



VENTURA COUNTY PROBATION AGENCY

Strategic Plan

2021-2025

TRANSFORMING AND EMPOWERING LIVES TOGETHER



Acknowledgments

This strategic plan represents the collaborative efforts of individuals from all bureaus and divisions, and all levels of seniority, throughout the Ventura County Probation Agency. A special thanks to Mark Howe, Accounting Manager, Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee; Leah Velador, Senior DPO, Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee; and Sandra Solorzano, Chief Deputy, Business Services Bureau. All are to be commended for their excellent leadership throughout the strategic planning process. Further, the agency gives special recognition to the Strategic Planning Committee for its diligent efforts over many months and for its commitment to elevating the agency's vision. Each member deserves special appreciation.

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Representatives of the
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Message

FROM THE DIRECTOR/CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

Probation agency employees, key stakeholders, and community partners:

I am pleased and excited to present to you the Ventura County Probation Agency's Strategic Plan 2021-2025: Transforming and Empowering Lives Together. This strategic plan represents a thorough and concerted effort from all levels of the agency to collectively establish a common vision for our future and a clear, thoughtful roadmap to get us there. The journey to complete this plan was long; however, it was well worth the effort.



Mark Varela, Director/
Chief Probation Officer

The process by which this plan was constructed was carefully thought out and crafted with the intent of soliciting meaningful input from all agency staff and from our key stakeholders, including representatives from county government, justice agencies, and community partners. Their input was vital in helping us identify future goals, continuous improvement activities, and needed resources.

The heaviest lift of all was made by members of our Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Under the professional guidance of our expert consultants, The Carey Group, members of the SPC completed many hours of work developing data-gathering tools (e.g., staff survey and interview guides for focus groups and stakeholder interviews), conducting research, interviewing subject matter experts, and summarizing information and ideas to include in this plan. I am grateful for the work done by the dedicated and engaged SPC members and, on behalf of the entire agency, I express our collective appreciation and gratitude for their efforts.

We continue to face a changing landscape in our profession, and challenges lie ahead for our agency. It is important now—more than ever before—to carve out a path for the agency's next few years. We are proud of the work we do every day, and sharing the plan will inform the community we serve of our vision, mission, and goals for the future. Our direction is clear. Our course is set. We will continually strive to serve our community with the highest level of integrity, compassion, and professionalism.

As a special acknowledgment, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the staff members who make up the Ventura County Probation Agency for their energy, enthusiasm, and effort each day to make our communities safe and healthy. As a lifelong resident of Ventura County and as the proud Chief of this agency, I thank you for making our community a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

Sincerely,



Mark Varela, Director/Chief Probation Officer
Ventura County Probation Agency

Agency Overview

Ventura County, located in southern California, covers 2,200 square miles and is home to more than 846,000 residents. With its ten incorporated cities and its unincorporated areas, Ventura ranks as the 13th most populous county in the state.

The dedicated employees of the Ventura County Probation Agency (VCPA) work to transform and empower the lives of youth and adults under their care and supervision. In doing so, VCPA collaborates with justice system stakeholders (e.g., judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, law enforcement, and service providers) and allied organizations, community-based partners, and community members to support victims and to provide evidence-based programming and other services to those under supervision.

With an annual operating budget of nearly \$78 million and 445 budgeted positions, VCPA conducts its work in the courtroom, community, and juvenile facilities. The agency is comprised of four bureaus.

THE ADULT SERVICES BUREAU consists of Adult Field Services, Adult Safety Realignment, Adult Detention Alternative Programs, and Adult Court Services. These divisions perform specialized functions supervising more than 8,400 adults each year and participate in over 13,000 court actions. Services include pre-sentence investigation reports, pretrial evaluations, risk and needs assessments, work release, and probation and post release supervision.

THE JUVENILE SERVICES BUREAU is comprised of three divisions: Juvenile Field Services, Juvenile Court Services, and Juvenile Facilities. The Bureau focuses on prevention, diversion, youth and family support services, treatment, and community supervision. It oversees programs for over 500 youth each year and participates in 2,700 court actions. The Juvenile Field Services Division manages citations, operates several

specialty programs, administers risk and needs assessments, develops individualized and comprehensive case plans, and supervises in the community youth who are at moderate to high risk of recidivism. The Juvenile Court Services Division provides intake and investigative reports to the Court, operates an electronic monitoring program, and coordinates the placement of youth with high needs. The Juvenile Facilities house youth and young adults pending Juvenile Court proceedings and/or custody commitments and offer rehabilitative treatment pending their release back into the community.



VCPA staff at a career fair recruiting and answering questions about agency positions

Two other bureaus, consisting primarily of civilian staff, provide essential services to support VCPA and its employees. **THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES BUREAU** includes the Professional Standards Unit, which conducts pre-employment background investigations and internal investigations on both peace officers and civilian staff. This bureau also includes Clerical Support, the Custodian of Records, Agency Courier Services, Human Resources, Labor Relations, and Staff Training. **THE BUSINESS SERVICES BUREAU** oversees Fiscal, Information Technology, and Strategic Management. This bureau, while small in size, has the immense responsibility of ensuring that all agency staff have the resources and tools to perform their work effectively and efficiently.

