Probation Performance Measures Resource Guide

CEPP

Center for Effective Public Policy

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Introduction

Performance measures are quantifiable indicators used to analyze progress toward achieving specific goals or objectives. For probation agencies, they are critical for evaluating the effectiveness of programs and processes and ensuring they align with evidence-based practices (EBPs).

This resource guide describes the importance of performance measures in enhancing the quality and outcomes of a probation agency's practices and programs; the characteristics of effective performance measures; and the steps involved in creating, evaluating, and sharing these measures. The guide aims to empower probation professionals to implement measures that truly reflect and enhance their jurisdiction's objectives and capabilities.

Incorporated in the guide are the standards related to performance measures from the *National Standards for Community Supervision* published by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) in June 2024.[1] Examples of performance measures are included; they may not directly apply to all jurisdictions, thus underscoring the need for measures to be adaptable to each community's unique context.

Why Performance Measures?

Data collection and analysis are dynamic and continuous processes essential for community supervision jurisdictions. By systematically gathering and examining data, agencies can understand their current practices, develop goals and objectives, calculate desired performance measures, analyze their progress in meeting the goals, and communicate their findings to justice system partners and the community. This process enables them to improve by modifying or creating additional goals and objectives to ensure that strategies are targeted and impactful. Additionally, performance measures provide opportunities to identify strengths and instances to support staff charged with meeting these goals. After implementing changes, jurisdictions should analyze whether the modifications yield the desired results, communicate their new findings, and continue the process by making further improvements.

Beyond Anecdotes

Data transforms abstract concepts into concrete realities. Instead of relying on anecdotes or isolated incidents, performance measures offer a broader perspective, revealing trends and patterns that may not be immediately visible. This expanded knowledge is invaluable for identifying opportunities for growth and refining practices, ultimately fostering a culture of continuous quality improvement.

THE VALUE OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Jurisdictions grapple daily with the complexities of community supervision, striving to balance community safety and well-being with rehabilitative efforts. Performance measures become a compass, guiding jurisdictions toward their goals and helping narrate their journey. These metrics tell a story of progress and challenges. They chart the effectiveness of agency activities and ensure that every step taken aligns with the agency's overarching mission, vision, and values. Performance measures are essential for accountability and continuous improvement, creating a path toward a more effective, equitable, and just system. They inform decision making, identify gaps, guide policy decisions, resource allocation, and strategic planning. And their ongoing, transparent use helps build trust and support among system partners and within the communities that agencies serve.

Advancing Equity

An essential aspect of performance measures is their role in prioritizing equity. By systematically analyzing data, jurisdictions can identify and address disparities, ensuring that all people are treated fairly and justly. This focus on equity helps mitigate potential harm and ensures that supervision practices are aligned with principles of justice and fairness.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.1

Agencies should develop and implement a comprehensive performance measurement system which should include process measures of supervision activities consistent with risk-need-responsivity theory, as well as performance outcomes for agencies and individuals on supervision.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.8

Agencies should have written policies, procedures, and established practices to systematically measure the progress of persons on community supervision and provide feedback.

While performance measures are powerful tools, they are not without limitations. They do not establish causal relationships but rather provide indicators of performance. Jurisdictions need to interpret these measures with a critical eye, understanding that, while they tell a story, they do not capture every nuance or detail of the supervision process.

TYPES OF MEASURES

Many different types of measures can be used to guide improvement, including process, productivity, quality, efficiency, and outcome measures. However, process and outcome measures are the two most frequently used in community supervision.

Process measures focus on monitoring how well staff at all levels adhere to established policies and procedures, ensuring that practices align with evidence-based models, such as the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model. This model emphasizes tailoring supervision to an individual's assessed likelihood of success (risk level), criminogenic needs, and cognitive behavioral characteristics (e.g., cognitive ability, motivation, mental health, etc.). By tracking compliance with these practices, process measures help agencies ensure that their staff implement strategies effectively and consistently.

Examples of process measures include the ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions) applied to people under supervision, the percentage of people who receive a validated risk and needs assessment within a specified period, and the percentage of individuals (by risk level) receiving cognitive-based interventions.

Types of Measures

▶ **Process.** Measures whether an activity is performing as intended

▶ **Productivity.** Measures the volume of tasks completed

▶ **Quality.** Measures satisfaction with the process or practice being performed

▶ **Efficiency.** Measures whether maximum outcomes are being produced

▶ **Outcome.** Measures the effectiveness of a practice

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.2

Process measures should track compliance with policies and procedures by staff at all levels, ensuring fidelity to the risk-need-responsivity theory model.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.3

Outcome measures should assess the impact or results of staff activities.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.4

Outcome measures should assess the impact or results for individuals on supervision. Agencies should collect and report on outcome measures related to recidivism reduction, accountability, and other socially valued outcomes.

