You Get What You Measure: Compstat for Community Corrections

Executive Summary

Any efforts to control crime and corrections costs must seek to strengthen the ability of probation and parole agencies to keep offenders crime- and drug-free. Although prisons and jails currently consume most corrections spending, the majority of adult offenders (70 percent) are in the community on probation and parole. The reincarceration of these offenders for new crimes and violations of the conditions of their release, such as failing a drug test, is a leading driver of the prison populations in most states.

As prison and jail budgets continue to rise, states and counties increasingly are seeking ways to control the costs while ensuring public safety and holding offenders accountable. Probation and parole agencies are not immune to this pressure. Because they are such a big part of the system, they too must deliver stronger results at less cost. Today, many agencies across the nation are employing a wide array of techniques and technologies to get better, more cost-effective results. These include programs that teach offenders new ways to think through problems and resolve conflicts, and rapid-result urine tests and electronic monitors that alert authorities when offenders are using drugs or aren't where they're supposed to be.

A growing number of community supervision agencies also are employing new strategies to ensure these programs and practices are implemented swiftly and grounded in solid research about what works. Many of the strategies try to emulate the public sector's premier model of measuring and managing for results—the Compstat program of the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

The Compstat model is given significant credit for the remarkable and sustained crime drop in New York City

Executive Summary

since the mid 1990s, and police departments across the country have adopted it. Short for **comp**are **stat**istics, Compstat is a continuous evaluation of agency performance that features "live audits"— information on arrests and other critical areas is compiled and distributed to managers across the department, then reviewed in weekly plenary sessions of department executives and senior managers. Unit commanders are called to a podium before their supervisors and colleagues, where they are questioned about the data from their jurisdictions and expected to have deployed new strategies or tactics to deal effectively with any problems. By using real-time objective results and offering transparent feedback on performance, the department-wide meetings generate healthy competition among managers and provide an urgent incentive for them to become proactive and aggressive in their implementation of best practices.

Momentum is building to adapt Compstat to the community corrections field in order to help bolster results, particularly lowering recidivism rates among offenders on probation and parole. Agencies in several states, including New York, Maryland and Georgia, have moved forward and are beginning to show promising outcomes. The rate at which offenders successfully complete their parole terms in Georgia, for example, has risen by four percentage points since managers started a Compstat-like system, and each percentage point is estimated to save the state $6 million to $7 million in reduced costs of incarceration.

The Compstat model represents a dramatic departure from business-as-usual, and as the policing experience shows, it has the potential to significantly improve the performance of community corrections. To reach that potential, a few key elements are essential. First, agencies must select a few critical measurable indicators of success. Next, they need information systems capable of accurately tracking and reporting on those indicators in real time. Third and probably most important is strong leadership. Executive and judicial branch officials who oversee community corrections agencies must be committed to performance management and hold department heads accountable for results to make the process work. Legislators, for their part, gain unprecedented access to performance data that can—and should—inform funding and other policy decisions. Their focus on results reinforces expectations that public dollars produce a solid return—less crime, fewer victims, and offenders who become law-abiding citizens.

Compstat for Community Corrections

In the 1980s, America began a dramatic expansion of its prison system. The number of adults behind the bars of state and federal prisons nearly quintupled in the past 25 years, jumping from 320,000 in 1980 to more than 1.5 million today. An additional 766,010 are being held in local jails.[1]

Far less recognized is that the number of offenders on probation or parole grew at a similar pace. The five million American adults on probation or parole[2] today are under the supervision of state or locally operated probation and parole agencies. These agencies play a critical role in protecting public safety and in almost every aspect of the criminal justice system—preparing reports and recommendations for judges and parole boards, monitoring and enforcing offenders' compliance with the conditions of their release, helping them access programs such as

job training and substance abuse treatment, and collecting restitution for victims of crime, among dozens of other duties. Since these agencies supervise offenders who live in our communities—not behind bars—policy makers and the public have a tremendous stake in what they do, and how well they do it.

Performance Management in Community Corrections

As it stands, parole and probation agencies do a poor job measuring and managing their performance. Few people outside the field itself understand the mission and functions of probation and parole agencies. Communication about how well (or poorly) they do their jobs, and whether and to what degree they are reducing crime and helping offenders become

law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, tends to be episodic, focused on activities rather than outcomes, and driven by crisis, often in response to a crime committed by an offender under supervision. The limited information about results that is available is usually about recidivism, a critical measure but one that is often produced only after years-long follow-up studies by academic and other outside researchers. Such data are interesting, but of limited value for the daily management of community corrections agencies or the minute-by-minute decision-making of community corrections officers.

