



LOS ANGELES COUNTY

PROBATION OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

September 2024

# CBO Relationships Listening Session Report

CBO RELATIONSHIPS AD HOC COMMITTEE:

- SECRETARY DIANE TERRY
- COMMISSIONER MILINDA KAKANI
- VICE-CHAIR DOLORES CANALES

On September 5, 2024, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM, the Probation Oversight Commission (POC) ad hoc committee on Community Based Organization (CBO) Relationships hosted a virtual listening session for CBO providers currently and previously delivering programming in the Probation Department's locked facilities. Providers were invited to discuss the current state of their relationship with the Department and relevant experiences. In total, 21 individual community providers attended the session and gave feedback to POC commissioners and staff in small breakout rooms to the following prompts:

- What is it like to be a service provider in the facilities right now?
- What was your experience like getting cleared to work in the facilities?
- How does scheduling work for you? How do you find out if there's a change? Who do you go to if an issues comes up?
- What feels most challenging when you think about your work and the facilities? How did these challenges impact your work?
- Is there anything that is working well when it comes to working with Probation in providing programming in the facilities?
- What recommendations would you have for Probation leadership to make bringing programming into the facilities easier? What does the department need to start, stop, or continue doing?

The resulting answers from providers are grouped below into major categories, followed by POC interpretation of those disclosures and subsequent recommendations. POC Commissioners and staff believe that implementing these recommendations would improve and strengthen critical partnerships between Probation and CBOs and would help professionalize Probation's procedures and overall image with the public.



# Clearances & Contracts:

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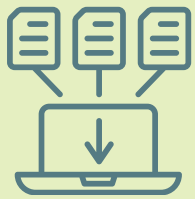
- How they determine stuff is strange to me, drug and prostitution charges are not accepted vs attempted murder charges being accepted.
- Out of 18 people, only 1 was denied, that person was given a link to see why they were denied.
- Lived experience clearance is a challenge and not clear, some with similar crimes are accepted vs not accepted, only a denial is given, without a reason why.
- Getting clearance for the career fair was very smooth.
- For the most part its been “smooth sailing”.
- Some clearances got pulled and no one knew why. We received a 12-hour notice.
- We’ve had issues with the clearances, but it might be because some of our staff are formerly incarcerated.
- With LACOE clearances, there’s no pushback when we show LACOE badge.
- Previously took hours to go in to see clients at LP, but now it’s much easier.
- Clearances for my organization took a couple of weeks.
- Only thing we have a copy of is our clearance form; no longer have access to technology clearance form.
- Worked on getting live scanned, sometimes delay in scheduling livescans, some clearances pulled after 2 years, some not pulled, some pulled because of failure to do PREA, so many inconsistencies.
- Contract has a set end date that doesn’t get extended so when they can’t get in, youth are missing out. Program provides tools for toolbox that they need to cope, if programs don’t happen, they don’t get them.
- Initial live scan took a long time. I was originally disqualified because of record and got an override. Took almost 6 months.
- Process was easy – barrier was going to Downey, they’re strict with time, you can’t be 5 minutes late. Process was fast, about 3 months.
- Sometimes [clearance] comes back as quickly as two weeks.
- Onerous contract requirements.
- Probation didn’t pay for services after youth was released.
- Lots of restrictions on what to pay staff.
- No openings to apply for– there are no RFPs or they give the contracts to organizations they know.

## POC Finding:

The contracting and clearance process largely remains a mystery to providers and POC, and not knowing the process causes problems for programming providers across all Probation facilities. The lack of transparency and unclear communication of clearance approvals, denials, and expirations is a barrier to better relationships between Probation and the provider community.