Outcome measures, on the other hand, assess the impact of probation activities on people under supervision. These measures focus on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions in reducing recidivism, promoting accountability, and achieving other socially beneficial outcomes, such as improved employment, education, or mental health. Agencies are encouraged to collect and report data on these outcomes regularly to gauge whether their programs and practices are achieving the desired effects.

Examples of outcome measures include the percentage of people employed at the end of supervision and the percentage of people who complete supervision successfully.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.7

Agencies should collect and report data on the discharge status of persons completing community supervision, including those with successful discharge, early discharge for good performance, revocation, incarceration, and death.

By using both process and outcome measures, probation agencies can refine their operations, improve decision making, and demonstrate their commitment to evidence-based practices aimed at reducing reoffending and fostering community safety.

Performance Measurement Steps

Creating and evaluating performance measures for probation are crucial tasks that demand careful consideration. At this stage, some agencies may choose to select a few performance measures from the samples provided and begin collecting and reporting data. This approach can help agencies assess their capabilities, quickly review specific measures of interest, and achieve early successes.

However, the following steps present a comprehensive process designed to improve the development and collection of performance measures in a way that is both robust and meaningful, ultimately driving lasting, positive change.

By taking these steps, the team can create performance measures that not only reflect an evidence-based practice but also promote continuous quality improvement and accountability within the probation system.

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND CURRENT PRACTICES

Understanding an agency's current practices and data collection capabilities is critical when creating effective probation performance measures. Without a clear picture of what is already being done, agencies risk developing measures that are misaligned with existing strategic plans, workflows, resources, or objectives.

Taking stock of current practices ensures that performance measures reflect real-world operations and provide actionable insights rather than abstract benchmarks. One method to understand current practices is to create a probation system map. This architectural diagram or flow chart of key decision points, processes, and areas illustrates where performance can be measured. It helps identify critical stages and potential gaps in current practices, allowing the agency to develop goals and target areas needing improvement.

The National Institute of Corrections' Evidence-Based Decision Making guide on system mapping offers practical advice and examples to support this process.[2]

Evaluating data collection capabilities is equally essential. Agencies must assess whether their current systems and practices can reliably gather, store, and analyze the necessary data. If gaps exist in data availability or quality, these must be addressed to ensure that performance measures are meaningful and accurate. For instance, agencies may need to implement new tools, update software, or provide training to staff. By addressing limitations up front, agencies can ensure that resources are being expended on measures that can be properly tracked or validated.

STEP 2: DEVELOP PERFORMANCE MEASURES

It is important to develop performance measures that not only track processes and outcomes effectively but also drive continuous improvement. This approach ensures that measures are grounded in reality, supported by reliable data, and aligned with the agency's mission to promote safety, rehabilitation, and fairness in community supervision.

An ideal performance measurement system must be manageable. Start with a feasible number of key measures that are both easy to obtain and supported by existing data; this allows for a focused approach and facilitates initial success. Jurisdictions should aim to select those measures that are the strongest indicators of performance for which data already exist or for which a data collection process is in place or can be created. As the agency gains experience and confidence, it can gradually expand the scope of measurement to include more complex and layered measures. This incremental approach ensures that the performance measures are practical and impactful, providing valuable insights into the agency's effectiveness.

The box below is the beginning of an example that will be built upon in subsequent steps.

Performance Measure[3]

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

STEP 3: ESTABLISH BASELINE DATA

Establishing baseline data serves as the starting point for meaningful evaluation. Baselines allow agencies to measure progress over time, showing whether specific interventions or policies are working. Without a clear reference point, it is impossible to determine whether meaningful changes are occurring. Baseline data also help set realistic and achievable goals, ensuring that performance measures motivate improvement without setting the bar unrealistically high or too low.

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 69% of people are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

STEP 4: PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals should represent the desired outcomes of the probation system, while objectives should outline short-term indicators that demonstrate progress toward these goals. Objectives describe what will change, by how much, and over what period. It is crucial that objectives are aligned with the SMART principle and grounded in evidence-based practices, with a particular emphasis on reducing risk and promoting success.

