A Postscript

to

Maya Kearney’s Ethnographic Assessment of
the DC Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA)

Further Recommendations for MORCA to Consider from CuSAG’s Director

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September 25, 2015.
Introduction

As the academic advisor to the author of this report, Ms. Maya Kearney, I would like to thank Mr. Thornton, MORCA’s Executive Director, for providing Ms. Kearney the opportunity to carry out her internship with that agency during three months of the summer of 2014. Conducting a successful internship is one of the major requirements for students in the Masters of Applied Anthropology (MAA) program at the University of Maryland, College Park. This report is based on that internship experience. I wanted Ms. Kearney to do something that I thought would be beneficial to the agency, beyond any assistance she might provide to MORCA’s overwhelming workload with limited agency funding. Thus early in this process, Maya and I met with Mr. Thornton to explore what else might she do beyond assisting in its normal workload, and his response was to help develop a White Paper of its activities and progress.

The idea of conducting an ethnographic assessment is a concept that I came up with many years ago to accommodate organizations like MORCA, who did not want a formal evaluation, which is most often a measurement of organizational success in meeting its proposed outcomes. These organizations instead wanted me, or CuSAG, to simply document what they were doing, and recommend how they might do it better in order to improve program strategies that meet the objectives of their missions. Thus, the concept of an ethnographic assessment meant not the dependence on quantitative and other measurement methods, but the use of ethnographic methods such as the analysis of organizational and other relevant documents, ethnographic observations, and informal conversational interviews with significant staff members.

We had initially hoped that Maya would analyze her data and complete her report by the end of the 2014 calendar year. However, due to the demands of her schoolwork, she could not find the time to immerse herself in the analysis of her internship data until the summer of 2015, following the successful completion of her degree. But even if this report is later than we had initially planned, we hope that MORCA can find some value in its findings and recommendations.

At the same time, although I am trying to enjoy my retirement, I continue to have a strong interest in the issue of successful prison-to-community reentry, and the fate of MORCRA as an agency under the local government model for addressing those issues. Thus, as a post retirement avocation, I hope to continue to find ways to better understand MORCA’s work by assisting the agency in achieving its mission. To that end, in the following sections of this Postscript to Maya Kearney’s White Paper, I offer MORCA several recommendations beyond those offered by Ms. Kearney in her report.
POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 1: Periodic Lunch Meetings with MORCA’s Executive Director.

A year has passed since Ms. Kearney completed her internship, to the completion of her White Paper. I am interested to learn more about MORCA, and what has been going on at the agency during that year, as well as what is being planned going forward. As such, if MORCA’s Executive Director, Mr. Thornton, is receptive to the idea, I would like to travel periodically into D.C., have lunch with him, hear about what is going on, and provide an ear regarding challenges and high points in MORCA’s work. I would also like to use my visits to try to explore how CuSAG and I might provide some technical assistance in following through with and broadening Ms. Kearney’s recommendations.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 2: Establish an Ongoing Relationship with the University of Maryland’s Cultural System’s Analysis Group (CuSAG).

Ms. Kearney’s first recommendation is: “MORCA should continue to work within the government to secure more resources, both staffing and fiduciary, in order to enhance its services to returning citizens, and to broaden its partnership relationships with community, academic, faith-based, local business, and non-profit organizations.” This recommendation has two parts upon which I would like to make further recommendations. I will focus on the second part first, of broadening its partnership relationships, particular with academic partnerships, by establishing an ongoing MORCA partnership with CuSAG. This would allow us to continue the work started by Ms. Kearney, and to follow through with some of the collaborative suggestions to follow. To initiate this partnership, I will volunteer to be a member of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), primarily so that I can be aware of what the issues are, and hopefully I will have something useful to contribute.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 3: Collaborating on Securing Funding to Establish a MORCA Based Research and Evaluation (R&E) Unit by first Hiring an R&E Director.

Now I turn to the first part of Ms. Kearney’s first recommendation, “…secure more resources, both staffing…” by offering my recommendation to include additional funds to employ a Director of Research and Evaluation (R&E). Perhaps I and/or CuSAG may then provide some assistance in pursuing funds to build a MORCA based R&E Department. (The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), which is primarily responsible for supervising and re-incarcerating returning citizens has a relatively large R&E unit. It would seem that it would be as important to have a R&E unit at MORCA, an organization which is concerned with preventing recidivism by responding to the neglected human needs of returning citizens).

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 4: MORCA Should Expand its Network of Referral Organizations and Act More as a Coordinator of Reentrant Service Referrals.