■
VCPA collaborates with justice system stakeholders and allied organizations, community-based partners, and community members to support victims and to provide evidence-based programming and other services to those under supervision.
■

Agency Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

TRANSFORMING AND EMPOWERING LIVES TO BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY.

Mission

TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS, INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING.

Values

■ **COLLABORATION**

We actively build networks of support and strive to create shared solutions on issues impacting our communities.

■ **DEDICATION**

We demonstrate the highest level of integrity, professionalism, and compassion as a committed workforce.

■ **EMPOWERMENT**

We connect people to resources and opportunities to encourage change and personal responsibility, which are cornerstones to building safe communities.

■ **EXCELLENCE**

We are innovative, adaptable, and determined to continuously improve.

■ **RESPECT**

We believe in a positive, empowering, and supportive work environment that encourages the sharing of diverse opinions.

■ **SUPPORT**

We focus on restoration by providing access to trauma-informed services and facilitating healing.

About the Strategic Planning Process

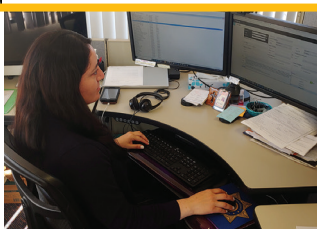
This strategic plan represents a collaborative effort among the leadership and staff of VCPA. The project launched in July 2020 during a worldwide pandemic. Chief Mark Varela expressed a longstanding desire for the agency to have a clear pathway to the future, noting that the pandemic provided a unique backdrop to this work. With normal agency operations disrupted, he thought it was the perfect opportunity to have conversations about how to strengthen functions and unite staff behind a process dedicated to improving agency activities and outcomes.

The strategic planning process began with a series of virtual meetings during which VCPA's executive and management teams reviewed the project's goals, workplan, and strategies for involving staff and key stakeholders. Chief Deputy Sandra Solorzano was appointed to coordinate the effort with consultants from The Carey Group.

On September 8, 2020, Chief Varela held two virtual town hall meetings, formally kicking off the agency's strategic planning process. He invited staff to apply to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee, complete an upcoming staff survey, participate in focus groups, and provide feedback throughout the process. The Strategic Planning Committee, made up of 20 individuals from all divisions and levels of the agency, began their work in earnest on October 28, 2020. A staff survey was developed, launched, and analyzed, with 88% of the agency responding. Other information-gathering activities included 18 stakeholder interviews,¹ 20 staff focus groups,² and a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

Finally, agency reports, policies, budgets, and statistics, as well as documents related to county trends (e.g., the Draft Ventura County Strategic Plan, Ventura County

VCPA field
probation officers



A member of VCPA's
IT Services Unit

¹ The list of stakeholders interviewed is on page 26.

² The list of focus groups is on page 27.

A staff survey was developed, launched, and analyzed, with

88%

of the agency responding.

Professional Peace Officers' Association survey reports, Ventura County Juvenile Justice Plan [2017], Ventura County Community Health Needs Assessment [2019], and County of Ventura Public Safety Realignment Strategic Plan [2019-2022]), were collected and reviewed.

During this process, the Executive Committee remained actively involved through regular briefings. Its members collaboratively developed new agency vision, mission, and values statements, which were finalized after staff provided input at unit meetings. They also reviewed and approved distribution of findings from the staff survey and other information-gathering activities to demonstrate their commitment to a transparent planning process.

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the input received through these processes and drew heavily from staff and stakeholder feedback to develop the goals, objectives, and performance measures included in this strategic plan; they reflect the Committee's excellent work in developing a strategic plan that aligns with the agency's new vision, mission, and values.

■

During the strategic planning process, the Executive Committee remained actively involved through regular briefings; they collaboratively developed new agency vision, mission, and values statements; and they reviewed and approved distribution of findings from information-gathering activities.

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Overview: Strategic Goals

The goals, objectives, and performance measures that comprise this strategic plan seek to enhance VCPA's capacity to accomplish and sustain its vision and mission of transforming and empowering lives to achieve community well-being. The order of these goals is purposeful. VCPA recognizes that as a contributor to community well-being, its focus must be on helping those involved in the justice system make positive life choices. Without effective programs and services, the agency will fall short of achieving its mission. Data is needed to assess the agency's effectiveness and to inform decision-making and resource allocation. Communication is essential to effectively link the agency's vision, mission, and values to the people served, the staff performing this important work, and the community partners with whom the agency collaborates. This work is possible only when the agency employs talented and motivated staff who are inspired and supported by visionary leaders. Collectively, these five goals serve to create the foundation of success for VCPA's clients, staff, partners, and the community.