This is not to suggest that nothing of value is being produced in community corrections. In fact, there are countless examples of probation and parole officers achieving significant results every day in their caseloads and programs. They collect millions of dollars in victim restitution and supervision fees, which often cover or nearly pay the costs of their agencies' budgets. They help offenders find jobs, housing, drug treatment programs and other services that can turn lives around. It's just that the system is not set up to capture, compile and communicate this information. As a result, the information that is communicated doesn't accurately reflect how community corrections agencies actually perform.

Policy makers probably receive higher quality performance reports from many agencies, including others in the criminal justice system. Beginning in earnest with the publication of Reinventing Government[3] in 1992 and

PHOTO CREDIT: NYC PROBATION.
New York City Probation is one of the first community corrections agencies to adapt Compstat.

Compstat Principles

Compstat is short for **comp**are **stat**istics.[12] It became a comprehensive model for measuring and managing police operations in New York City.

At its most basic, the Compstat model is a series of principles for policing and a mechanism for implementing and managing those principles. Applied in practice, it represents a paradigm shift for law enforcement, a new way of thinking about and managing the police function.

The Compstat principles are:

- **Accurate and timely intelligence:** gather up-to-the-moment statistics on what crimes are being committed where in the city

- **Rapid deployment of resources:** use the intelligence to send the police where and when the crimes are happening, with the intent of preventing more crime

- **Effective tactics:** use strategies and tactics that have been proven to work, that produce the desired results: a reduction in crime

- **Relentless follow-up and assessment:** monitor performance to determine if the tactics are working. If they are working, expand their use and share them with others. If they aren't, try something else

the bipartisan adoption of the federal Government Performance and Results Act in 1993, performance measurement and reporting has spread throughout the public sector. In 1993, the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the U.S. Department of Justice reported on performance measurement in criminal justice, including community corrections.[4] The American Probation and Parole Association studied performance-based measures in community corrections in 1995.[5] The Association of State Correctional Administrators[6] has begun a web-based system for performance measurement focused on prisons.[7] The National Center for Juvenile Justice[8] and the National Center for State Courts[9] also have undertaken significant projects with performance measurement for juvenile justice and courts.

The community corrections field lags behind this broad-based movement towards performance measurement. It must catch up. Community corrections leaders need objective, real-time data on key outcomes to effectively manage their organizations and the offenders under their jurisdiction, and to demonstrate they are delivering results and creating public value. And policy makers in all three branches of government should demand better performance data so they can ensure taxpayers are getting a strong return on their investment of scarce resources to probation and parole agencies.

A Model for Change

When William Bratton became police commissioner in New York City in 1994, he made a bold and audacious promise: crime would be reduced by 10 percent in the first year of his term,

and by 40 percent within three years.[10] The strategies he pursued restructured the operations of the New York Police Department (NYPD) from top to bottom, but the one that gets the lion's share of the credit is Compstat.

In the first five years of Compstat, homicides in New York City fell by 75 percent, and from 1993 to 2003 overall serious felonies dropped by 66 percent. That dramatic decline continues today and is, no doubt, the result of a number of programs and social and economic forces. But many analysts agree[11] that Compstat played a major role. It transformed and reinvigorated the NYPD, and with its widespread replication throughout law enforcement, has done the same for many police departments across the nation.

"Live Audits:" Creating Incentives for Results

Though the principles of Compstat (see sidebar) are fundamental to the model, they alone would not have produced the results Bratton promised. The key to the stunning transformation of the NYPD, and the component that has garnered the most attention, is the Compstat meeting.

Twice weekly at police headquarters, department managers gather in a single room to review real-time reports of crime and other performance data. Top brass conducts a "live audit" of the individual commanders, questioning them one by one about crime patterns reflected in the data, hotspots and top suspects in their jurisdictions. By putting everyone together in the same room to look at the numbers, Compstat constructs a powerful public forum for accountability.

The key dynamics created at the Compstat meetings are[13]:

◗ **Peer Pressure:** At traditional staff meetings, employees sit around a table and discuss agency issues on an agenda. At Compstat, the agenda is the performance of individual staff members and their units. The entire senior staff attends each meeting, and some or all supervisors are called individually to stand at the podium in the front of the room. Once in the spotlight, the supervisor provides an update on progress during the past week. Top department managers, seated together at a head table, ask questions about trends and developments based on their knowledge and interpretation of data. This practice creates enormous incentives for supervisors to have already identified problems and creative solutions, especially those that involve partners in the room and in the community.

◗ **Real-Time, Objective Data:** Prior to the meeting, everyone receives a copy of a one-page summary for each manager that tracks key indicators, noting changes over the past week, past month, and year to date. The use of objective data puts the various supervisors on a level playing field in terms of their performance evaluations, minimizing the role of (and rumors surrounding) personal friendships and relationships among employees at all levels. Because the data are provided in real time, Compstat ensures that staff is shifting strategies and tactics quickly to meet changing circumstances and helps provide immediate feedback about the effectiveness of such adjustments. Though the main subject of

"Before Compstat, police executives accepted the credit when crime dropped. But few would accept responsibility when the numbers went up.