## Recommendations:

- 01.** The processes to contract and/or provide services in Probation facilities should be made available in writing with an appropriate level of detail such that an agency or individual can know what to expect, rough timelines for the steps of the process, and be provided a list of charges that will cause automatic disqualification.
- 02.** Individuals denied clearance should be provided with the specific reason(s) for the denial.
- 03.** With a department wide clearance protocol in place, clearances should no longer be site specific. This use of a single, County-wide clearance would eliminate bureaucratic delays and allow providers to fill in for absent colleagues assigned to other facilities, preventing cancellations.
- 04.** There should be clearly identified points of contact within Probation's administrative structure and within each facility to address questions and concerns. When any of those individuals are no longer in that role, all agencies should be notified of a new permanent or temporary point of contact.
- 05.** Agencies and individuals need timely notification of expiration of clearances. Probation must consider that some providers indicated wait times between weeks and months, so expirations should be managed generously in advance to prevent any lapse in service provision.



# Data Management

- They ask our agencies to send list of cleared individuals at least 2x a year, as if Probation has lost track.
- Facilities are still using paper files and binders to track clearance/entry.
- No one could find my clearance.
- I have to take my clearance print out every time. There's always a problem.

## **POC Finding:**

Using loose leaf paper as a tracking system for clearances will inevitably lead to mistakes, and this not only hurts providers' ability to deliver programming but inhibits Probation's ability to be seen as professional, organized, and prepared.

## **Recommendations:**

- 01.** Connect appropriate administrative managers with facility specific administrators in charge of programming to create an electronic process in which data for all individuals cleared to enter any Probation facility can be centrally managed, disbursed, and emailed as needed. Each facility should have a way to access this information in the event that the facility specific administrators are absent.
- 02.** Provide agencies and individuals with clear documentation of their clearance and date of expiry so they may dispute errors as needed.



## Entering Facilities:

- No issues with Kilpatrick – communication is clear, even with staff changes.
- BJN – stuck in the front for 20 min to an hour. We don't have your clearance form, we don't see your name, etc.; 1-2x a month, makes provider late to go in to do programming.
- Bringing in needed technology is also problematic/inconsistent.
- Historically, used to get VISTO badges, but Probation stopped providing those to contracted folks.
- Some of the POs have been very helpful getting in the facilities.

### POC Findings:

Ease of entry to the facilities, including issues with clearances and the management of that data, varied widely. Kilpatrick was mentioned by name as having the best communication and process. The east camps and Dorothy Kirby Center were not points of focus for complaints and seem to be satisfactory experiences for the providers. Barry J. Nidorf was mentioned by providers as a varied experience, with numerous individuals pointing out a greatly improved process. A majority of issues as listed in the various categories above related to Los Padrinos.

### Recommendations:

- 01.** Both Kilpatrick and Barry J. stood out as having more organized and communicated programming processes. Utilize those administrations to replicate their processes across facilities, uniformly.
- 02.** Provide agencies and individuals with clear documentation of their clearance and date of expiry so they may dispute errors as needed.
- 03.** Apply standards for searches evenly across facilities and ensure that contracted companies are willing to adhere to the standards.



# Schedules and Probation- Initiated Cancellations:

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- Sometimes we are given notice the same day or 12am prior about sudden changes or cancellations, lack of communication and transparency about why these changes happens.
- I won't know if programming is canceled until I show up to the unit.
- Typically, any cancellations are communicated once we are in the lobby, sometimes we are held in the front if there is another CBO that went over their time, that's when we ask the front desk to call our unit and let them know that we'll be late.
- Probation cancels only once we've arrived for COVID outbreaks, double booking programming, fights, and claim that the "Kids are over-programmed". This happens across the board at all facilities.
- There are conflicts in the schedule Probation made with other programs, we are not told which programs are before or after ours. Sometimes other programs run long and then it interferes with our sessions. Are we able to have a copy of the calendar so we know?
- We've had issues with being double booked.
- Schedule changes make programming difficult.
- Youth notice the inconsistent programming.
- No one knows who the designated programming person is at LP or who to contact.
- Our organization did a schedule for all providers at the beginning of the "season" – knows months in advance. Announcement of a change from Probation happens morning of. Changes happen because of incidents in the units, people in their rooms. A couple of times at LP, found out the morning of that they couldn't get in because they are short staffed.
- When something changes that is told to them at the lobby. Probation relationship is getting better – sometimes get a heads up a day in advance.
- We often switch units to accommodate Probation.
- Reliance is on program ahead to wrap up on time, while relying on Probation to enforce the schedule.