Goal One

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Programs, services, and practices that encourage positive life changes and support community well-being

Goal Two

DATA

A data-driven and strategic agency that is continually improving

Goal Three

COMMUNICATION

Transparent communication within the agency, with stakeholders, and with the community at large

Goal Four

WORKFORCE

An inspired and diverse workforce, united in purpose, and dedicated to excellence

Goal Five

LEADERSHIP

A culture where leaders inspire, engage, mentor, and celebrate the personal and professional development of staff



Programs, services, and practices that encourage positive life changes and support community well-being

VCPA'S CORE PURPOSE is to support people involved in the justice system to lead productive and law-abiding lives. This purpose is carried out by professionally trained staff who employ evidence-based practices to reduce a person's likelihood of returning to the justice system. Staff utilize interventions that target clients' criminogenic needs and offer and refer them to programs and services to help them develop life skills. Programs are purposeful, structured activities designed to help clients achieve behavior change. Services (e.g., medical care, mental health treatment, assistance finding a home, transportation) help clients lead stable lives. To connect clients to the most appropriate interventions, staff must have rapport with and understand client needs. Staff must also support client success by acknowledging and reinforcing positive behavior and progress and by responding swiftly and fairly to noncompliant behavior. VCPA has invested in evidence-based practices and promoted a philosophy that positive behavior change is possible when a person's level of risk and needs are matched to the right interventions. When agencies effectively implement evidence-based practices, the risk of recidivism can be reduced by as much as 30% on average.³

When agencies effectively implement evidence-based practices, the risk of recidivism can be reduced by as much as

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OBJECTIVE One Implement protocols to ensure fidelity to evidence-based practices that promote client success and community safety.

An evidence-based framework ensures that staff are teaching and reinforcing skills and decisions that lead to success. But training and policies are insufficient to ensure that staff understand and consistently apply these practices; over time, skills and knowledge may fade if they are not continually reinforced and refreshed. Therefore, maintaining fidelity requires well-conceived quality assurance plans that promote staff proficiency,

³ Source: https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/research/com2000-chap_2-eng.shtml

Probation staff reading a Dr. Seuss book to students during the annual Read Across America Day



including supervisory support to prevent “drift,”⁴ and that allow staff to effectively and ongoingly apply their skills correctly.

Staff must be adept at building rapport with clients and conveying their commitment to clients’ success. To do this, staff must have expertise in gathering, analyzing, and understanding how past trauma—including experiences with racial, ethnic, gender, or wealth bias—has shaped the person’s experiences. One strategy for supporting this effort is strengthening the agency’s relationships with advocates and those with lived experience.

Building rapport with clients will allow staff to craft case plans that are responsive to each person’s unique circumstances. Case plans must address the client’s criminogenic needs, call upon their strengths to accomplish their goals, and provide the appropriate level of supervision based on their assessed needs. With an individualized and informed approach, clients are most likely to receive the supportive services that are key to their success. This support and related interactions must be balanced with community safety. When clients exhibit noncompliant behavior, staff must respond in a way that is effective, reasonable, and fair.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of case management staff who demonstrate proficiency in evidence-based practices.
2. % of clients who are referred to programs.
3. % of referred clients who complete programs.
4. % of people assessed as moderate or high risk who are not adjudicated/convicted of a new misdemeanor or felony crime three years after discharge.

OBJECTIVE TWO Incorporate families and other social supports in clients’ care and treatment plans.

VCPA understands that it must operate in a people-first framework. This framework recognizes that the power to modify behavior lies in large part within the client. The justice system can spark positive advancements by helping clients construct their individualized pathways to

⁴ “Drift” can be defined as the process of incrementally departing from an endorsed, proven procedure. Without a process to prevent drift, it is inevitable. Programs will not be delivered accurately, assessments will not be used properly, and procedures will be mishandled.

Staff taking youth in the Repeat Offender Prevention Program to a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game



change. However, to truly thrive, people need the support and encouragement of their family or significant others. When VCPA engages families and other social supports, it multiplies the number of people who can assist clients in achieving and sustaining their goals long past their justice system involvement.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of families of youth who indicate that they feel supported, informed, and involved in the youth's care and plan for success.
2. % of adult clients who indicate that they are satisfied with the agency's efforts to involve their family members and significant others.

OBJECTIVE Three Ensure the effective use of high-quality risk reduction programs.

VCPA is responsible for ensuring that programs to which clients are referred—both in house and in the community—are effective in helping them remain law-abiding. Successful programs are responsive to the client's needs. They also satisfy the client's cultural, linguistic, and gender identification requirements. They are structured so that clients gain insight into how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors impact their life choices and how they might change those patterns to produce different outcomes. Effective programs also teach clients the skills they need to be successful and provide opportunities to practice those skills so they can become proficient in using them. Implementing specific programmatic performance standards will enable VCPA to monitor program outcomes and continually strengthen programs and services. Standards also establish clear expectations for those providing programming and assist the agency in demonstrating its effectiveness in meeting client needs.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of clients who indicate that the programs they receive meet their cultural, linguistic, and gender identity needs.
2. % of community-based programs that receive satisfactory scores on an administered fidelity assessment.
3. % of agency-operated programs that receive satisfactory scores on an administered fidelity assessment.

Goal Two

DATA



A data-driven and strategic agency that is continually improving

USING INNOVATIVE AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY to collect, analyze, and report accurate information from a variety of sources is critical to VCPA's ability to make data-driven fiscal and operational decisions. To promote trust and accountability, performance outcomes need to be collected, studied, and made available to staff, stakeholders, and the community at large. In addition, to continually improve, VCPA must have processes that promote learning and ensure that services and practices are delivered in the intended manner and achieve the desired outcomes.

