



National Institute of Justice

R e s e a r c h i n B r i e f

Jeremy Travis, Director

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Issues and Findings

Discussed in the Brief: A model process for community corrections agencies' strategic planning and evaluation that relies on performance-based measures. The NIJ-sponsored project was based on the idea that performance-based measures could provide agencies with a mechanism for assessing what they do and how well they do it. Given the proper learning environment and a system of structured feedback, community corrections agencies that adopt the model process—developed by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA)—could discover ways to improve outcomes and achieve desired goals.

Key issues: Tremendous growth in the population of probationers and parolees has stretched the capacities of community corrections agencies to the limit and, concurrently, increased demands for measurable accomplishments. Other factors contributing to the pressured state of these organizations include:

- A climate of heightened public concern for safety, demands for accountability, and diminished or inadequate resources.
- New practices for managing the offender population that promise greater effectiveness and efficiency but require changes in the status quo.

continued . . .

Implementing Performance-Based Measures in Community Corrections

by Harry N. Boone, Jr., Ph.D. and Betsy A. Fulton

Traditionally, low recidivism rates have been used as the primary—and often sole—measure of success for community corrections programs. The 1990's have brought growth to community corrections organizations along with demands for accountability and fiscal restraint. In a climate where accomplishments mean more than tradition, organizational viability depends increasingly on strategic planning, systematic monitoring, and ongoing evaluation of performance against stated goals and objectives, so that, if necessary, mid-course corrections can be made.

In 1993, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored a project by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) to develop a model process for devising and implementing alternative outcome measures that could be used by community corrections agencies to evaluate staff and overall agency performance. This Research in Brief provides a rationale for these measures and a step-by-step discussion of the model process.

Developing an agency-specific strategy

Rationale for creating performance-based measures. Performance-based measures provide internal and external feedback at all organizational levels about the relationships between practices, objectives, and results. Additionally, they reflect decisions about the business of community corrections: who the customers are, what they want, and how their needs will be determined and met. To the degree that performance measures are not integral to standard business practices, feedback is less credible, less useful, and even contrary to an organization's objectives.

The APPA model was designed to provide a framework for developing agency-specific performance-based measures (see exhibit 1). The process requires an organization to examine its values, define its mission, articulate its goals, design activities for their accomplishment, and create measures for evaluating their effectiveness. Adoption of these key organizational practices enhances an agency's chances for achieving desired results.

Issues and Findings

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- Little guidance for needed modifications of policy and practice from the traditional focus on reducing recidivism.

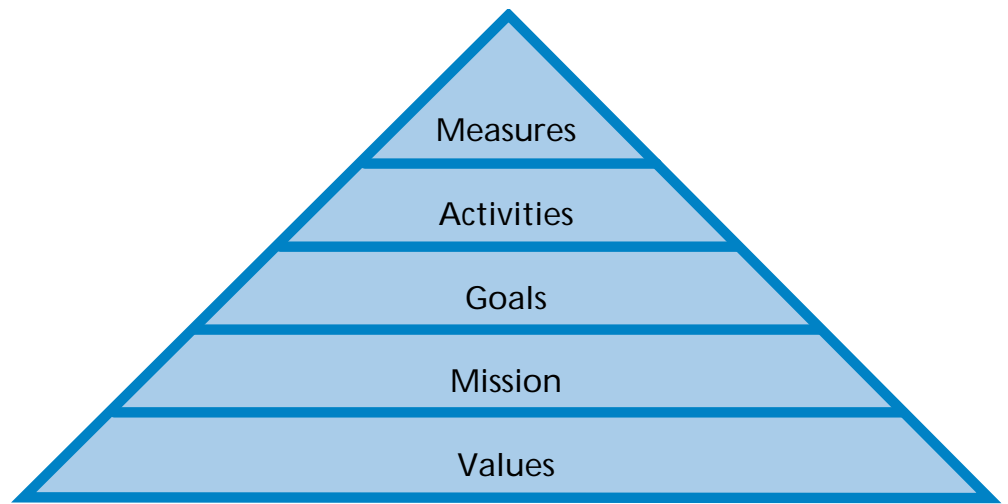
Key findings: The APPA model is based on a five-step process:

- Clarify values.
- Define agency mission.
- Develop organizational goals.
- Implement activities to meet agency goals.
- Evaluate performance.

