State Case Study

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Massachusetts' Evidence-Based Approach to Reducing Recidivism

Overview

In March 2012, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Senate President Therese Murray, and House Speaker Robert DeLeo invited the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative to collaborate with the Special Commission to Study the Commonwealth's Criminal Justice System. Through this effort, Massachusetts is laying the groundwork for a strong evidence-based approach to policymaking that can decrease criminal justice spending, reduce crime, and improve public safety.

Massachusetts' Results First model uses state-specific data to compare the costs and long-term benefits of a variety of programs and policies. With guidance from the commission, officials and researchers from the commonwealth's public safety agencies implemented the model to analyze adult criminal and juvenile justice programs. Officials used the Results First approach to:

- Target approximately $4 million in funding toward evidence-based criminal justice programs.
- Expand participation in effective but underused programs.
- Educate policymakers on the high cost of recidivism.
- Enhance collaboration among criminal justice agencies.

Results First: A Model for Making More Cost-Effective Policy Choices

The Results First approach uses a nationally recognized, peer-reviewed model with a three-step process:

- **Use the best national research** to analyze all available studies of similar programs across the country to identify what works and what does not and to gauge program effectiveness in achieving policy goals.
- **Apply state-specific data to the national results** to project the anticipated effect that different program and policy approaches would have in the state.
- **Compare programs' costs and projected benefits** and produce a report that ranks programs by the relative value they would generate for taxpayers. This information enables policymakers to identify the best return on investment of public dollars.

The cost-benefit analysis model was developed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in partnership with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. States and local governments can use the model to assess programs in many public policy areas, including adult criminal and juvenile justice, pre-K through 12th-grade education, child welfare, mental health, substance abuse, and public health.

Building the Massachusetts Results First model

In 2011, the Massachusetts Legislature established the Special Commission to Study the Commonwealth's Criminal Justice System. One of its responsibilities was to identify and implement a data-driven approach to reduce corrections spending and use the savings to improve public safety outcomes and recommend other budget priorities. The next year, the commission began working with staff from the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative to develop and implement the Massachusetts Results First Initiative.

The initiative is housed jointly with the commission and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS). Mike Coelho, EOPSS' former assistant secretary of policy and planning, served as the project's first coordinator. In this role, he facilitated collaboration between the commission and EOPSS and oversaw a technical work group, which was organized into three cross-agency teams to support data collection and analysis for the model's criminal justice component. The technical work group includes researchers, analysts, and select budget and policy staff members from the EOPSS Office of Grants and Research, the Department of Correction, the Department of Youth Services, the Office of the Commissioner of Probation, the Massachusetts Trial Court, the Massachusetts Parole Board, and the Hampden County Sheriff's Department.

The technical work group collected and analyzed the data needed to build the cost-benefit model, including recidivism rates, cost, resource use, and program information for adult and juvenile offenders released from county or state facilities or on probation or parole.[1] This effort marked the first time that the agencies systematically collected such data and shared it with one another and with policymakers.

Using Massachusetts data to analyze costs and benefits

In June 2014, the technical work group completed populating the adult criminal justice component of the Results First model and calculated the predicted returns on investment and reduction in recidivism for seven corrections, four probation, and six parole programs and practices (17 total). The staff presented the initial findings to the commission in October 2013 and a full analysis in August 2014. (See Table 1.)

The study found:

- **Department of Correction.** Net benefits ranging from $5,622 to $18,057 per program participant and reductions in recidivism of up to 19.2 percent.

- **Probation.** Net benefits ranging from $424 to $21,874 per participant and reductions in recidivism of up to 23.3 percent.[2]

- **Parole.** Net benefits ranging from $3,606 to $22,720 per participant and reductions in recidivism of up to 19.8 percent.[3]

Table 1

Findings of the Massachusetts Results First Model Analysis of Select Recidivism-Reduction Programs and Practices

Returns on investment, by department and cost-benefit ratio (high to low)

Program/practice	Benefits per participant	Cost per participant	Net benefit per participant	Cost-benefit ratio*	Change in crime
Department of Correction					
Job Assistance Workshop	$6,470	($341)	$6,129	$19.01	-6.0%
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for High- and Moderate-Risk Offenders	$10,383	($598)	$9,785	$17.35	-10.1%
Education in Prison	$21,297	($3,240)	$18,057	$6.60	-19.2%
Modified Therapeutic Communities—Drug Treatment	$10,698	($1,712)	$8,986	$6.27	-9.7%
Vocational Education	$20,561	($3,698)	$16,863	$5.58	-18.2%
Correctional Industries	$7,122	($1,501)	$5,622	$4.75	-6.3%
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Sex Offenders	$24,751	($17,764)	$6,988	$1.40	-14.6%