As goals and objectives are developed, it is imperative that the agency establish clear definitions.[4] For instance, if the goal or objective is to measure recidivism rates, the agency needs to determine the definition of recidivism, decide how it will be measured, and calculate rates using consistent formulas. Using a common statewide definition, should one exist, will aid the jurisdiction in setting targets when comparing rates to similar jurisdictions within the state.

While measuring recidivism is important, agencies should also consider evaluating additional indicators, such as risk assessment results; enhancements in intrinsic motivation; adherence to risk, need, responsivity, and dosage principles; skill building; reinforcement strategies; prosocial support; and other indicators of positive progress.[5]

SMART Principle

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Relevant

Time-oriented

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.5

A standard definition of recidivism should be developed and utilized across an agency. Using this definition, agencies should measure and report on recidivism of the community supervision population. This definition should clearly distinguish new criminal activity from technical violations (failure to comply with the conditions of community supervision) and determine what behavior counts toward recidivism.

Using baseline data, the agency should think strategically about the type of information needed to convincingly demonstrate that probation is meeting its objectives and operating at its highest potential and then set specific performance targets that define optimal performance.

When planning goals and objectives, frame them positively to better reflect outcomes. Develop metrics such as the percentage of people who completed a program successfully or the percentage who remained arrest-free during supervision. Refer to the Community Supervision Resource Center (CSRC) Language Guide for additional terminology that can enhance the interpretation of results.[6]

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 69% of people are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Goal

By 2028, more than 75% of people will remain arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Objective

The percentage of people remaining arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation will increase by 2% in each of the next three years.

STEP 5: CALCULATE PERFORMANCE MEASURES

In most instances, a performance measure must be calculated using at least two data elements to produce a percentage, ratio, or average.[7] As such, the agency should identify the data elements and formula needed to calculate the measure.

Sources of data may consist of the agency's case management system, paper files, or a criminal justice partner's data. Data-sharing agreements may need to be developed for information not collected directly by the probation agency. For example, to obtain arrest data, the agency might require access to law enforcement or jail data, which necessitates agreements with external organizations.

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 69% of people are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Goal

By 2028, more than 75% of people will remain arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Objective

The percentage of people remaining arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation will increase by 2% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

► The total number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity by year.
► The total number of people completing probation by year.

Formula

Divide the number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years by the total number of people completing probation in the same period. Multiply this by 100 to obtain a percentage.

STEP 6: ANALYZE PROGRESS

Analyzing data is a critical step in determining whether an agency is meeting its goals and objectives. By examining the data, agencies can assess how well their practices align with intended outcomes, identify trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions. This process involves comparing actual performance against established benchmarks or targets to see if the agency is on track. Discrepancies between goals and outcomes may reveal areas for improvement, such as gaps in service delivery, inconsistencies in policy application, or unforeseen barriers to success.

To effectively analyze the data collected, it is essential to interpret the data accurately and avoid misinterpretation. As you analyze the data, be attentive to emerging trends and patterns. Be prepared to discuss any unexpected results and explore potential reasons for these anomalies, which can offer valuable insights into the underlying factors influencing the data.

Consider the following questions during the analysis process:

▶ Do the data accurately reflect the agency's practices?
▶ Do unexpected data appear in the set?
▶ Are there any gaps in the data?
▶ Is the agency measuring what it intended to measure?
▶ Does the definition of the measure require any revisions?

▶ Do the data need to be refined?
▶ Are there external factors that could contribute to the outcomes?
▶ What improvements are necessary to ensure more accurate data collection?

Effective data analysis not only evaluates progress but also serves as a foundation for refining practices, addressing challenges, and fostering continuous improvement.
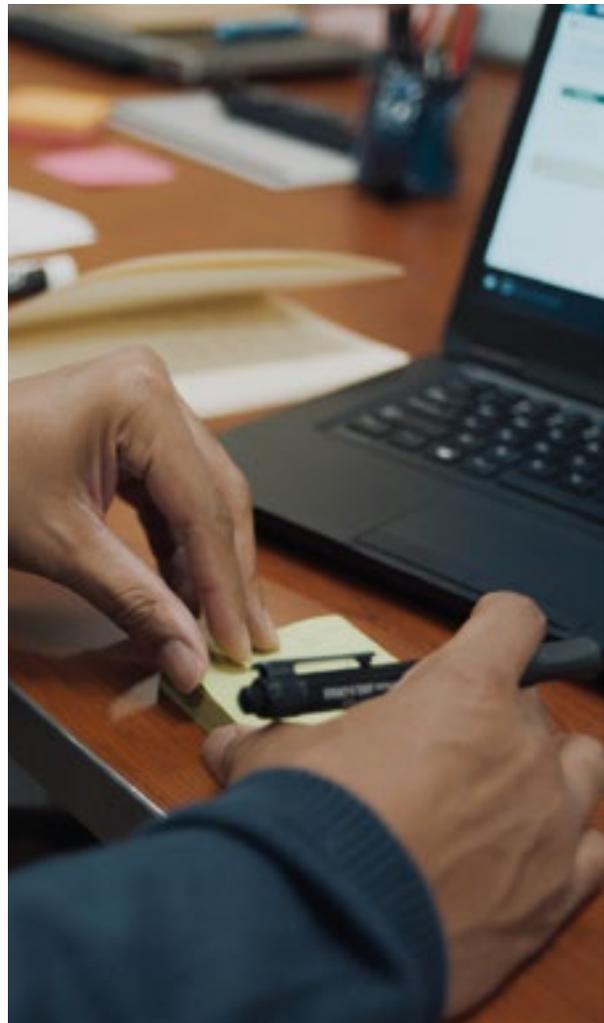
STEP 7: COMMUNICATE WITH PARTNERS AND THE COMMUNITY

