem solving potential that generates new and innovative ideas with clockwork regularity. Having this rich investment of talent and experience, contributed by the local corrections community, consistently results in the selection of the most useful solutions and translates those solutions into practical terms. This process consistently wins support for the ideas and for putting those ideas into action.

But do these outside opinions really make a difference?

The CSA thinks so. The CSA believes that ESCs are among the most important CSA institutions - a place where representatives of the CSA's constituency have an essential place reserved at the table. ESCs provide independent, expert management and correctional advice to the CSA on the safety, effectiveness, and appropriate use of projects, programs and regulations under its jurisdiction. Each ESC consists of individuals with recognized expertise and judgment in a specific area, and who have the training and experience necessary to evaluate information objectively, often under controversial circumstances. The goal of any ESC is synergy, and the only way that can occur is by the careful selection of the people who are appointed to it. Stakeholder participation in all ESCs has become a two-way process through which the CSA communicates priority correctional information to its constituency, and the field of local corrections in turn expresses its views, attitudes, reactions and knowledge to the CSA. ESC's deliver a valuable external viewpoint about often difficult issues that face the CSA and, as a result, communications have continuously and incrementally improved between the state and local corrections, and local corrections has come to feel more and more involved in the CSA decision-making process.

Examples of the ESC Approach

One example of how the CSA uses the ESC model is to enhance the state's regulation revision process (which typically includes only an agency's staff review and public hearings) by incorporating the expertise of local corrections practitioners in the form of an ESC and ESC appointed workgroups. This provides upfront expert input; allows for the exploration of an expansive number of possible changes; automatically provides the best resources to address technical aspects of any needed change; and does this while continuously involving the people with the most specific knowledge and those who must carry out any changes that are adopted. Another example is the CSA's approach to grant administration. All CSA grant programs start with either an Administrative, Legislative or Congressional allocation of funding accompanied by legislative language describing program intent, desired outcomes, eligibility and initial criteria. The CSA then reviews its program responsibilities and adopts a general template for the grant program administration. After adopting a general approach the CSA appoints an ESC and charges it with the responsibility of developing the grant program design and then implementing that design.

In grant administration the CSA appoints the ESC to provide:

- expert input;
- recommendations to the CSA regarding the Authority's responsibility for administering the proposed grant program; and
- guidance in the overall program implementation and operation.

Once an ESC has been selected it will meet and solicit input to:

- develop associated criteria that clarify and identify legislative and CSA intent,
- establish reasonable timelines,
- address technical aspects of the Request for Proposal (RFP),
- establish the method to rate applications and select the best projects, and

- determine the best approaches to grant evaluation.

Ultimately, ALL ESCs must submit recommendations to the CSA on every aspect of the proposed grant program including:

- technical requirements of local planning efforts,
- design of the RFP (grant criteria and selection process),
- amount of latitude that can be afforded counties in developing proposals, and
- how the mixture of jurisdictions will be addressed in the awards process.

Finally, in grant administration there are five essential steps to a successful ESC effort:

- First, when changing the way the CSA does business we have to make it as easy as possible for local agencies to adjust to this new model.
- Second, we need to always look for ways to speed up the process.
- Third, we need to be thinking innovative – “*new and improved.*”
- Fourth, everything we do should emphasize building on our knowledge base.
- Fifth, make sure learning from our efforts is a priority.

How does the ESC Model Help Make Better Decisions?

We recognize that different organizations adopt different strategies to achieve their objectives. But whatever the strategy, data is essential to its success. The ESC model focuses the use of “outside-intelligence” (local subject matter experts) to uncover emerging issues in specific areas of responsibility and gives the CSA a sophisticated intelligence-gathering technique to evaluate how serious those issues are and what impact they may have on the local corrections system, allowing the CSA to make appropriate decisions in a timely and efficient manner.

ESC Model

Because an issue ignored is a crisis invited and because significant issues can emerge from unexpected places, it’s critically important that the CSA have a mechanism like the ESC process that is capable of scanning the macro environment quickly but comprehensively for social, technological, economic, environmental, and political developments. This mechanism allows the CSA to:

- identify emerging issues before they strike;
- analyze intelligence about the issues that could affect local corrections using the individuals who know the most about it; and
- address the crucial question – What is the probability that the issue will become critical?

Because ESC’s are made up of highly, skilled professionals selected for their in-depth knowledge of the specific area being addressed and because they are from outside the CSA organization allowing an open mind to address the external forces that will have influence on the CSA, these individuals make an ideal group to determine:

- the implications and degree of opportunity or vulnerability of an issue;
- rate issues on the basis of probability, impact, and whether the CSA can or should influence them; and,
- to develop consensus on the degree of CSA involvement.

All organizations operate using accumulated experience to construct an internal model of what is best practice. The ESC process offers the CSA as an organization important additional information about the outside world. More significantly, they offer a fundamentally different perception of the organization, challenge prejudices, and open the CSA to new insights for decision-making, ***a model for making better decisions.***