This Postscript Recommendation is the same as Ms. Kearney’s second recommendation, which also consists of two parts. The first part reads: “MORCA should develop an active strategy to create a referral network structure that would include the successful recruitment of a larger number of referral organization and expand the rage of service locations.” I believe that this
work could be simply an expansion of those organizations that are included in the CJCC’s “Resources Locator”.

CuSAG and I may be able to provide some technical assistance in increasing the number of organizations in the referral service network in that about 5 years ago I began developing a database of D.C. community based organizations (CBOs) that provided basic human needs (e.g., housing, employment, education/literacy, etc.) assistance to lower income residents, including returning citizens. This has not been a funded activity, and something that I engage in periodically with some of my students. Nevertheless, we have identified more than 70 such organizations. I would be happy to merge my organizational database with our recommended MORCA R&E unit’s effort to move forward on Ms. Kearney’s recommendation to establish a referral network of more organizations.

I also agree with the second part of Ms. Kearney’s second recommendation that within this expanded referral structure, MORCA would act more as a coordinator of referral network activities, rather than attempting to respond to a broad range of services in house. This would result in an enhanced MORCA capacity to: (1) match individual reentrant needs with the service specialties of specific organizations; (2) provide a larger number of returning citizens services (in house or through referral); (3) expand the locations of where services might be received; (4) reduce service duplications; and (5) broaden the range and effectiveness of the reentrant needs being addressed.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 5: The D.C. Government Should Provide MORCA Funding to Establish a Computerized System for the Storage and Easy Retrieval of Data Related to Most if not all of its Program Activities.

Ms. Kearney’s third recommendation states: “The D.C. government should provide a budget increase to include funds to establish a referral database for MORCA to track and maintain referrals as well as monitor its program activities leading to desired annual outcomes, evaluations of those outcomes, and justifications for future budget modifications.”

However, beyond simply establishing a database for tracking referrals, I recommend that MORCA seek funding for putting in place a broader computerized system for the storage and retrieval of all types of data that might be generated from the range of MORCA activities. Such a system would greatly enhance MORCA’s capacity for achieving other desired outcomes related to its mission, and those of the city in relationship to returning citizen community reintegration and prevention of recidivism.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6: Using the Cultural Ecology of Health and Change (the CEHC) in Recommending Additional MORCA Possibilities.

All the recommendations that have been proposed thus far have been informed by the Ethnographically Informed Community & Cultural Research Systems (the EICCRS), one of the

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four subsystems of the Cultural Ecology of Health and Change (the CEHC). The CEHC is a community based participatory research (CBPR) system that has evolved from my 40+ years career straddling anthropology and community based public health. From this point forward, I will propose additional recommendations for MORCA to consider based first on the EICCARS, and then on the other three CEHC subsystems which are: (1) The CEHC’s Project Design and Implementation Planning (the PDIP); (2) Project Implementation Programs (the PIPs); and (3) Ethnographic Assessment and Evaluation Programs (the EAES).

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.1: Advising MORCA’s Proposed Research and Evaluation Unit in the Development and Implementation of Other Research Activities Using the EICCARS.

The EICCARS is a 14- research method toolkit, including those used by Ms. Kearney during her internship that resulted in her White Paper. Among the methods that she used were the analysis of secondary data, ethnographic observations, participant observations, and informal conversational interviews. These are similar methods that I would be utilizing in the periodic lunch meetings with Mr. Thornton that I recommend earlier, as opportunities for informal conversational interviews. I also would like to follow up with Maya’s use of participant observation practices of shadowing Mr. Thornton and some of his staff members as they carry out significant MORCA activities, such as their periodic visits to correctional facilities, MORCA’s “Family Appreciation Day”, or the W.I.R.E’s annual leadership conferences. Because I will personally have little time for such activities, I will also seek MORCA’s permission to have my students assist me with taking notes at some of these activities as part of their requirement with my ongoing class in Applied Urban Ethnography. Postscript Recommendation 5 above, establishing a MORCA computerized data system is also informed by one of the EICCARS’s programs, which has the title, the Development of Computerized Data Storage and Retrieval. If MORCA is receptive to the idea, I am open to utilizing the EICCARS toolkit to advise its recommended R & E director in other agency research activities.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.2: Advising MORCA in Developing and Implementing an Annual Project Culture Development Workshop.