When reporting data to justice system partners and the public, clarity and openness are paramount. Present data in a straightforward manner that allows the audience to easily understand the findings. Carefully select which measures to highlight for internal and external distribution and determine the most effective way to illustrate the data. The goal is for partners and the community to clearly see what is working well and identify areas that need improvement.

To enhance understanding, use visual tools like tables, charts, and graphs, ensuring they include legends and labels for context. Provide explanations of the methodology, definitions of terms, and information on the population the data represents. A brief narrative explaining the significance of each measure will help readers grasp why it matters and how it aligns with agency goals.

Tailor communication to the needs of your audience. Policymakers, practitioners, and community members may require different levels of detail or emphasis. Additionally, offer information in multiple formats and languages, and adhere to standards for people with differing abilities.

Decide on the frequency of reporting to provide justice system partners and the community with timely updates, and develop a communication plan that outlines how and where the data will be shared—whether through dashboards, publications,

Justice System Networks

Consider seeking feedback from and presenting the agency's findings to existing cross-agency teams with varied membership, expertise, and perspectives. Additionally, presenting findings to people with previous probation involvement and expertise ensures that the metrics are grounded in the realities of their experiences, leading to more effective, equitable, and relevant measures that better reflect the challenges and needs of those under supervision.

websites, or media releases. Consider including case studies or success stories to make the data more relatable and impactful.

Finally, foster two-way communication by seeking feedback from partners on the reporting process. Transparent and open communication builds trust, supports collaboration, and ensures the data drives meaningful improvements in probation practices.

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 69% of people are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Goal

By 2028, more than 75% of people will remain arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Objective

The percentage of people remaining arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation will increase by 2% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity by year.
▶ The total number of people completing probation by year.

Formula

Divide the number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years by the total number of people completing probation in the same period. Multiply this by 100 to obtain a percentage.

Visual Illustration of the Data

Use visual tools like tables, charts, and graphs, ensuring they include legends and labels for context.

STEP 8: CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Leverage baseline and trend information to identify key areas needing improvement. Evaluate potential priorities by considering factors such as public safety, risk reduction, public perception, and the anticipated impact on agency operations. Use tools like cost-benefit analyses or other assessments to help determine which areas offer the greatest opportunity for meaningful and positive change.

Set realistic and attainable benchmarks to guide your improvement efforts. For areas requiring significant progress, consider using incremental benchmarks to track progress effectively and maintain momentum. Develop specific, practical strategies tailored to address the identified needs, and ensure these strategies align with the agency's resources and capabilities.

Engage staff early in the process to build buy-in, and provide training to prepare them for implementing the changes. Clear communication is critical; ensure that all team members understand the goals, the strategies, and their role in achieving them. Involve justice system partners and community members to ensure alignment with broader expectations and support.

Define measurable metrics to monitor the progress of improvement efforts. Once strategies are in place and sufficient time has passed, assess the impact of the changes, analyze outcomes, and refine strategies as needed. This iterative approach ensures that improvements are sustainable and adaptive to emerging needs.

By committing to thoughtful and data-driven improvements, agencies can foster a culture of continuous learning, enhance performance, and make a meaningful impact on public safety and rehabilitation efforts.