Expected benefits of this process for community corrections agencies include:

- Better assessment of activities (e.g., treatment and services, surveillance, enforcement) that define the profession.
- Clear differentiation between long-term goals (such as reduced recidivism) and short-term objectives (such as increased probation completion rate).
- “Results-oriented management” through establishment of benchmarks and standards on which to base organizational improvement and judge success or failure.
- Creation of a learning environment that contributes to organizational growth through structured feedback and continuous monitoring and evaluation.
- Ability to successfully compete for limited public funds by demonstrating agency value.

Exhibit 1: A Framework for Developing Performance-Based Measures



Implementing the model. Evaluation, in any form, can be discomfoting. Management and staff often resist performance measures because they are threatening and represent change. Involving a representative cross section of staff in selecting performance measures can help to overcome this resistance in several ways. It increases organizational learning regarding the tradeoffs involved in performance measurement. Is it, for example, more important to measure the number of contacts made or to evaluate what happened during those contacts? Staff input increases buy-in and decreases normal fears and opposition to evaluation. The involvement of line personnel and supervisors in the developmental process is critical. Line officers are responsible for performing the activities designed to achieve organizational goals, and supervisors must assess this performance.

The five steps in exhibit 1 could be used to develop a comprehensive approach to performance-based measures. Allowing sufficient time for a thorough developmental phase can clarify an agency’s

values, mission, and methods. It can be enlightening and promote renewed understanding and commitment.

Step 1—clarifying values. Values are principles, standards, or qualities considered worthwhile, and they represent the fundamental beliefs on which agency practices are based (see exhibit 2 for an example). The first, and perhaps most significant, step in developing a performance-based strategy is to clarify and communicate agency values. Values shape decisions, actions, and results. They are the motivating force behind agency policies and practices, from hiring officers, to case supervision of offenders, to monitoring and evaluation.

Step 2—defining a mission. The second step in developing a performance-based measurement strategy is to develop a mission statement that reflects the organization’s values and its strategic intent. A mission statement should clarify organizational purpose—e.g., “to protect the community,” without spelling out the method for achieving it. Develop-

Exhibit 2: Maricopa County Adult Probation Department

Values Statement

- We believe that individuals can change and that we can be instrumental in directing that change.
- We believe in being sensitive to the needs of victims of crime.
- We believe in promoting and maintaining a positive, safe, and healthy work environment.

ment of an attainable, yet inspirational, mission statement can be a long and involved process. The end result, however, is worth the expenditure of time. A strong mission promotes organizational cohesiveness and increases overall effectiveness.

Step 3—clarifying organizational goals. A broadly stated mission, while desirable, can be overwhelming. A key question is left unanswered—how does the agency become what it aspires to be? The next step in developing a performance-based measurement strategy, clarifying organizational goals, begins to answer this question by bringing the mission into focus and breaking it down into manageable, achievable components (see exhibit 3 for an example of a probation department’s mission statement and organizational goals). Program goals map out the future and provide a standard against which success can be measured. They specify the intentions of the agency and direct organizational activities.

The importance of goal clarification cannot be overstated. Goals that are too ambitious or ambiguous can create organizational confusion; one goal may be achieved at the expense of another. One solution to this problem lies in

setting specific and separate goals for the short and long terms. For example, initiatives that aim to immediately deter crime or incapacitate criminals may be effective short-range goals, but rehabilitation, which involves behavioral change over time, is a goal that can only be reached in slow and steady increments.¹ Preventing recidivism is a long-term goal, which can be supported by short-term goals (e.g., enforcing court orders and securing treatment resources for offenders). By assigning goals to the appropriate timeframe, agencies can clarify intentions and guide operations toward program success.

Step 4—selecting activities that support organizational goals. Selecting the supervisory style or method that supports an agency’s stated goals is the next step in developing an agency-specific performance-based measurement strategy. Methods of supervision are generally discussed in terms of whether community corrections is oriented more toward social

services or law enforcement. The purpose here is not to advocate one orientation over the other, but to encourage agencies to examine their organizational philosophies and supervisory styles within the context of established goals. In this way, the roles of individuals can be integrated with operational procedures.