Compstat meetings is the data, discussion easily can turn to a specific incident or case if warranted.

◗ **Focus on Outcomes:** Before Compstat, police executives accepted the credit when crime dropped. But few would accept responsibility when the numbers went up. There were too many intervening factors, they argued, such as drugs, the economy or the breakdown of the family. By placing responsibility for achieving an agency's ultimate outcomes squarely on the shoulders of unit supervisors, Compstat refuses to accept the excuse that issues are outside the department's control, or to trivialize the whole agency endeavor by settling for measures of activity, such as the number of arrests. Because external issues affect all units in more or less the same way, measuring the outcomes produced by individual managers and their units is not only fair, it refocuses the energy and culture of the organization where it should be: on results.

◗ **Responsibility and Authority:** Holding supervisors responsible for results means giving them greater authority to manage their resources. Compstat commanders are awarded wide latitude to craft strategies that fit

their communities, their staff and their personal management styles. Greater autonomy from traditional practice sparks innovation and lets the real stars shine.

◗ **Reward and Reprimand:** Compstat meetings are not forums for leaders to rant and rave. Questioners must be careful to deliver a balanced mix of darts and laurels. Staff should expect failures and poor performance to be highlighted and come well prepared to avoid it. But they also should expect to be applauded for making progress and view the meetings as an opportunity to share their success and learn from others.

◗ **Normative Consequences:** Beyond the tangible rewards and reprimands, Compstat helps create "normative consequences"[14] for managerial behavior in the department. Managers want to be able to answer questions completely and competently, to know the data and their operations, and generally present themselves as capable managers. In a Compstat environment the **norms** for managerial behavior create a powerful force for the transformation of agency operations and performance.

PHOTO CREDIT: NYC PROBATION.
Real-time comparative performance data is displayed at a NYC Probation STARS meeting.

Adapting Compstat to Community Corrections

The principles of Compstat were developed for policing, but they provide sound guidance for almost any organization or agency, including community corrections.

For community corrections, the **intelligence** principle of Compstat consists of information about offenders. Risk assessment instruments help probation and parole officers identify characteristics of individual offenders, such as substance abuse, that make them more likely to commit additional crimes. These research- based tools predict *who* is likely to re-offend and why. The **rapid deployment** principle has several elements. First, resources should be deployed to those offenders who pose a high risk of re-offending, while low risk cases should receive far more limited attention and resources. Second, caseloads should be of a manageable size to enable officers to monitor offenders closely and respond quickly when problems arise. Third, resources should be concentrated during the times when offenders are most likely to slip back into their old habits and recidivate— the few months immediately following

their release from prison or sentence to probation. Finally, officers should work in the community, not in the office, and they should have flexible schedules that enable them to respond to situations and crises when they occur, which is often not during the traditional work schedule.

The **effective tactics** principle has received considerable attention in community corrections in recent years. A growing body of evidence-based practice has demonstrated that certain programs matched to the specific needs of individual offenders can produce significant reductions in recidivism. The last principle of the model, **follow-up and assessment**, is simply sound management practice. Managers need to monitor performance and determine how well the strategies are working.

While these four principles form the core of the Compstat model, any community corrections agency that seeks to implement and benefit from the model must do three key things before proceeding.[15] First, the agency must articulate a clear mission. In policing in New York City, the mission is to prevent crime. In probation and parole, the mission is the prevention of crime by offenders under supervision.[16] Second, the agency must identify and implement effective business practices, such as placing high-risk offenders under more intensive supervision. Third, the agency must target key performance indicators. These three areas comprise the framework within which a Compstat model will operate, and must be in place if the model is to work—and they pose a significant challenge to community corrections.

Early Results

The New York City Department of Probation was the first community corrections agency to develop a version of Compstat—its STARS (Statistical Tracking, Analysis and Reporting System) program launched in 2001. Just as the NYPD tracks the commission of crime and evaluates the effectiveness of individual commanders in reducing it, the probation department tracks the commission of crimes by people on probation, and in monthly face-to-face meetings reviews top managers' efforts to move the numbers in the right direction. An evaluation of STARS is underway, but over the last three years, arrests of probationers have dropped by 9.5 percent.

Community supervision agencies in Georgia, Maryland and the District of Columbia also have instituted Compstat-like performance measurement and management strategies. Four percent more Georgia parolees are successfully completing their parole terms since the system began in 2005, and officials calculate that the state saves $6 million to $7 million in corrections costs for each one-percent reduction in the recidivism rate.