Taking a Deeper Dive

When jurisdictions are ready to take a deeper dive into probation performance measures, there are several key considerations that can enhance the depth and effectiveness of their approach. This section highlights various factors that agencies should keep in mind, from analyzing demographic data to incorporating qualitative measures. A comprehensive and nuanced evaluation of probation performance requires not only a careful examination of quantitative data but also an understanding of its broader impact on individuals and communities. By leveraging expert collaboration, ensuring fairness in data interpretation, and distinguishing between measurement and evaluation, agencies can develop a more holistic and effective approach to tracking and improving probation outcomes.

Equity Assessment. Collecting data on race, ethnicity, gender, and geographic area within a jurisdiction is crucial when evaluating probation performance measures, as it directly impacts the assessment of equity and fairness within probation practices. By analyzing this demographic data, stakeholders can identify disparities in how different groups experience probation, uncover potential biases, and ensure that policies and practices are applied equitably across diverse populations. This comprehensive approach helps to ensure that probation services are fair and inclusive, addressing the needs of all individuals and preventing systemic inequalities. Furthermore, it allows for the development of targeted interventions and supports that can mitigate any identified disparities, ultimately promoting a more just and effective probation system.

Analyzing how each measure impacts people experiencing probation requires a comprehensive approach. Consider the effects from multiple perspectives, including demographic attributes, offense type, and risk level. Use tools like the Relative Rate Index (RRI),[8] and consult resources such as the U.S. Census Bureau population statistics[9] and the BJS-OJP-DOJ Annual Probation Survey statistics[10] to enrich the analysis.
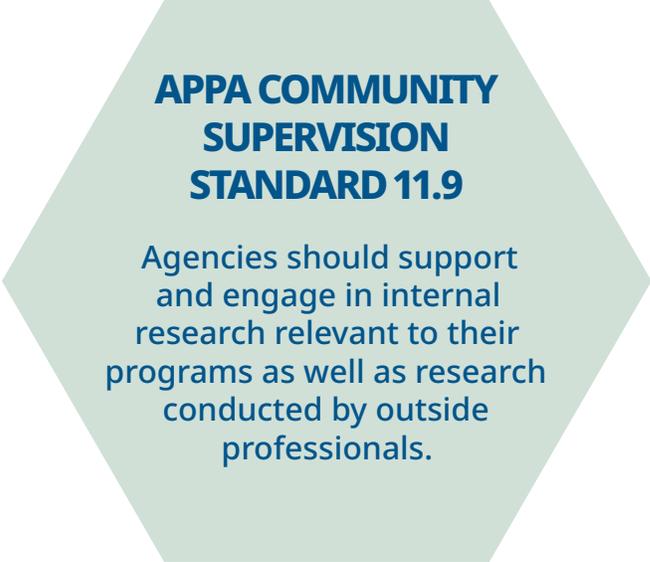
APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.6

Agencies should report recidivism data by risk level, offense type, time on community supervision, gender, race/ethnicity, geographic region, and other relevant criteria.

Data Breakdown. When communicating performance measures, consider breaking down the data by various attributes and demographics, especially when there are notable concerns or highlights. This detailed breakdown can reveal important insights into different population segments. Additionally, where applicable, incorporate benchmarks and strategies for improvement to offer context and guide future actions.

Expert Collaboration. As probation agencies progress in their use of performance measures and transition to more advanced metrics, it may be important to enlist people with expertise in statistical analysis. Employees from city or county administrator's offices, as well as those in criminal justice agencies with dedicated analysis units, could serve as valuable resources. Local universities are also excellent sources for statistical analysis support.

Community Impact and Qualitative Measures. Incorporating community impact and satisfaction, along with satisfaction metrics for those experiencing probation, is also crucial. Performance measures should not focus solely on risk reduction but also reflect the expectations and perceptions of the broader community and of people with previous probation experience. For example, collecting feedback through surveys from people harmed by crime can provide insights into the agency's practices and their effectiveness in supporting those harmed. By including these non-risk reduction measures, the agency can present a fuller picture of its performance and impact, addressing qualitative experiences within the community.

Program Evaluation. Performance measurement is often confused with program evaluation because both focus on collecting quantitative data about goals and outcomes; however, they are quite different. Program evaluation typically involves one-time studies that examine activities and outcomes over a specific period. Its main goal is to identify causal relationships between actions and changes, while also considering other factors that might have influenced those changes. According to the final APPA community supervision standard, probation agencies should conduct internal research related to their programs, as well as review studies from external professionals.

APPA COMMUNITY SUPERVISION STANDARD 11.9

Agencies should support and engage in internal research relevant to their programs as well as research conducted by outside professionals.

