

Board of Pardons & Paroles Structured Decision Making

Members of the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles and board staff have adopted the use of an objective instrument designed to assist board members in parole decision making. This tool was designed by Dr. Ralph Serin of Canada and is being implemented in the states through the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), utilizing the latest research in recidivism reduction. South Dakota's Parole Board was awarded specialized technical assistance through the NIC to be trained in implementing this tool.

The Structured Decision Making Framework (SDMF) acts as a guideline for parole board members to help them reach consistent, transparent and defensible release decisions. The structured approach guides parole board members through the deliberation process of making parole decisions by considering the offender's information that has been demonstrated to be closely linked to positive post-release performance.

In South Dakota, Board members utilize the SDMF to guide their decision making in discretionary cases. An offender's risk assessment scores and information from all domains ["Aggravating (A)", "Mitigating (M)", or "No impact (N)"] are considered before a decision summary is produced and a final decision is reached.

Board members utilize one coding sheet and one decision summary per hearing panel. Domains and proper coding may be discussed before, during, or after the hearing until an agreement between the panel is reached.

Domains of the SDMF include:

- Criminal history;
- Ability to control behavior;
- Responsivity;
- Institutional and community behavior;
- Offender change;
- Release plan;
- Case specific factors; and
- Conflicting information.