Performance-based measurements assist agencies in determining the activities that lead to goal achievement. Results-oriented data move the debate from considerations of style to those of effectiveness; activities change as agencies enhance their knowledge and understanding of what “works.”

Step 5—identifying performance-based measures. In depth exploration of agency values, mission, goals, and activities, as outlined in the APPA model, supports a measurement strategy that assesses and communicates an agency’s purpose and performance. As one researcher has stated, “Once the agency has identified its goals and the methods it uses to address each

Exhibit 3: Maricopa County Adult Probation Department

Mission Statement

The mission of the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department is to provide information to the court and provide community-based sanctions for adult offenders. This is accomplished by conducting investigations, enforcing court orders, and providing treatment opportunities.

Organizational Goals

- To conduct complete and thorough investigations and provide the court with accurate, objective information and professional evaluations and recommendations.
- To secure treatment resources for probationers.
- To assist probationers to remain in the community through appropriate intervention and supervision.
- To assess the behavior of probationers and bring to the court’s attention those offenders who are in serious noncompliance with court orders.
- To foster professional development, safety, and well-being of staff.
- To set direction consistent with the department’s mission and values.

goal, it can specify objective (measurable) criteria that determine the extent to which the activities are being performed.”² Typically, performance measurement in community corrections has tended to focus on either process (e.g., number of supervision contacts) or outcome (e.g., recidivism). One has excluded the other, when, realistically, measures of both are necessary.

Process measures are needed to determine if a program has been implemented as designed. Specifically, they provide a mechanism to:

- Identify program goals.
- Consider causal linkages to criminal behavior.
- Specify the program’s target population.
- Describe what services are actually being delivered.
- Investigate unanticipated consequences.
- Search for explanations of success, failure, and change.³

Process measures may include the number and type of contacts, the number of referrals for treatment, the style of interaction between officers and offenders, or the extent to which offenders were appropriately classified (see exhibit 4 for an example of a process measure). Processes can be examined through observation of program activities, interviews, and case audits.⁴

Outcome measures are needed to assess a program’s impact. As previously discussed, multiple intermediate outcomes should be measured in addition to a long-term result such as rate of recidivism. “Because recidivism-centered findings provide administrators

with no direction for program improvement, they are routinely pushed aside with no corrective actions taken.”⁵ Outcome measures that more effectively guide program improvements may include rates of offender employment, drug abuse reduction, offender completion of probation/parole (see exhibit 5), or risk-level reduction.

If only outcomes are examined, little direction is available for program policymaking. Examining processes, however, helps to explain why such effects were produced and how practices can be modified to produce desired outcomes.⁶ By controlling processes, agencies can control outcomes. One researcher has stated that as much as 85 percent of undesirable results are associated with any process controllable by management, while 15 percent can be attributed to individuals.⁷ Organizations seeking to prioritize how they spend their evaluation resources should consider addressing process measures first to obtain fundamental feedback on whether services are being delivered according to specifications. If the feedback confirms that processes are meeting agency targets,

then questions about outcomes are meaningful. The importance of accurately distinguishing among these types of measures cannot be overemphasized.

As Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives and “reinvention of government” became popular, so did the awareness that public organizations have both internal and external customers, as well as suppliers.⁸ Hence, customer satisfaction is being introduced as a key objective for community corrections. One purpose of performance-based measures is to increase the understanding of relationships between customers, processes, and outcomes.

Staff evaluation using performance-based measures

Employee performance evaluations will change dramatically in terms of performance criteria, employee/supervisor interaction, and corrective actions. Staff will be held accountable for the quality and results, rather than the frequency, of their efforts. Being held accountable for results can be a

Exhibit 4: Sample Process Measure

Degree of Accuracy and Completeness of Presentencing Investigations (PSI's)	
Objective	90 percent of all PSI's will be complete and accurate when they are submitted to the court.
Data Elements	Number of PSI's evaluated by supervisors, number of PSI's rated complete and accurate by supervisors.
Formula	(Number of PSI's rated complete and accurate by supervisors ÷ number of PSI's evaluated) x 100.
Sample	Results of evaluation on this process measure: 60 (10 percent) of the 585 PSI's completed in the first quarter of 1994 were randomly selected for review. 51 of the PSI's met minimum standards for accuracy and completeness; thus, 85 percent $[(51 \div 60) \times 100]$ of all PSI's were rated complete and accurate. Therefore, the objective was not achieved.