OBJECTIVE One Collect accurate data to measure the impact of agency performance and progress toward achieving VCPA's vision.

Assessing agency performance necessitates the collection of complete and accurate data. Federal, state, county, and grant funding sources require the reporting of data to support and justify spending. Managers and supervisors need data to manage their units and divisions effectively. Staff, stakeholders, and the community need data to understand and assess the agency's performance.

The Ventura County Integrated Justice Information System (VCIJIS) is a countywide, integrated system that allows multiple criminal and juvenile justice agencies to input and access data in a common database. The county plan to upgrade VCIJIS will address some important data entry issues;⁵ however, this upgrade is expected to take many years. In the meantime, VCPA will set clear expectations regarding data to be collected; implement temporary solutions for VCIJIS's data entry issues; put in place other measures to ensure the accuracy and efficiency of its staff's entry of data into VCIJIS and the Ventura County Risk Assessment System (VCRAS); and increase the functionality of the VCPA Mobile system.

Increased analytical
capacity will allow
VCPA to be
agile
in responding to
time-sensitive
data needs.

⁵ Some of the data issues include duplicate person entries that require record merges and the need to enter the same information on multiple screens (i.e., in both chronos and tree entries).

An officer involved in case planning and management



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of VCIJIS and VCRAS data that is entered accurately.
2. % of VCIJIS and VCRAS data that is entered completely.
3. % of new VCIJIS person entries that do not require a record merge.

OBJECTIVE Two Enhance agency capacity to analyze data, create dashboards, and report outcomes.

In addition to having data that is accurate, a data-driven organization must have the capacity to analyze data and report outcomes in a format that is user friendly. While VCPA has access to a tremendous amount of data, it has limited internal capacity to analyze and report data effectively. Building this capacity will provide the agency with the means to report and share outcomes with internal users, stakeholders, and the community. This dynamic feedback loop will enable the entire workforce to examine their performance, identify strengths, and foster commitment to ongoing improvement. Finally, increased analytical capacity will allow VCPA to be agile in responding to time-sensitive data needs—for example, when responding to grant opportunities or legislative proposals—and to strengthen planning efforts, such as expanding community-based services and addressing agency staffing shortages, workload, or retention issues.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of data requests filled within the timeframe established by policy.
2. % of divisions that have a data dashboard.
3. % of staff who know their unit performance outcomes for any given year.

OBJECTIVE Three Use data to establish budget priorities and allocate resources efficiently.

Broadly speaking, the collection and analysis of agency performance data allows VCPA to make sound fiscal and operational decisions including, among others, the allocation of staffing resources, the identification of client needs at the individual and aggregate levels, the determination of gaps in the continuum of available resources, and the management of service contracts.

VCPA will establish return on investment processes to routinely evaluate performance and outcomes. These analyses, together with other measurement processes, will position VCPA to advocate for program resources that contribute to positive client outcomes. Data will also help VCPA better prioritize grant opportunities that target the most significant needs, identify when functions or services should be reduced or expanded, and identify less costly alternatives to incarceration or residential care.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE

1. % of programs and services funded at the determined level of need.

OBJECTIVE Four Implement a comprehensive continuous improvement process.

VCPA is committed to providing effective and efficient operations. This requires that every mission-critical activity—including staff recruitment, training, client supervision, and budgeting—is performed well. One of the agency’s values is excellence, which the agency has defined as being “innovative, adaptable, and determined to continuously improve.” The agency participates in the County Executive Office’s Service Excellence Program and receives process improvement points as a measure of its success in finding ways to evaluate and streamline processes—making them more efficient and easier to use—and to increase the accuracy of data collection.

VCPA is dedicated to being a learning organization that uses continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes to enhance agency performance. CQI involves structured activities to evaluate current services, implement improvements, measure their impact, and make mid-course adjustments as needed. To achieve this objective, each bureau and division in VCPA will adopt a customized continuous quality improvement plan.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE

1. # of process improvement events implemented.



Staff from Fiscal Support Services ensuring that VCPA's financial infrastructure operates with integrity and efficiency



Goal Three

COMMUNICATION

Transparent communication within the agency, with stakeholders, and with the community at large

COMMUNICATION IMPACTS VCPA ON EVERY LEVEL and is critical to the achievement of each of this plan's strategic goals:

- **Programs and Services:** Two-way communication with clients, their families, community leaders, and stakeholders helps VCPA better serve their needs.
- **Data:** The agency can better achieve its objectives when data is shared with interested parties in a timely, accurate, and transparent manner.
- **Workforce:** Clear and timely communication directly improves staff morale, teamwork, and trust, which increases productivity, well-being, and retention.
- **Leadership:** Clarity around vision, mission, purpose, goals, and methods to achieve them are essential to principled leadership.