## POC Finding:

Program providers at all facilities reported issues with Probation-initiated cancellations and receiving notification after they traveled to the site. There are issues with keeping fidelity to the schedule Probation creates that seem avoidable, including double booking, scheduled conflicts with recreation time, or allowing other programs to carry on outside their allotted time. Program providers seem to understand the need for flexibility and appear open to working on non-scheduled units when safety issues are present, though they expressed concern for youth who expected them.

## Recommendations:

01. When cancellation is called for, provider agencies need to be provided with reasonable advance notice, whenever possible. A point person at each facility should be responsible for providing these notices.
02. When cancellations are made upon a program provider's arrival to the facility, reasonable steps should be taken to discuss whether the program could be offered elsewhere in the facility at the provider's discretion.
03. When programming cancellations happen for any reason, the unit's staff and youth should be notified of such with reasonable advance notice, whenever possible.
04. One program should not be delayed due to other programming. Probation should clearly communicate expectations around respecting scheduled activity timeframes to providers and probation officers alike to encourage fidelity to the schedule.





# Culture

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- Constant struggle to figure out who the right person to contact is for any specific issue, emails and questions go unanswered.
- We need more communication and more buy-in from staff.
- LP has been a challenge since the merge.
- One provider reported “Terrific” experience with Probation administration at BJN, which included “Working collaboratively” and “Open communication”.
- When Providers need help: No point person from Probation; we use our person from our agency to make any contacts with Probation administration.
- At LP, more difficult since February. Lots of inconsistencies between units observed.
- The energy can be challenging, it all depends what has happened before our arrival, but we tell our staff that it’s not personal, and to try to engage even if it’s for a few seconds.
- Resentment from deployed staff and providers told “We’re not touching these kids, you’re on your own”, etc. Those resentments are from having to deal with programming but also from just having to be at LP.
- Apathy from staff at all facilities is really difficult because it requires staff to be deescalating while attempting to facilitate programming.
- Provider identified potential for safety concerns when officers are particularly disengaged, “They just watch and don’t do anything when there’s an altercation happening.”
- CBOs are made to feel like they’re a burden by staff.
- The culture is programming being treated as if it were a reward for kids who don’t deserve it.
- Probation officer attitudes and words communicating that youth deserve punishment.
- Actively discouraged from contracting with Probation by Probation, encouraged to contract with LACOE.
- Fight for power between Probation and youth is also problematic, where Probation is agitating youth.
- They (officers) act like they don’t want to be here and programming is just an extra thing to deal with.
- Never worried about safety because of strong relationships with youth and staff. Never felt safety was at risk.
- Probation lost the idea of whole person, whole day treatment.

- Inconsistency – some days there are programs, some days there are not, youth feel frustrated. Credible messengers able to talk to them about it.
- Lots of ego in the beginning, us vs. them. Trying to take Probation’s jobs. Barberin and Martinez at Barry J are a big help. Sat down and talked through differences.
- Friendly, professional staff.
- Officers can be pushy.

## **POC Finding:**

Similar to many findings made in other POC reports, the Probation Department continues to depend on the will of individual employees to set the tone in facilities via personal standards for expected practice and the way partnership is approached. In some cases, this approach is fine and yields mostly positive results, including at Barry J. Nidorf. In many instances, the lack of clear messaging from leadership about Probation’s views of partners, valuing the work of program providers, belief in rehabilitation, etc., creates environments that prevent meaningful, mutually supportive professional partnerships.

## **Recommendations:**

**01.** Probation should generate a set of direct and concrete practice behaviors associated with the facilitation of programming to be applied evenly across facilities and units and communicate these standards to all employees working in the facilities.

**02.** Probation leadership should develop a line of communication with the facilities and openly share with its employees the Department’s formal stance and commitment to professional partnerships and explain how that serves the goal of rehabilitation for young people. Emphasis of care and healing must be a top priority to strengthen the eradication of Departmental culture and narratives that imply youth deserve ongoing punishment.



