

AUTO Screener: An Intelligent Way of Assessing Offender Risk

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As the provider of supervision and support services to over 15,000 District of Columbia residents on probation, parole, and supervised release, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) has been looking at innovative ways of enhancing its case-management and information retrieval technology. CSOSA, a federal executive branch agency, is developing AUTO Screener as the latest and "smartest" addition to a group of supervision tools used by Community Supervision Officers (CSOs).

AUTO Screener is an "intelligent" assessment tool that determines the appropriate level of supervision for offenders and recommends treatment and support services to meet the offender's needs. Based on extensive historical and social data entered in a structured interview with a CSO, the AUTO Screener generates a prescriptive supervision plan that contains support service recommendations.

Thomas Williams, Associate Director for Community Supervision Services, sums up the value of this new tool: "Through a combination of logic, rules, and formulas, AUTO Screener is able to derive a total score and a list of prescriptive treatments and supervision recommendations," Williams said. "Supervision officers can quickly determine the appropriate treatment and supervision level for the offender. Auto Screener allows quantitative intelligence to provide quality supervision and treatment services better, faster and more accurately."

SMART—The Bedrock System for AUTO Screener

AUTO Screener is the newest component of CSOSA's Supervision and Management Automated Record Tracking system, or SMART. A unique Web-based case-management and information retrieval system, SMART provides tracking and monitoring capabilities not found in other community supervision applications.

SMART is used not just for day-to-day operations and case management, but to measure overall Agency performance. Management has defined a set of key variables, or performance measures, including rearrest, reincarceration, technical violations, drug use, job retention, contacts with staff or treatment providers, and educational or vocational programming. Progress in each of these areas can be tracked by individual offender, as well as by a CSO's caseload, a team, a branch, or the entire Agency. Early warnings are built into the system to provide frontline managers with the tools to insure that offenders are properly supervised.

A technological achievement in its own right, SMART was developed three years ago to replace an unreliable and outdated case tracking system and has been operational for about two years. Several local governments, federal agencies, and the federal and local courts use SMART data extensively in their own community supervision and law-enforcement operations.

The Auto Screener Process: Taking the Guesswork Out of Community Supervision

AUTO Screener was developed as a module within SMART that is useful to both CSOs and managers. For CSOs, the AUTO Screener standardizes the assessment process. Based on the assessment results, AUTO Screener suggests a complete prescriptive supervision plan for that offender. The AUTO Screener assessment is performed when the offender first enters the community supervision, then every six months for routine reassessment, as well as when a major life event or re-arrest has occurred.

For managers, AUTO Screener provides a way to ensure consistency and quality in case management. "By using AUTO Screener with its built-in intelligence, managers are able to standardize prescriptive supervision plans, thereby helping to ensure that offenders with similar offenses and criminal records are supervised in similar ways by different CSOs," states Jasper Ormond, CSOSA Associate Director for Community Justice Programs.

AUTO Screener works by using automated statistical methods to evaluate data about individual offenders. The assessment data are gathered through a series of questions to the offender about education level, functional literacy, employment, residence, social networking, originating offense, etc., to help establish an appropriate treatment and supervision course.

Through a combination of logic, rules, and formulas, AUTO Screener is able to derive a total score and a list of prescriptive treatments and supervision recommendations. Based on these, the CSO can quickly determine the appropriate treatment and supervision level for the offender. The CSO can then prioritize the treatment and supervision items. AUTO Screener will allow for the CSO to deviate from, or override, the suggested plan, and provides a mechanism to record the reason for

deviation and the supervisor's approval. Upon completion of the AUTO Screener process, the offender signs printed versions of the plan, as well as a contract specifying the sanctions that will be imposed for violating the rules and conditions of supervision.

Inventory Screens

As an all-encompassing offender-screening system, AUTO Screener consists of the following fifteen inventory screens designed to capture a complete social, criminal, and function history of the offender being evaluated:

- * Education
- * Community Support/Social Networking
- * Recent Losses/Traumatic Events
- * Residence History
- * Employment History
- * Originating Offenses
- * Criminality/Violence
- * Victimization
- * Supervision/PreRelease/Institutional Violations/Failures
- * Substance Use/History
- * Mental Health
- * Physical Health/Disability
- * Learning Challenges
- * Leisure Time
- * Attitude and Motivation

Each screen contains a series of questions designed to assess the offender's criminal risk level, recidivism probability, and supervision needs. For example, the Community Support/Social Networking screen contains a comprehensive series of questions for evaluating the level of community support experienced by the offender (see figure 1). Some screens contain inventory questions as well as a detailed history of answers.