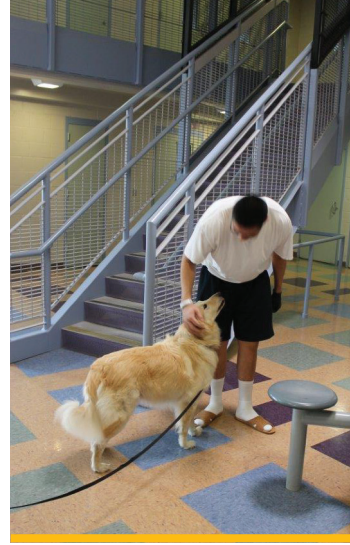
Effective communication is everyone's responsibility. It requires a safe physical and emotional space in which people can openly exchange ideas and listen to one another's needs. It is best achieved when modeled by leaders and reinforced purposefully, which motivates others to follow suit.

OBJECTIVE One Strengthen relationships with the community and stakeholders by enhancing two-way communication.

While agency staff reflect a microcosm of the larger community, the agency cannot assume that it understands the community's experience with the justice system without establishing processes for dialogue. The agency convenes numerous meetings, some of which are open to the public; communicates regularly with stakeholders and community service providers; attends public relations events; and maintains an active social media presence. However, barriers limit the number and type of people who participate in such

The agency
values
its close alliance
with its juvenile and
criminal justice
partners.

A therapy dog providing comfort at the Juvenile Facilities



events. Consistent with its values statement on collaboration, the agency will better meet the community’s needs by creating more opportunities for listening sessions where community voices are heard and barriers to participation are removed. This is especially important as the community grows more diverse and the ideals of equity and inclusion are fully incorporated in agency policies and practices. Increasing these efforts will reinforce that participation and input are welcome, strengthen trust, reduce misinformation, and ultimately better equip the agency to provide exemplary services and improve client outcomes.

The agency values its close alliance with its juvenile and criminal justice partners, recognizing that while each has a different role, their goal is shared: to make communities safer and stronger, and to make the administration of justice fairer. As such, continued and expanded communication and collaboration with service partners and stakeholders is central to achieving this broader system- and community-wide goal.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of community members at an agency-sponsored listening session who indicate satisfaction with the outcome of the event.
2. % of stakeholders indicating satisfaction with the frequency, depth, and clarity of agency communications.

OBJECTIVE Two Expand the agency’s communications infrastructure.

Internal communication that is clear, concise, timely, two way, and standardized empowers employees, builds morale, and fosters trust among staff and between staff and management. It also helps staff understand the work in other divisions, builds camaraderie, and supports a transparent work culture. An expanded communications infrastructure will assist in ensuring that all VCPA staff receive information crucial to the operations of the agency.

VCPA previously put in place a variety of mechanisms to enhance communication. These include but are not limited to:

- establishing in every building an Advisory Committee to share information and discuss developments and accomplishments;
- assigning a staff member Public Information Officer duties;
- conducting unit, division, and bureau meetings;
- developing a communications plan that defines roles and responsibilities around communication, methods of communication, staff meeting guidelines, and guidelines for interacting with the media and other interested parties; and
- producing an agency newsletter that provides unit updates and recognizes new hires and staff milestones.



Kitchen staff from the Juvenile Facilities delivering encouragement (and food)

In addition, VCPA leverages technology—such as Microsoft Teams, Lexipol, and video messaging—to bolster the ready exchange of information.

Despite these efforts, barriers to fluid and timely communication are noted. These include workload demands that make it difficult to keep pace with a high volume of internal emails, and an information policy that proscribes a chain of command that can impede free-flowing dialogue and the sharing of ideas.

A review and expansion of the current communications infrastructure will cultivate additional technology solutions or their expanded use, such as increased use of message boards and Microsoft Teams, and address both the expected frequency of communication as well as the methods. In addition, the agency will review and modify policies and practices around communication and ensure that expectations are clear throughout the agency. Similarly, the wide dissemination of information following meetings between union boards and upper management will serve to strengthen relationships between the unions, management, and staff.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE

1. % of staff indicating satisfaction with the frequency, depth, and clarity of agency communications.



The Paxton Patterson Program, where Corrections Services Officers teach construction trade skills to youth at the Juvenile Facilities

OBJECTIVE Three Address structural barriers to effective communication at the Juvenile Facilities.

Communication within the Juvenile Facilities presents unique challenges. Staff who provide direct services in the facilities do not have convenient access to a computer or ample time during their shifts to check email. Facility staff who are responsible for sharing agencywide information are often sidelined to manage staffing shortages. These and other realities associated with operations within the Juvenile Facilities means that supervisors and staff may not benefit from current and timely information. Improving communication by addressing these barriers will increase feelings of connection to the larger organization, enhance morale, and bolster a cohesive teamwork environment.

In recent years, VCPA has taken steps to support communication improvements within the Juvenile Facilities. These include establishing townhall and advisory group meetings, setting expectations for the frequency of unit staff meetings, and posting workgroup minutes. The fact that communication challenges remain despite these efforts may be due to the nature of shift work in a 24/7 operation, necessitating strategies other than those that are commonplace. For this reason, VCPA will routinely examine the barriers that are unique to facility operations and identify customized and creative solutions for this setting.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of Juvenile Facilities staff indicating satisfaction with internal communication.
2. % of Juvenile Facilities staff indicating a high degree of connectivity with the larger agency.