Essential Performance Measures

The measures outlined in this section serve as suggested areas for agencies striving to enhance their impact. However, each jurisdiction has its definitions, goals, and objectives, so these measures should be tailored accordingly while still maintaining a focus on these key areas. Some performance measures, such as supervision completion rates and number of incentives delivered, are relatively straightforward to track, while others, like addressing criminogenic needs or implementing skill-based interventions, may require more nuanced data collection and analysis. By prioritizing these performance measures, agencies can ensure they effectively support rehabilitation, public safety, and long-term success for those they supervise.

RECIDIVISM

▶ *The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within a specific time after completing probation.*

This measures new criminal activity after completing probation. An agency should be consistent when determining what to measure concerning recidivism. There are many ways to measure it, and the difficulty and time involved in collecting the data varies considerably depending on how it is measured. For example, an agency may choose to focus on arrests. Arrest data is usually kept by a separate agency, and a data-sharing agreement may be necessary to collect the data. Arrest data is not likely to capture instances of cite and release that may be prevalent in some jurisdictions. Due to a variety of factors, including an overrepresentation of people of color in arrest data, some jurisdictions may want to focus on those people who are charged with a new offense. Again, this data may be kept by other agencies and may be more difficult to obtain.

Finally, a jurisdiction may want to focus only on new convictions, perhaps due to a high rate of cases being dismissed. Due to the length of time from arrest to conviction, these data may be much more difficult to collect over an extended period but could provide a more detailed story of a jurisdiction's activities and effectiveness.

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Performance Measure

The percentage of people who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 69% of people are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Goal

By 2028, more than 75% of people will remain arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation.

Objective

The percentage of people remaining arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years of completing probation will increase by 2% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity by year.
▶ The total number of people completing probation by year.

Formula

Divide the number of people completing probation who are arrest-free for new criminal activity within three years by the total number of people completing probation in the same period. Multiply this by 100 to obtain a percentage.

COMPLETION OF SUPERVISION

▶ *The percentage of people who complete probation successfully.*

▶ *The percentage of people who complete probation early (successfully).*

Monitoring completion rates by type of completion (e.g., successful, unsuccessful, early discharge, and death) permits an agency to analyze the success of various populations under its jurisdiction. As with recidivism, it is essential for an agency to create definitions for completed types. For example, an agency may define a successful completion as a person completing supervision despite receiving administrative sanctions during the supervision term. A clear and specific definition will ensure staff collect the data correctly and consistently, and an agency measures what it intends to measure.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who complete probation successfully.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 54% of people complete probation successfully.

Goal

By 2028, more than 60% of people will complete probation successfully.

Objective

The percentage of people completing probation successfully will increase by 2% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people completing probation successfully by year.
▶ The total number of people completing probation by year.

Formula

Divide the number of people completing probation successfully by the total number of people completing probation in the same period. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

REVOCATIONS

▶ *The percentage of people revoked due to technical violations only.*
▶ *The percentage of people revoked due to new criminal activity.*

People experiencing community supervision may be revoked due to new criminal activity, technical rule violations, or both, which may or may not result in the termination of their supervision. Some people may have a specific number of days, months, or years revoked and then restored to supervision after the period of incarceration or confinement.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of people revoked due to technical violations only.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 71% of people revoked are due to technical violations only.

Goal

By 2028, less than 62% of people revoked will be due to technical violations only.

Objective

The percentage of people revoked due to technical violations only will decrease by 3% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people revoked due to technical violations only by year.
▶ The total number of people revoked by year.

Formula

Divide the total number of people revoked due to technical violations only by the total number of people revoked in the same period. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

COMPLETION OF RISK AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

▶ *The percentage of people who have a risk and needs assessment completed at the beginning of supervision.*

▶ *The percentage of people who have a risk and needs reassessment completed within the time frame outlined in the agency's policy.*

Using actuarial risk and needs assessments is the cornerstone of community supervision. Assessing risk and needs allows agencies to monitor risk reduction efforts and identify needs that, if addressed, will increase the likelihood of success.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who have a risk and needs assessment completed at the beginning of supervision.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 78% of people have a risk and needs assessment completed within 15 days of beginning supervision.

Goal

By 2027, more than 95% of people will have a risk and needs assessment completed within 15 days of beginning supervision.

Objective

The percentage of people having a risk and needs assessment completed within 15 days of beginning supervision will increase by 8% in each of the next two years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people with a completed risk assessment within 15 days of beginning supervision by year.
▶ The total number of people with a completed risk assessment by year.