Program/practice	Benefits per participant	Cost per participant	Net benefit per participant	Cost-benefit ratio*	Change in crime
Probation					
Risk, Need, and Responsivity Principles with Ohio Risk Assessment System	$12,377	($81)	$12,296	$152.54	-21.2%
Electronic Monitoring/Global Positioning Systems: Parole Population	$22,634	($759)	$21,874	$29.88	-20.2%
Electronic Monitoring/Global Positioning Systems: Probation Population	$14,969	($759)	$14,205	$19.66	-23.3%
Hawaii Opportunity Probation Enforcement Program/ Massachusetts Offender Recidivism Reduction	$14,666	($2,921)	$11,745	$5.03	-22.8%
Employment Training/Job Assistance in the Community: House of Correction Population	$5,678	($3,599)	$2,100	$1.59	-4.9%
Employment Training/Job Assistance in the Community: Parole Population	$5,701	($3,599)	$2,105	$1.59	-5.7%
Employment Training/Job Assistance in the Community: Probation Population	$4,023	($3,599)	$424	$1.12	-6.7%
Parole					
Graduated Sanctions	$22,744	($24)	$22,720	$948.20	-19.8%
Risk, Need, and Responsivity Principles with Level of Service/ Case Management Inventory	$18,480	($33)	$18,447	$561.37	-18.3%
Substance Abuse Counselors	$6,665	($153)	$6,513	$43.76	-5.8%
Regional Reentry Centers: Department of Correction Population	$6,448	($162)	$6,288	$40.14	-6.0%
Regional Reentry Centers: House of Correction Population	$3,768	($162)	$3,606	$23.30	-4.9%
Re-Entry Housing Program: Six Months	$10,845	($1,716)	$9,129	$6.33	-11.3%
Re-Entry Housing Program	$4,095	($4,454)	$8,549	N/A[†]	-3.7%

* A cost-benefit ratio compares the monetary value of achieving predicted outcomes with the cost of generating those outcomes. A positive ratio indicates a net positive benefit to society for that particular program. For example, in the table above, the Education in Prison program has a ratio of $6.60, which indicates a net benefit to society of $6.60 for every $1 invested.

[†] The cost-benefit ratio cannot be calculated because the alternative cost of standard incarceration exceeds the program cost.

Using the Results First approach in policy and budget decisions

Massachusetts used the Results First approach to help make strategic decisions regarding quality programs and to respond to critical policy issues, including:

- **Targeting funding toward evidence-based programs.** In 2014, Massachusetts set aside approximately $4 million in state and federal funds for a new competitive grant aimed at expanding evidence- and research-based programming or implementing promising practice approaches to reduce recidivism, as defined by the Legislature.[4] To be eligible for funding, an agency must conduct a comprehensive program inventory that classifies each program according to its evidence of effectiveness, demonstrate efforts to support quality implementation and independent outcomes evaluations, and commit in writing to increase the number of evidence- or research-based programs it delivers. The state will use the Results First model to evaluate proposals and ensure that selected programs are cost-effective and supported by rigorous research.

- **Expanding participation in effective but underused programs.** While collecting program information to populate the Results First model, the Department of Correction identified re-entry programs that were projected to be highly effective and good investments but were not operating at capacity. In response, the department identified 250 inmates who could be moved to minimum-security facilities, increasing the number of offenders eligible to participate in proven recidivism-reduction programs. The department is also prioritizing resources for institutions with the highest need. For example, it increased the number of slots for substance abuse treatment at one of its minimum-security facilities from 50 to 135 by reassigning unused slots from other institutions.

- **Educating policymakers on the high cost of recidivism**. Massachusetts' Results First model used seven years of recidivism data to compute the type and number of felonies and misdemeanors resulting in new convictions and the associated long-term costs of those crimes to the state, local communities, and victims. This gave policymakers a more complete picture of the types of crimes committed and the fiscal impact of high recidivism rates and further informed the work of the commission.

- **Enhance collaboration among criminal justice agencies**. Working together to build the Results First model has produced significant benefits for Massachusetts' criminal justice agencies. They are now systematically using data to answer policy questions and improve their recidivism-reduction programs and services. EOPSS is developing a data-sharing platform that will inform programming and policy across the criminal justice system.

> Results First has had a very positive impact in Massachusetts. It's actually driven all three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—toward a more evidence-based model. We're finding better ways to work with each other to achieve the evidence-based policymaking and decision-making that we think ultimately is going to make us better as a state—in terms of the services that we deliver—and far more cost-efficient."
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> **Andrea Cabral,** secretary of public safety and security

Next steps for Results First in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has realized significant benefits from implementing the Results First approach and is poised to build on that success. Future analyses will provide cost-benefit information for additional criminal justice programs and include a more comprehensive inventory of programs. The commonwealth will continue to evaluate and monitor new and existing criminal justice programs to ensure that they are evidence-based and implemented according to best practices. Further, state leaders are exploring opportunities to expand the Results First Initiative to analyze the commonwealth's juvenile justice and child welfare programs.

> " Even as Massachusetts continues to implement Results First, we're already realizing tremendous gains in the breadth and depth of information available to policymakers. Being able to conduct meaningful analyses on our recidivism rates and understanding the cost drivers will lead to robust, evidence-based policy initiatives and, ultimately, better outcomes for all."
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> **Senator Stan Rosenberg (D)**

Endnotes

1   The team used the Massachusetts Parole Board's case management database to determine releases from county corrections facilities.

2   The technical team reviewed four program areas. However, two of the programs, Employment Training/Job Assistance in the Community, and Electronic Monitoring/Global Positioning Systems, serve different offender populations and were analyzed separately.

3   The technical team reviewed six program areas, but one of them, Regional Re-entry Centers, served two different populations and was analyzed separately.

4   H. 4242, 188th Legislature, Massachusetts General Court, https://malegislature.gov/Bills/BillHtml/137923?generalCourtId=11.