# Engaging Youth into Programming:

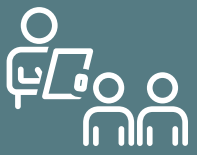
- The youth who are secluded, we are not able to approach. The probation staff just ask us to leave flyers for the youth. If we were able to approach them, we would be able provide information about resources for when they are released.
- When programming is turned away because staff say “no youth wants to participate”, we should still be able to enter, to come in and ask why youth do not want to participate, because it might also be how the program was presented to the youth by Probation. Probation might also be turning agencies and programming away as a form of punishment for the youth.
- Probation will say upon arrival (Nidorf, LP, less at camps) that youth aren’t interested and won’t let staff even go to unit to talk to kids

## POC Finding:

Various providers across facilities would like the ability to engage youth into programming.

## Recommendations:

- 01.** Program providers should be able to attempt to engage youth into their program, as long as it is safe to do so. This should be a standard protocol that is clearly communicated to all facility employees.



## Staffing:

- Not enough probation staff also affects providing the curriculum.
- Energy is combative.
- Staff usually scrambling and wondering who we are and trying to get us set up.
- Imposing.
- Different/Inconsistent experiences with P.O/s.
- Probation Officers become open when they understand that we are there to help youth and that we are working together to help youth.
- Probation Officers “need help, they’re tired”.
- We recognize how short staffed they are, they’re doing their best.
- Seniors at LP compound unit are a bit judgmental. My partner had tattoos and dressed in all black. And she was treated differently. I’m sure the P.O.s are skeptical about this person and their impact on the rehabilitation of the young people.
- Assumptions are made about program providers, especially those with lived experience. This is done unconsciously; we love all the staff and they work hard so I feel bad saying this. They do this not on purpose.
- Shout out to Probation staff , they always give us a heads up on any incidents, and the energy of the unit. There are a lot of Probation staff that is supportive.
- Inconsistencies with staff at LP is really frustrating, staff have to introduce themselves every single time they come to a unit and have to build rapport from scratch with staff.

### POC Findings:

There was much recognition on behalf of program providers on how stressed and stretched thin Probation officers in Los Padrinos are. There were wide variations described in the behaviors and interactions with Probation officers across facilities, particularly for people with lived experience and non-conventional appearances. Again, some had positive experiences with staff and levels of staffing were acceptable to provide programs, but the overwhelming majority had experiences at various facilities that damaged Probation’s image. Judgmental attitudes shown toward providers was echoed by various providers.

### Recommendations:

01. Accurate and updated programming schedules need to be posted in all units to help staff prepare for their shift.
02. Implicit bias trainings and specialized trainings that address working with credible messengers or any providers whose staff have lived experience should be mandated for all facility employees to reduce bias and help promote equity, inclusion, and workplace dignity for all.



**In addition to the above findings and recommendations, we asked providers “What recommendations would you have for probation leadership to make bringing programming into the facilities easier? What does the department need to start, or continue doing?” The responses given were:**

- College fair and resource fairs and graduations are great, but need to be more often, some of the more challenging youth also deserve to participate and need more of these resources.
- When youth are reprimanded, they get their phone calls taken away and it affects the way they come into our sessions.
- Giving/creating a plan with youth for when they are released, “planting the seed”.
- We’d like Leadership to reiterate that we (CBOs) are here to help them, and we are in this together.
- Adapting – we understand leadership changes are challenging, but need to communicate to help programs run smoothly. Probation should do a roundtable with new staff and CBOs.
- Continue working with DYD as the contractor. Give extra money to DYD to find more services, especially money they aren’t spending.
- Lighten up purse strings.
- Hire more staff to ensure support and support staff.
- Give support to continue the great attitudes of the staff who are coming to work.
- Start seeing the programs as important as school.
- Enforcing the schedule.
- Communication is key – especially keeping the youth as the big picture focus.