Exhibit 5: Sample Outcome Measure

Percentage of Offenders Recommended for and Successfully Completing Probation/Parole Supervision	
Objective	70 percent of all offenders recommended for, and placed on, community supervision will successfully complete the required period of supervision.
Data Elements	Number of offenders recommended for community supervision, number of offenders successfully completing supervision.
Formula	$(\text{Number of offenders successfully completing supervision} \div \text{number of offenders recommended for community supervision}) \times 100$
Sample Results of an Evaluation Using this Outcome Measure	430 offenders were recommended for, and placed on, community supervision during the first quarter of 1990. Of those 430 offenders, 318 successfully completed their terms of supervision. Therefore, 74 percent $([318 \div 430] \times 100)$ of all offenders recommended for community supervision during 1994 successfully completed their supervision requirements. Objective was achieved.

frightening prospect for employees at all levels of the organization, but if accountability is not established, performance-based measurements are of little use.

The employees of an organization are responsible for planning and delivering services or products, and it has been observed, “what gets measured gets done.”⁹ Programs that do not closely align employee evaluations with process and outcome requirements should expect neither implementation according to design nor achievement of desired goals.

When held accountable for results, officers become concerned. Managers can promote acceptance and minimize skepticism by involving officers in the development of performance-based measurements and by listening to their concerns. Managers also must commit resources and provide the training required for staff to achieve the results for which they are to be held accountable. Above all, it should be made

clear that the principle of accountability will be applied throughout the organization—at line, managerial, and administrative levels. Accountability should be presented and perceived as an opportunity for professional growth rather than as a threat to the status quo. Managers must lead the organization through the rough spots.

With the proper learning environment and structured feedback based on meaningful performance criteria, staff can be expected to work to improve outcomes and achieve desired goals. The more control people are given over their work, the more motivated, productive, and effective they are. Staff who are evaluated using performance-based measurement are free to employ creative approaches to goal achievement, and they are provided with meaningful feedback that demonstrates their worth to the customer (i.e., the offender), the organization, and the community.

Analyzing, reporting, and applying results

The final phase in the cyclical process of performance-based measurement involves analysis, reporting, and application of results. Analysis and reporting highlight positive outcomes, uncover ineffective practices, and guide agencies to explore alternative methods for achieving organizational goals. If properly implemented, a system of performance-based measurement will keep agencies at the vanguard of community corrections practices.

What if performance-based evaluations contain bad news? One way to prepare for this situation is to anticipate unfavorable results.¹⁰ Agencies that pursue performance measures as “proof” that their methods “work” set the stage for certain disappointment. If, however, an organization adopts the view that “feedback,” rather than “proof” is the objective, disappointing results become an opportunity to examine alternatives.

Community corrections agencies must accept responsibility for poor outcomes and explore the reasons behind them. Probation and parole originated with the idea that people can change, but absolute certainty or success is impossible when human behavior is involved. By testing, modifying, and retesting programs and practices, community corrections agencies and professionals can learn about “what works.” Key stakeholders within the criminal justice system and the community at large should be regularly informed of program outcomes. An honest, straightforward approach to reporting outcomes is essential in order to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation.

Sharing both positive and negative outcomes will earn greater respect and credibility with all audiences. Measuring performance demonstrates a commitment to improved practices, and key information about agency struggles may elicit support and assistance for those improvements. The content and format of communiqués should be carefully considered: long, comprehensive reports are of little value or interest to most audiences. Information should be concise and, wherever possible, in graphic form.