Formula

Divide the total number of people with a completed risk assessment within 15 days of beginning supervision by the total number of people with a completed risk assessment in the same period. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

ADDRESSING CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS

▶ *The percentage of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) who have a case plan created within a specified time after beginning supervision.*

▶ *The percentage of people whose case plan addresses criminogenic needs identified by a risk and needs assessment.*

▶ *The percentage of people who complete the objectives or action steps in their case plan by the end of supervision.*

The need principle guides agencies on what to target with people who have a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher). Case plans should be developed with the person under supervision and initiated early in supervision. Case plans should focus on criminogenic needs by aligning effective interventions to address areas that are likely to increase public safety and achieve greater success.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of people who complete the objectives or action steps in their case plan by the end of supervision.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 38% of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) complete the objectives or action steps identified in their case plan by the end of supervision.

Goal

By 2028, 50% of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) will complete the objectives or action steps identified in their case plan by the end of supervision.

Objective

The percentage of people completing the objectives or action steps identified in their case plan by the end of supervision will increase by 4% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) completing the objectives or action steps identified in their case plan by year.
▶ The total number of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) with case plans by year.

Formula

Divide the total number of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) completing the objectives or action steps identified in their case plan by the total number of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) with case plans. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

SUPERVISION LEVEL

▶ *The percentage of people whose supervision level matches their assessed likelihood of success (risk level).*

The risk principle guides agencies on the population that would most benefit from resources and interventions. To increase public safety and promote behavior change, it is most effective to focus resources on those with the lowest likelihood of success (highest risk level) and to use a higher frequency of meaningful and effective contacts that include skill-building and cognitive-based interventions.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of people whose supervision level matches their assessed likelihood of success (risk level).

Baseline

Existing data indicate that 63% of people's supervision levels match their likelihood of success (risk level).

Goal

By 2028, more than 75% of people's supervision levels will match their likelihood of success (risk level).

Objective

The percentage of people's supervision levels matching their likelihood of success (risk level) will increase by 4% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of people whose supervision level matches their likelihood of success (risk level) by year.
▶ The total number of people with a completed risk assessment and an assigned supervision level by year.

Formula

Divide the number of people whose supervision level matches their likelihood of success (risk level) by the total number of people with a completed risk assessment and an assigned supervision level in the same period. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

SKILL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

▶ *The percentage of contacts with people who have a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) that include skill-based interventions.*

As a behavior change agent, a supervision officer's role is to provide training on basic, foundational skills to help a person develop and use these skills in real-life situations. These behavioral interventions should include foundational skills, like applying for employment, and more advanced skills, like problem-solving and cognitive restructuring. Contacts should include opportunities to practice skills.

EXAMPLE

Performance Measure

The percentage of contacts with people who have a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) that include skill-based interventions.

Baseline

Existing data indicate that skill-based interventions are delivered in 20% of contacts with people who have a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher).

Goal

By 2028, 50% of contacts with people who have a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) will include skill-based interventions.

Objective

The percentage of people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) with a skill-based intervention during contacts will increase by 10% in each of the next three years.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of contacts with a skill-based intervention for people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) by year.
▶ The total number of contacts with people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) by year.

Formula

Divide the total number of contacts with a skill-based intervention for people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) by the total number of contacts with people with a lower likelihood of success (moderate risk or higher) in the same period. Multiply it by 100 to obtain a percentage.

INCENTIVES AND RESPONSES TO NONCOMPLIANT BEHAVIOR (SANCTIONS)

▶ *The ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions).*

Behavior change and learning new skills are best supported by applying positive reinforcement rather than negative reinforcement at a ratio of 4:1 or greater.

E X A M P L E

Performance Measure

The ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions).

Baseline

Existing data indicate the ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions) is 2:1.

Goal

By 2027, the ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions) will increase to 4:1.

Objective

The ratio of incentives to responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions) will increase to at least 3:1 in 2026 and 4:1 by 2027.

Data Elements

▶ The total number of incentives (e.g., verbal praise, certificates, reduced supervision levels) delivered by year.
▶ The total number of responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions such as increased reporting, electronic monitoring, and program referrals) by year.

Formula

Divide the total number of incentives delivered by the total number of responses to noncompliant behavior (sanctions) in the same period. A ratio is produced.

Additional Performance Measures

The following is a list of additional performance measures an agency may wish to consider. It is not meant to be exhaustive, and an agency should decide the measures that will be meaningful and an appraisal of success.