During the initial assessment process, each screen is saved individually. The ability to save screens individually enables the CSO to work on the assessment over a period of time as information is verified or as time permits.

After the screening process has been completed, AUTO Screener generates a Details Sheet showing that all the categories of questions have been answered. Also displayed are a Risk Predictions section and a link to the Prescriptive Supervision Plan. It's important to note that Auto Screener does not rely solely on self-reports. The CSO is encouraged to consult all available resources to verify data.

A Flexible Prescriptive Supervision Plan

Once the screening has been completed, AUTO Screener provides the CSO with a Prescriptive Supervision Plan that includes a list of treatment and supervision recommendations. This plan determines what types of additional assistance the offender will need while under supervision. The plan includes the following areas:

- * Plan Item (calculated by the system)
- * Goal (calculated by the system)
- * Target Date (entered by the CSO)
- * Planned Outcome (entered by the CSO)
- * Comment field (entered by the CSO)

At this stage, the Community Supervision Officer can prioritize the items and goals, and write a planned outcome and comments. Depending on the offender's needs, the CSO may decide to override the system to adjust some of the parameters to better tailor the plan for that offender.

At the end of the screening process, the Prescriptive Supervision Plan is finalized and a printed plan/sanction contract is printed and signed by the offender.

The Benefits of AUTO Screener

Designed to better manage supervision and treatment resources and activities, AUTO Screener combines fundamental

technical characteristics expected from a dynamic system, such as reliability, flexibility, and modularity, which translate into qualitative enhancements immediately beneficial to the offenders, to the CSOs, and to the community at large. These benefits include:

Objective assessment and standardization: By automatically generating a prescriptive supervision plan based on weighted formulas, AUTO Screener greatly assists CSOs in their task of objectively assessing offenders. This ensures fair and appropriate treatment and supervision for each offender. Ultimately, the CSO can determine if the plan is adequate for the offender being treated and supervised.

Risk-group classification: The system automatically categorizes offenders into different groups based on their risk levels. This helps provide treatment and supervision services customized to each offender group as well as identify high-risk individuals who need specialized supervision. Additionally, managers can use this feature to direct resources to certain priority groups, such as high-risk offenders, and monitor the effective use of resources across the Agency.

Flexibility: AUTO Screener is a remarkably dynamic system that allows users to customize existing screens as well as design new ones from scratch. Through the administration interface, users can add or delete supervision plan items and modify the logic at the question-answer level that is used to determine the recommended plan items. The formulas and logic can be adjusted according to the latest statistics and offender population trends. Moreover, the system allows CSOs to deviate from a suggested plan with supervisor approval.

Historical data tracking: AUTO Screener also keeps a chronological record of information entered or modified in any of its screens. For example, it keeps a history of modifications made to a prescriptive supervision plan.

Ability to share information with other agencies: Although CSOSA is a federal agency bound by certain guidelines related to the Privacy Act, AUTO Screener data as well as all SMART data can be shared with CSOSA's criminal justice partners who have the ability to view offender data in order to better protect the community, when appropriate and viable. Allowing outside sources to directly view certain data without the involvement of CSOSA employees translates into substantial saved time and effort.

Other Benefits

The implementation of AUTO Screener brings other benefits to CSOSA as well, including:

- * Paperwork reduction as a step toward a long-term goal of a paperless office,
- * Secure access from inside and outside the agency,
- * A usable, navigable, configurable interface,
- * Access to AUTO Screener via the Internet,
- * Ability for the CSO to prioritize the items in the plan,
- * Ability to generate a hard copy of the plan, as well as a sanctions contract for the offender to sign, and
- * Tracking sections that allow the CSO to monitor versions/iterations of the plan.

Conclusion

With AUTO Screener, CSOSA is making progress towards standardizing and improving offender assessment, thus ensuring quality of treatment to all offenders, while providing targeted services to each group of offenders. It was designed with ease of use and flexibility as its primary qualities. Its interface allows users to modify some of its features, such as the order of questions, and to update the related scoring and formulas as needed.

AUTO Screener, along with the advanced technologies used throughout the parent system SMART, can be applied to offender-based case management in other criminal justice agencies as well. It could be easily customized to fit the needs of criminal justice agencies looking for a new, more flexible, and more advanced case-management system.

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