

# You Get What You Measure: Compstat for Community Corrections

Key Questions for Policy Makers and Practitioners

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## 1 Does the community corrections agency have a system to both measure and manage performance?

- ✔ Most public agencies today generate some type of report that tracks their work. But often the reports come only once a year, list activities rather than outcomes, and are quickly forgotten. Community corrections agencies play a central role in fighting crime and addiction, and should have advanced systems to measure and manage movement toward those goals. This includes frequent monitoring of the progress that individual managers are making toward key agency objectives, and incentives for managers and staff to improve their performance.

## 2 What indicators are being measured?

- ✔ The performance indicators that are being tracked should reflect the agency's mission and the community's priorities. Key indicators include recidivism (separating arrests for new crimes and violations of the conditions of supervision), employment rates, drug test failure rates, rates at which victim restitution and other financial obligations are being collected, and the speed or on-time completion of certain critical tasks, such as pre-sentence reports due to the court and quick imposition of sanctions following detection of violations. Agencies must prioritize a few core measures and perhaps look at others periodically; a large number of measures dilutes focus.

## 3 How frequently are the performance indicators updated and shared with agency managers?

- ✔ Performance reports should be generated at least once per month. Less frequent reports permit too much time to pass before resources can be redeployed to address emerging situations or patterns, and allow managers to argue that the numbers are outdated and fail to reflect current practice.



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#### ABOUT THE PROJECT

Launched in 2006 as a project of the Pew Center on the States, the Public Safety Performance Project seeks to help states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in sentencing and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs.

#### ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This document is part of a series of primers for policy makers about the critical choices they face in developing strategies to protect public safety, hold offenders accountable and control corrections costs. For more on this topic, visit our website at [www.pewpublicsafety.org](http://www.pewpublicsafety.org).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This document was written by William Burrell and Adam Gelb. William Burrell directed probation supervision in New Jersey between 1984 and 2003. Most recently, he was professor of criminal justice at Temple University. Adam Gelb directs the Public Safety Performance Project, an operating project of The Pew Charitable Trusts. He previously served in senior state government criminal justice policy positions in both Georgia and Maryland.

#### ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

This document was peer reviewed by Mario Paparozzi and Judith Sachwald. Mario Paparozzi is professor of criminal justice at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. He served as Chairman of the New Jersey State Parole Board and as past-president of the American Probation and Parole Association. Judith Sachwald is Director of the Maryland Division of Probation and Parole.

While these experts have screened the report for methodology and accuracy, neither they nor their current or former organizations necessarily endorse its findings or conclusions.

## Whose progress is being monitored?

- ✓ Agency-wide measures are important for assessing overall performance, but to really incentivize employees, statistics must reach down through regional offices to districts, office chiefs and front-line supervisors. These top and middle levels of management must be on board with the performance system before agencies begin to track individual probation or parole officers' caseloads, but that ultimately is ideal. There is no substitute for data about the performance of individuals when it comes to rewarding and improving progress.

## Does the agency conduct "live audits" of performance?

- ✓ Any performance feedback that department headquarters can give to the field is helpful in motivating the operating units to improve their outcomes. But giving managers an opportunity to gather together in a room to present their progress on the indicators to agency leadership and their peers can provide significant additional incentive. Agencies may be doing performance management in a number of effective ways, but it is hard to argue they are doing "Compstat" without these live audits. Top managers should ensure that Compstat-like meetings strike the right balance between praise for achievements and critique of areas in need of improvement.

## Is the agency's personnel evaluation system in sync with the performance indicators?

- ✓ The sharing of comparative performance data across the agency is a powerful incentive for managers to produce results. But progress toward key indicators must also be incorporated formally into job descriptions and personnel evaluation criteria.

## How can policy makers help enhance a community corrections performance system?

- ✓ Community corrections agencies tend to lag behind other public sector organizations in the sophistication of their information technology and data systems. Some probation officers still don't even have computers. Fully loaded laptops aren't vital to a Compstat program – the New York Police Department began Compstat with pre-Windows computers – but an advanced data network that officers can use to track their caseloads would be a major advance. Perhaps the biggest boost can come from focusing on the work of these agencies, and asking agency leaders the same questions they are asking their staffs: "What can you do to keep more offenders crime- and drug-free?"