Through appropriate analysis, reporting, and application of results, community corrections agencies can demonstrate their commitment to achieving stated goals. Successful agencies are actively involved in learning; they pursue information and work to enhance their knowledge. They modify, adapt, and accept the challenges that come with change and growth. Community corrections agencies that fully participate in performance-based measurement have much to gain and even more to contribute.

Conclusion

This model for developing a performance-based measurement strategy can assist agencies in exploring important organizational issues. By clarifying values, mission, and goals, agencies can more readily identify methods for measuring, evaluating, and communicating agency performance and accomplishments.

Change in any form produces anxiety and discomfort, but if it is controlled, rational, and purposeful, change can stimulate positive growth. A performance-based measurement strategy can ease the perception of accountability as a threat by setting clear ex-

pectations and standards. An appropriate performance-based measurement strategy:

- Guides agencies and their personnel through the change process.
- Provides agencies with a vision, a logical well-planned pathway.
- Allows agencies and their personnel to learn and grow.
- Leads to a healthy, vital organization.

The past decade has brought formidable challenges to community corrections. Agencies and practitioners have demonstrated a commitment to enhancing their programs and services. As a profession, community corrections must continue to learn and grow, and a system of performance-based measurements can facilitate this professional and organizational growth. By demonstrating results, community corrections agencies can position themselves as agencies that make a difference in the safety of American communities.

Notes

1. Harland, Alan T. and C. J. Rosen, "Sentencing Theory and Intensive Supervision Probation," *Federal Probation*, LI(4)(1987):33-42.
2. Petersilia, Joan, "Measuring the Performance of Community Corrections," 1993:8. Paper prepared for the BJS/Princeton Outcomes Study Group.
3. Harris, P., "Evaluation of Criminal Justice Programs," 1991. Final Report of technical assistance no. 92C1010 for the Community Justice Assistance Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. National Institute of Corrections.

4. See Harris, "Evaluation of Criminal Justice Programs."

5. See Harris, "Evaluation of Criminal Justice Programs," 9.

6. Blalock, A.B., ed., *Evaluating Social Programs at the State and Local Level*, Kalamazoo, Michigan: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1990.

7. Deming, W.E., *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986.

8. Osborne, D. and T. Gaebler, *Reinventing Government*, New York: Plume, 1993.

9. See Osborne and Gaebler, *Reinventing Government*, 146.

10. See Blalock, *Evaluating Social Programs at the State and Local Level*.

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cluded Ann H. Crowe, Research Associate, American Probation and Parole Association and Gregory Markley, Director of Staff Development, Texas Department of Corrections. The monograph and Research in Brief were developed under the leadership of Timothy H. Matthews, Director, American Probation and Parole Association. The monograph uses community corrections examples to guide the reader through the step-by-step process of implementing performance-based measures. Please contact: American Probation and Parole Association, P.O. Box 11910, Lexington, KY 40578-1910, or call 606-244-8207.

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Wide Web site for viewing or downloading. Contact NCJRS for more information.

Inciardi, James, *A Corrections-Based Continuum of Effective Drug Abuse Treatment*, NIJ Research in Progress 60-minute videotape, \$19 (\$24 in Canada and other countries), 1995, NCJ 152692.

MacKenzie, Doris Layton, Ph.D., and Eugene Hebert, editors, *Correctional Boot Camps: A Tough Intermediate Sanction*, NIJ Research Report, 19 chapters by different authors, 1995, NCJ 157639. Limited copies available.

Moses, Marilyn C., *Keeping Incarcerated Mothers and Their Daughters Together: Girl Scouts Beyond Bars*, Program Focus, 1995, 12 pages, NCJ 156217.

NIJ Survey of Jail Administrators, NIJ Update, 1995, 2 pages, FS 000087.

NIJ Survey of Wardens and State Commissioners of Corrections, NIJ Update, 1995, 2 pages, FS 000085.

Pfeiffer, Christian, *Sentencing Policy and Crime Rates in Reunified Germany*, NIJ Research in Progress 60-minute videotape, \$19 (\$24 in Canada and other countries), 1994, NCJ 152237.

Useem, Bert, Camille Graham Camp, and Renee Dugan, *Resolution of Prison Riots*, Research in Brief, 20 pages, 1995, NCJ 155283.

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