As stated above, beyond the EICCARS, another one of the CEHC subsystems is Project Design and Implementation Planning (the PDIP). The PDIP actually consists of only one program, a 1-3 day Project Culture Development (PCD) Workshop. The goal of the PCD Workshop is to convene significant project (or organizational) staff, and representatives from various stakeholders, for the purpose of creating a project design/implementation plan (or what some refer to as a “logic model” that has everyone “on the same page” regarding the project’s (or organization’s): (1) desired outcomes; (2) strategies and tasks for achieving those outcomes; (3)

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2 For more information on the CEHC, go to: http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/WorkingPapers/IntroCECH.pdf
3 For more information on the EICCARS subsystem go to: http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/WorkingPapers/IntroEICCARS.pdf.
role assignments of the individuals or partner organizations in implementing strategies and tasks; and (4) timelines or schedules for achieving each task, strategy, and eventually the objectives to which each set of tasks and strategies is related.

The PCD Workshop was created because over my long career of working with teams implementing community based interventions (CBIs), I have found that among the primary reasons that they rarely achieved their desired outcomes was because there was not a shared and clear understanding of:

1) What are the desired outcomes would those involved like to see achieved?
2) What strategies and tasks should be implemented to achieve desired outcomes?
3) Who is assigned to carry out specific strategies and tasks?
4) What will be the timelines for achieving specific tasks, strategies, and outcome?

I have often found that there were leaders of potentially very effective initiatives, who were conceptually clear about their desired outcomes, and sometimes the strategies for achieving them. But they were not good at grounding their staff or collaborators in their vision; not had mechanisms in place for establishing such a project or organizational culture. Thus, those who were needed to achieve the leader’s vision were often not clear about the implementation of that vision, while some lamented a sense of being part of a shared project or organizational culture. This would often lead to an implementation process by some of conducting activities not related to the vision of the leadership, or the organization’s or project’s mission. The larger the group of stakeholders involved in the initiative, the more complex the issues, and the more likely are these types of undesirable outcomes would occur. Thus the PCD Workshop was developed to create a shared culture in enhancing that there is a shared plan of achieving the project or organization’s desired outcomes, through a clear understanding of the task, strategies, assignments, and timelines for effectively achieving such outcomes.

While Mr. Thornton may or may not readily accept that MORCA’s mission, and its strategies for achieving this mission may not be shared by a number of MORCA’s stakeholders, we have repeated anecdotal evidence that this may indeed be the case. Whenever I bring up MORCA to other D.C. organizations that also work with returning citizens, the point is often made of a lack of communication between MORCA and its various stakeholders, in terms of what it is that MORCA wants to achieve, and how it goes about its business of getting there. But as I stated in the preceding paragraph, this is a common problem that I have found with other organizations—so why should it not be the case with MORCA? So I recommend my advising its newly recommended R&E Director in the design and implementation of an annual PCD Workshop, for at least one day, if not more4. The Workshop would close with at least a skeleton of an Implementation Plan or Logic Model that I would continue to advise MORCA’s R&E Unit until it is completed.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.3: Advising MORCA in the Implementation of its Implementation Plan (or Logic Model).

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4 At least 2 days is the ideal, because at least one full day is needed to work through the different components of the planning matrix (desired outcomes, strategies and tasks, timelines and assignments) and another day to create an implementation plan that can be efficiently followed during the different phases of a project’s implementation.
The purpose of the CEHC’s third subsystem, *Project Implementation Programs* (the PIPs), is simply to carry out a project or organization’s Implementation Plan (or logic model) that resulted from its PCD Workshop. One of the desired outcomes of the PCD Workshop is to develop a shared implementation plan that organizes a project or organization’s desired outcomes, strategies, tasks, assignments, and timelines into *project phases* (e.g., every 3 months). A project’s PIPs consist of developing project strategies and tasks organized into phases (e.g., 3 or 4 months each), and are carried out by whomever they are assigned by the deadlines of each project phase. This process helps to make sure that project activities continue to focus on desired outcomes, and to make modifications in implementation where and when necessary. This provides an iterative approach to project implementation, in which each new implementation phase is informed by what is learned from preceding phases, and effective modifications can be made in subsequent implementation phases.

**POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.4: Create a Committee Structure Based on Meeting the Basic Needs of Returning Citizens.**

I recommend that included in the desired outcomes generated during the PCD Workshop would be the enhancement of services to returning citizens that are basic human basic needs and challenges of reentry; i.e. housing, employment, education/literacy, physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, etc. I also recommend that a committee structure be developed during the Workshop, with several committees, each focusing on one of the specific basic needs. I also recommend that the Director of the R&E hold meetings with these committees at the end of each implementation phase to discuss issues related to reenlistment needs, and strategies for enhancing services to meet those needs.

**POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.5: MORCA’s Support for My Recommendation to the D.C. Government of Contracting with CuSAG as MORCA’s External Evaluator.**

The reason for this recommendation is that in addition to adding a R&E unit, I strongly believe that MORCA would greatly benefit from having an external evaluator (not in MORCA’s employment) that is empathetic to what the agency is attempting to do. I also believe that CuSAG should be that evaluator, not simply because of my empathy as to what it is trying to do; but also because I would bring my *Ethnographic Assessment and Evaluation Programs* (the EAES) to this work. The EAES has four subsystems of programs: (1) FORMATIVE assessment and evaluation; (2) PROCESS or IMPLEMENTATION assessment and evaluation; (3) OUTCOME assessment and evaluation; and (4) IMPACT assessment and evaluation. The work carried out by Ms. Kearney during her internship and White Paper was based on one of the EAES formative assessment programs, using methodologies from the EICCARS toolkit. The recommended PCD Workshop is another of the EAES’s formative assessment programs. Monitoring the implementation of a yearly project implementation plan (that emerges from the annual PCD Workshop) is one of the EAES programs in process and implementation assessment. The assessment and evaluation of the achievement of MORCA’s annual desired outcomes would utilize the EAES approach to outcome evaluation. And the EAES approach to impact assessment and evaluation would be measured in terms of yearly increases in the number of returning citizens served, and the absence of recidivism (re-incarceration).
The value of the EAES approach and evaluation would also be of value to MORCA, because of its philosophy of not simply being a neutral evaluator, but also to offer assistance through the process of needs and resources assessment (formative), project design or implementation plan development (formative), project implementation (process assessment), as well as outcome assessment/evaluator). Another value that CuSAG could bring to MORCA as its external assessment/evaluator is that Dr. James Peterson of the George Washington University’s School of Public Health and I have recently created what we are calling a Network of Ethnographic, Cultural, and Community Health Sciences (the NECCHS). The NECCHS is an interdisciplinary group of individuals, any of whom we may call on to collaborate on community health research and interventions. Thus, when carrying out any complex research or intervention process, we can match an expertise with various project needs. Addressing issues of community reintegration of returning citizens is one of those areas of significant complexity in need of such interdisciplinary expertise.

POSTSCRIPT RECOMMENDATION 6.6: MORCA’s Support for My Recommendation to the D.C. Government to Partner ORCA and the University of the District of Columbia in Establishing a Masters of Science (MS) in Reintegration Management.

Since the late1980s, the U.S. has led the world in the number of its citizens incarcerated, such that by the turn of the 21st century that number has ballooned to 2 million persons. In a Forward to Ms. Kearney’s report, I wrote that when I first started exploring the statistics underlying these numbers in the early 1990s there were a number of questions that I had regarding the future in relationship to what I call this U.S. Incarceration Epidemic5. Because of the disproportionate representation among African Americans, my work has focused on the impact of this Epidemic on this population, which were reflected in my concerns. However, these questions are relevant for American society as a whole. Among my concerns were the following:

1) With so many young people of color (African Americans, and Latinos as time went on) being incarcerated, what will be the impact of prisons becoming major socializing institutions for so many young Americans?
2) What will be the impact of the African American Incarceration Epidemic, not only on African American individuals, but also on African American family structure, African American communities, and on the broader U.S. society and culture?
3) Aren't U.S. policy makers asking themselves what happens when these people are released and return to their communities and society? And what are they doing to address reentry issues as a preventative against recidivism?

With regards to the first question in item 3, since the turn of the 21st century, across the country about 650 incarcerated persons are released per year. It is also estimated that about 65% of those returning citizens return to lock up within three years following their release.

With regards to the second question in item 3, MORCA is an example of one strategy of what a municipal government, Washington, D.C., is doing to address the issues of reentry as a preventative to recidivism. I have not done the research to identify how many public (part of the local government system) organizations exist across the country, but I am convinced of the relevance of this type of organization for a city like D.C., where it has been estimated that 10% of the city’s adult population have incarceration histories.

Ms. Kearney’s White Paper assessment of MORCA highlights both the broad needs and challenges experienced by returning citizens, as well as the extensive needs and challenges of MORCA, and probably other D.C. organizations trying to respond to those of returning citizens. While we will leave it to others to do assessments of these complexities in other U.S. cities, we can assume that D.C. also represents a good model of similar issues in other locales.

Given this background, I have become convinced that a masters degree program that would prepare professionals for managing reentry issues would help to overcome some of the issues across the U.S. society that have resulted from this incarceration epidemic that the society has experienced over the past 30 years. I recommend that a partnership be establish between the Government of the District of Columbia, the University of the District of Columbia, MORCA, and other organizations involved in providing services to returning citizens, to establish such a program. I propose that such a program would admit traditional students with bachelor degrees, but also those who might have extensive professional experience that might substitute for bachelor degree training, including returning citizens.