Santa Claus visiting the Juvenile Facilities



First-place landscape project by youth at the Juvenile Facilities for the Ventura County Fair



Goal Four

WORKFORCE

An inspired and diverse workforce, united in purpose,
and dedicated to excellence

VCPA'S GREATEST STRENGTH IS ITS EMPLOYEES. They are the face of the agency, visible to the public they serve. A workforce delivers optimal performance when it is skilled, inspired, and satisfied. A workforce is strong when it is supported by a culture that values each employee; encourages them to voice their opinions, especially when they bring a new perspective; and unites them in meeting the agency's vision and mission. And, a workforce is well positioned to change, grow, and innovate when it is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

VCPA is committed to bolstering the recruitment of quality individuals, supporting them in their career objectives through professional development, encouraging high levels of staff performance and achievement, and collaborating with unions to achieve its mission. Supporting the dedicated members of its workforce will assist VCPA in providing exemplary service to its clients and the broader community.

OBJECTIVE One Recruit, recognize, and retain talented and motivated staff.

VCPA is a professional organization that proudly employs people who believe in serving the community, embrace the foundational values of honesty and integrity, and exhibit exceptional performance in their duties. Strategic recruitment of candidates who best reflect these values leads to a greater chance of a successful hire; well-suited candidates are more likely to complete on-the-job training, experience job satisfaction, and envision career longevity. VCPA can improve upon its hiring practices by examining how to streamline the process and shorten the gap between a person's application and job offer.

VCPA recognizes the value of providing frequent and regular employee feedback to enhance motivation and a positive work experience. Constructive and recurring feedback is

VCPA will
create
and support
an environment in
which staff are
encouraged to work
collaboratively
to continually
improve upon
how services are
delivered.

VCPA's armed staff at their monthly training at the Ventura County Sheriff's Range



necessary for staff's professional development. It shows employees they are valued and supported, helps them improve their performance, and reinforces that the agency has their best interests in mind. As such, VCPA is committed to the timely completion of annual performance reviews that incorporate substantive feedback vital to professional growth. The agency is also committed to developing a workplace culture that encourages recognition throughout all levels of the organization, from officers and administrative staff to supervisors and upper management. Providing recognition—whether verbal praise, a written note, or some other tangible benefit—is demonstrated through research to motivate employees to excel.

Effective staff recruitment and recognition help agencies retain staff. VCPA will draft a comprehensive retention plan that applies lessons learned from employees about their reasons for staying with or leaving the agency.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of vacancies for civilian staff filled within expected timelines.
2. % of vacancies for peace officers filled within expected timelines.
3. % of staff who achieve years of service milestones (5 years, 10 years, etc.)
4. **All** staff performance reviews completed within expected timelines.
5. % of staff who indicate they feel appreciated by their direct supervisor and management.
6. % of staff who express satisfaction with their job.

OBJECTIVE TWO Cultivate a supportive workplace that honors diversity and fosters respect, unity, engagement, safety, and well-being.

Probation work can be both rewarding and challenging. A supportive workplace is one in which success is acknowledged and celebrated regularly and where management recognizes and makes every effort to address the factors that contribute to stress.

Ensuring that a supportive workplace is commonplace means listening actively, honoring diversity in opinion, and joining forces to resolve issues through both informal and formal

Unions

Ventura County Probation Agency's two unions, Ventura County Professional Peace Officers' Association and Service Employees International Union, actively advocate for and negotiate agreements to create a stable and productive workforce. The relationship between the unions and management should reflect a united effort to support staff in the fulfillment of VCPA's mission.

This strategic plan supports the agency and union representatives working collaboratively with one another to proactively resolve employee concerns, hold a respectful dialogue about issues of mutual interest, and unite staff in achieving the plan's goals and objectives.

mechanisms. Unions can play a positive part in these discussions, bringing forth ideas, providing a venue for meaningful conversations, and engaging in mutual problem solving. This approach enhances communication, builds trust, and allows for a more open dialogue that can increase understanding of different perspectives.

Creating a supportive workplace necessitates engaging staff at all levels of the agency in meaningful ways, such as offering them opportunities to have input on decisions that impact their work. These decisions could include staffing assignments, transfers, shift schedules, work functions, and other areas where change can disrupt someone's daily routine and job satisfaction. A supportive workplace also means taking steps to ensure that staff have the training, skills, and tools to perform their work confidently and safely.

VCPA will enable staff to share their concerns. It will look toward its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, whose members work closely with Ventura County's DEI Committee, for guidance and strategies to further strengthen its commitment to DEI. And, in addition to offering officer safety training with the appropriate frequency, VCPA will maintain its vigilance in keeping the workplace safe and secure.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of staff who feel safe and secure in the workplace.
2. % of line staff and management who feel the workplace culture is supportive and inclusive.

OBJECTIVE Three Establish pathways for advancement, continuous learning, and professional development.