▶ The percentage of people whose assessed likelihood of success increases (risk level decreases) by the end of supervision.
▶ The percentage of people who experience a reduction in criminogenic needs by the end of supervision.
▶ The average number of days between the beginning of supervision and completion of a risk and needs assessment.
▶ The average number of days between the beginning of supervision and completion of an initial case plan.
▶ The average number of days between a treatment referral and the start of treatment.
▶ The average number of days of incarceration due to supervision violations.
▶ The percentage of people employed at the end of supervision.
▶ The percentage of people connected to non-criminogenic, supportive resources.
▶ The percentage of contacts that contain motivational interviewing techniques.
▶ The percentage of contacts that include a homework assignment.
▶ The percentage of contacts that include skill practice.
▶ The percentage of people with the lowest likelihood of success where a high percentage of the person's time is occupied in structured, prosocial activities.
▶ The percentage of people meeting education goals by the end of supervision.
▶ The percentage of people engaging in treatment programming.
▶ The percentage of people completing substance use programming by the end of supervision.
▶ The percentage of people who exhibit a reduction in the seriousness of new criminal activity.
▶ The percentage of people who experience a reduction in the frequency of criminal activity.
▶ The percentage of people who experience a reduction in drug use.
▶ The percentage of people meeting housing goals by the end of supervision.
▶ The average number of days between a detected violation and a response to the behavior.
▶ The percentage of supervision violations addressed according to agency policy.

Conclusion

Performance measures are crucial for demonstrating the effectiveness of a probation agency's practices, as they provide concrete evidence of how well goals and objectives are being met and highlight areas for improvement. By systematically assessing performance, agencies can track progress, identify successful strategies, and make informed decisions to enhance their overall effectiveness. These measures help ensure that practices are aligned with desired outcomes and provide transparency to justice system stakeholders and the community about the agency's impact.

Navigating the processes of understanding, analyzing, communicating, and improving strategies can indeed be complex and overwhelming. It is important to start small by focusing on practices that are straightforward to measure. This approach allows for manageable steps and can build confidence as initial successes are achieved. Gradually, more complex measures can be integrated as the foundation for performance measurement becomes more solid.

Celebrate the accomplishments and strengths that emerge from the data. Recognizing and acknowledging these achievements can boost morale and reinforce the value of ongoing efforts. By connecting performance improvements to the agency's mission and goals, staff can see how their work contributes to the broader objectives. Regular communication about these connections helps maintain motivation and underscores the importance of continuous quality improvement. Emphasizing how performance measures align with the agency's core mission ensures that staff remain engaged and committed to driving positive change.

End Notes

[1] American Probation and Parole Association. (2024). National standards for community supervision. https://www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/APPA/APPAs_National_Standards_for_Community_Corrections.pdf

[2] https://ebdmoneless.org/starter-kit/3a-developing-a-system-map/

[3] This is the beginning of an example used throughout this section and not a recommendation. A jurisdiction should define the components and timeframe used for each performance measure based on its preference and data capabilities.

[4] For more information and examples of definitions related to community supervision, see: Council for State Governments, Justice Center. (2023). Tier 1 metrics: Technical implementation guide for community supervision (1st ed.). https://justicecounts.csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Technical-Implementation-Guide-for-Community-Supervision-Jan-2023-1st-Edition-1.pdf

[5] Rosenfeld, R., & Grigg, A. (Eds.). (2022). The limits of recidivism: Measuring success after prison. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. https://doi.org/10.17226/26459

[6] Community Supervision Resource Center. (2024). CSRC language guide: Words and phrases to effect positive change in community supervision agencies. https://communitysupervisioncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CSRC-Language-Guide.pdf

[7] **Percentages** are useful when you want to express a proportion or a part of a whole. For example, an agency may want to report the percentage of cases where probation was completed successfully versus those with other dispositions. Percentages help to easily compare different groups or time periods, making it clearer how a specific outcome relates to the total number of cases or activities being measured. **Ratios** are best used when comparing two types of associated practices. For example, an agency may establish a goal to increase the average number of incentives, or positive reinforcements, and, at the same time, decrease the average number of sanctions delivered. Thus, an agency would report the average number of incentives versus the average number of sanctions delivered over the same period as a ratio. **Averages** are often used to measure efficiency in a practice. For instance, an agency may want to decrease the number of days between when someone is sentenced and when a case plan is initiated. To measure this performance, an agency should determine the average number of days between the two milestones over a defined period.

[8] An example of how to calculate the relative rate index can be found at https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/oja/documents/how_to_calculate_a_relative_rate_index_2020_oklahoma_arrests.pdf

[9] https://www.census.gov/data.html

[10] https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/list?series_filter=Probation%20and%20Parole%20Populations

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