VCPA recognizes that its success as an organization is directly dependent upon the success of every employee. One way to advance employee success is to focus on career and professional development. VCPA will make new employees aware of future growth opportunities during the onboarding process. Supervisors will be responsible for discussing

VCPA staff collecting canned foods for the annual CAN-tree Drive



employees' career goals during annual performance reviews, or more frequently as needed. Pathways to promotions will be well defined, and processes for advancement will be fair and objective. Professional development opportunities, such as training or taking on new responsibilities, will be varied and tailored to the needs of peace officers and civilian staff, so both acquire the skills to enhance their contributions to the agency's mission. In addition, all staff will benefit from informal and formal mentoring and coaching, where experienced and knowledgeable staff support their colleagues to excel in their current roles.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of employees satisfied with the professional development opportunities available to them.
2. % of employees who indicate that pathways to promotions are transparent and fair.

OBJECTIVE Four Build and sustain high-performing, collaborative teams.

From an organizational perspective, teamwork builds a sense of community and generates innovative solutions to agency problems. VCPA will create and support an environment in which staff are encouraged to work collaboratively to continually improve upon how services are delivered—keeping in mind client needs and limited resources. When process improvement or agency change requires a formal process, VCPA will apply effective project management strategies. These strategies include setting clear expectations for the project, involving people who are impacted, identifying and overcoming barriers to success, and implementing and monitoring the change. This process will increase team members' confidence that initiated projects will be completed and result in tangible outcomes.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of staff who indicate that the agency consistently operates with a strong sense of teamwork.
2. % of staff involved in agency projects who express satisfaction with the agency's follow-through on completing and implementing projects.



Goal Five

LEADERSHIP

A culture where leaders inspire, engage, mentor, and celebrate the personal and professional development of staff

Leadership is critical to any organization’s success. Research demonstrates its direct link to productivity, employee retention, outcome achievement, and customer satisfaction. Leaders who are intentional about building an organization that promotes empowerment are vigilant in creating opportunities to build a culture of “we.” As such, they are aware of how they impact people and use their leadership to lift up others. This kind of leader focuses on the growth and well-being of those with whom they work, putting the needs of others first and facilitating a healthy work environment where staff can grow and learn.

VCPA is committed to cultivating leaders who “model the way”⁶ by listening, building a community, reflecting, learning, and supporting others; by inspiring and mentoring future leaders; and by developing a deliberate, strategic succession plan to ensure the ongoing, long-term success of the agency. Key to achieving the goal of this leadership style is clarity and consistency in practice, participatory management, and encouragement of all staff.

Organizations with
highly engaged teams
outperform their
peers by nearly
150%.

OBJECTIVE One Cultivate and maintain a thriving, healthy organizational culture.

“Organizational culture” is the collection of attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices that define an organization. Healthy organizations are led by leaders who consciously seek to nurture a work environment that promotes a spirit of camaraderie, which contributes to positive morale, work productivity, and goal achievement. Team spirit is built on a foundation of trust. It is further enhanced by formal and informal opportunities for meaningful interaction within the organization. VCPA has adopted strategies over the years to create a healthy organizational culture. Future leadership efforts to build esprit de corps will include a variety of agencywide functions that focus on or promote team building; partnering with staff as they perform their duties to gain a firsthand understanding of the challenges associated with various positions; and participating in equal measure in community-based functions.

⁶“Modeling the way” is one of the five practices of exemplary leadership developed by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner and described in their book *The Leadership Challenge* (6th edition; John Wiley & Sons, 2017).



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

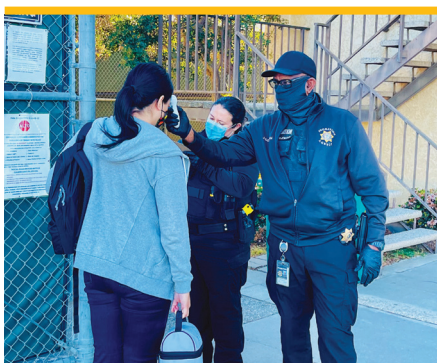
1. % of staff who indicate that agency leaders cultivate and maintain a healthy organizational culture.
2. % of staff who indicate that agency leadership are genuinely engaged in unit-level activities and agency-sponsored community events.
3. % of staff who indicate that supervisors and agency leaders are visible and understand the nature of staff members' jobs.

OBJECTIVE Two Ensure agency policies and personnel practices are clear and consistently carried out.

Strong, healthy organizations are managed under a system of deliberately crafted, thoughtfully implemented, and strategically monitored policies and procedures. Written policies and procedures establish expectations and provide staff with clear direction; they also ensure consistent practices across and within units and divisions and provide a mechanism for holding accountable employees and leaders throughout the organization. Although VCPA operates under a number of written policies, improvements can be made that would ensure that existing policies and procedures are systematically reviewed, updated as needed, and universally applied. Improvements may include, for example, creating a designated unit (or position) responsible for policy development and adherence; conducting independent audits of operational and personnel practices; and developing and monitoring remediation plans where necessary.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. % of agency policies that are objectively reviewed on an annual basis and, as necessary, revised.
2. % of operational and personnel practices deemed as consistently carried out, based upon an annual review.



Staff checking a client into
the Work Release program

OBJECTIVE Three Equip and empower staff at all levels within the agency to fully and independently exercise their responsibilities.

Research on organizational development demonstrates that high employee empowerment significantly correlates with a positive work environment. Empowering employees to fully exercise their responsibilities increases employee investment⁷ and frees leadership to focus on strategic vision and management. Further, research demonstrates that empowerment leads to engagement, and organizations with highly engaged teams outperform their peers by nearly 150 percent.⁸ According to the Wharton School of Government, the path to employee empowerment includes five steps: working toward a common goal, creating a strengths-based culture, reinforcing positive behavior, having open lines of communication, and encouraging mentorship.⁹

Creating a cadre of highly skilled staff who are effectively prepared to fulfill their responsibilities requires clarity around roles and expectations, transparency around decision-making parameters, and opportunities for growth through honest and supportive feedback. The creation of written guidance that carefully describes the various roles and responsibilities within the agency, lines of authority, and decision-making principles and criteria—as well as the establishment of mechanisms for candid feedback, such as 360-degree feedback processes—will enable all agency staff to perform at the highest possible level.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE

1. % of staff indicating that the agency supports independent decision-making appropriate to assigned roles.

⁷ Employee empowerment is directly tied to results. A study by Zenger Folkman found that 4 percent of employees are willing to put in more effort when empowerment is low, while 67 percent are willing to go above and beyond when empowerment is high. Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joefolkman/2017/03/02/the-6-key-secrets-to-increasing-empowerment-in-your-team/?sh=467b9e9777a6>

⁸ Source: <https://upstarthr.com/heres-how-an-engaged-company-outperforms-others-by-nearly-150-percent>

⁹ Source: <https://online.wharton.upenn.edu/blog/5-ways-to-empower-your-team-to-make-decisions>

OBJECTIVE Four Develop and implement a strategic succession plan to ensure continuity of strong leadership.

Like leadership, succession planning is critical to organizational success, particularly in today’s environment, where the workforce is largely characterized by aging and young workers, leaving a gap in the middle.¹⁰ Organizational stability and continuity in mission and activities necessitate that leaders of organizations consider the long term and plan for the future.

Succession plans identify the key roles within the organization, seek to prepare employees through professional development to advance in the organization when opportunities present themselves, and focus specifically on retention efforts. Succession planning seeks to identify those employees who already possess—or with training and mentoring can develop—the skills to be future leaders. Because succession plans leave organizations prepared for new leaders to assume important responsibilities, the creation of a strategic succession plan is essential to the future of VCPA.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE

1. % adherence to agency succession plan upon annual review.



Above: VCPA staff participating in the 2019 Special Olympics Torch Run

Below: A youth at VCPA's Evening Reporting Center being tutored by a Boys and Girls Club volunteer



¹⁰ Source: <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2017/08/04/critical-importance-succession-planning>

Appendix A

Stakeholder Interviews

Many stakeholders contributed to this strategic plan; their valued input helped shape and inform the five goal areas. Stakeholders were identified by VCPA and represented a broad spectrum of organizations, individuals, and community members. Interviews were conducted using a series of eight questions developed by the Strategic Planning Committee. The process was meant to be conversational and confidential; each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. A total of 18 interviews were completed.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE FOLLOWING OFFICES, AGENCIES, OR GROUPS WERE INTERVIEWED EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR IN SMALL GROUPS:

1. Civil Rights Organizations
2. Community-Based Organizations-Session 1
3. Community-Based Organizations-Session 2
4. County Behavioral Health
5. Criminal Court Judges
6. District Attorney's Office
7. Family Justice Center/Victim Advocates
8. Family Members of Staff
9. Human Services Agency
10. Juvenile Court Judges
11. Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative—Youth Empowerment and Support Committee (Burns Institute)
12. Law Enforcement—Local Police Chiefs and County Sheriff
13. Public Defender
14. Public Health Department
15. Service Employees International Union
16. Telecare
17. Ventura County Executives
18. Ventura County Office of Education

Appendix B

Focus Groups

Focus groups added important details to the staff survey about interviewees' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives about VCPA. Using a series of 10 questions, staff were asked to comment on how the agency can improve and where it should focus its attention in the next few years. A total of 20 focus groups and interviews involving 99 participants were conducted. Of the participants, 61 were peace officers and 38 were civilian staff; 26 held supervisory or management positions while 73 held nonmanagement positions. Like the stakeholder interviews, the focus groups were meant to be conversational and confidential, with each group lasting approximately 90 minutes.

1. Adult Field-Session 1
2. Adult Field-Session 2
3. Adult Investigations
4. Corrections Services Officers-Session 1
5. Corrections Services Officers-Session 2
6. Corrections Services Officers III, Watch Commanders, Deputy Probation Officers, and Operations
7. Executive Committee
8. Human Resources, Labor Relations, and Professional Standards Unit
9. Information Technology and Fiscal
10. Juvenile Facilities Kitchen and Laundry
11. Juvenile Field
12. Juvenile Intake and Electronic Monitoring
13. Juvenile Investigations
14. Pretrial Risk Assessment and Monitoring Services/Specialized Services Unit
15. Retirees
16. Supervising Deputy Probation Officers
17. Support Staff—Line Staff-Session 1
18. Support Staff—Line Staff-Session 2
19. Support Staff—Supervisors
20. Individual interview (upon request)



VENTURA COUNTY PROBATION AGENCY





COUNTY *of* VENTURA
Probation Agency

<https://venturaprobatation.org>