Performance Measurement in Community Corrections

The primary performance measure in community corrections is the number and types of new crimes **committed** by offenders under supervision. If community corrections agencies are effective, then they will reduce new

criminal activity. While recidivism is the ultimate measure of performance, it also is important to measure strategies and activities that help reduce offenders' risk factors and thus diminish the likelihood they will re-offend. These include getting addicted offenders into substance abuse treatment and helping unemployed offenders get jobs.

Other aspects of the community corrections mission include enforcing court or parole orders, holding offenders accountable for violations of supervision, and conducting pre-sentence investigations or preparing reports for the parole board. Each of these areas requires measures that address both the process and outcomes. For example, enforcing court orders would be measured by the number, type and outcome of *violation of probation/parole* proceedings, which occur when offenders break the rules of their release. Measures of offender accountability would include collection of victim restitution and fines, or completion of community service hours. Measures of pre-sentence reports and other legal requirements should include on-time compliance with relevant statutes, agency standards and policies, such as swift imposition of sanctions for violations.

Picking the right handful of key indicators to track is vital to the success of a Compstat initiative. While there are scores of valuable indicators, agencies in collaboration with their communities and stakeholders must decide which measures are the highest priorities. Just as long lists of special conditions can set up offenders for failure on supervision, dozens of performance measures will dilute agencies' focus on the core mission.

Data to Drive Measurement

So how do agencies get the data to drive these measures? Emulating the current police version of Compstat can be very daunting, especially for smaller agencies with basic data systems.

That is not reason to surrender. Remember, the first versions of what has become the Compstat book were developed on rudimentary personal computers and paper maps. A small agency or one lacking automated data can still measure overall agency performance on a handful of key measures. A large agency with a fully automated system could include additional measures and compare indicators across regions, agency divisions, programs, units and teams.

The need for data to track key performance measures can be an important consideration in obtaining support and resources for modifying an existing information management system or for the decision to develop or buy a new system.

Using the Measures: The Compstat Meetings

The transformative power of the Compstat model lies in the meetings where managers are held publicly accountable for their performance. Translating that component of the model requires consideration of a number of elements. First is the frequency of the meetings. The New York City Department of Probation holds its meetings monthly. Depending on the size of the agency and the extent of the performance measures, meetings may be held more or less frequently. Meetings should be frequent enough to create and maintain a sense of urgency for managers to take action and see results. At the same time, there should be sufficient time between meetings to allow managers to take action and time for those actions to have an impact. The nature of offender supervision requires that individual staff work with individual offenders to motivate and support them in changing behavior. That process by its very nature takes more time than flooding a crime hotspot with police officers to prevent crime, as occurs in the law enforcement model of Compstat.

Those attending the meetings should be agency leadership and individuals with operational authority over major components of the agency. In a state-level agency, that should be regional directors or division heads, depending

"Perhaps more than any other strategy, Compstat can reverse both the perception and reality of underperformance in community corrections.

on how the agency is organized (geographically or functionally). In a county-level agency, individuals such as assistant chief probation or parole officers with responsibility for divisions or functions should attend. Leading the meeting is clearly the job of the agency head, or the deputy in a large agency.

The nature of the meetings should be the same, regardless of the size of the agency or its level of sophistication with information technology. The meetings are designed to improve performance. They are based on empirical information on agency performance, and on proven strategies to accomplish the agency mission. The accountability is directed at ensuring that managers are managing proactively, monitoring operations, properly allocating resources, using proven strategies and assessing performance. As with Compstat in the NYPD, the meetings should never be a game of "gotcha!" as that will undermine the integrity of the process and foster unhealthy dynamics that defeat the transparency that is so critical.

Beyond the Meetings: Integrating the Model into the Organization

The transformation of the NYPD by Compstat is most evident outside the biweekly meetings at headquarters. Commanders hold their own mini-Compstat meetings with their own staff to prepare before the department-wide meetings. Managers and supervisors who do not attend the city-wide

meetings nonetheless get indoctrinated into the Compstat mindset as they help their bosses get ready.

Staff throughout the department see that individuals who do well managing with Compstat get promoted, and those who do not are passed by. Policies and procedures were modified to support the Compstat principles. Ultimately, Compstat drove changes that brought all elements of the NYPD into greater alignment in support of the agency mission – preventing crime.

Conclusion

The use of data to manage an organization is fundamental. As a student of business management, NYPD Commissioner Bratton knew the value of real time data to the successful executive. But as critical as timely and accurate data and its effective use by management are to the success of an organization, that alone cannot explain the success of Compstat. Key to its success is the *sense of urgency* created and sustained by the Compstat meetings. Bratton made bold promises about crime reduction and had to deliver. All NYPD commanders knew that they were expected to produce results and demonstrate them before their peers and the department leadership on a regular basis. While Bratton makes it clear that the meetings were not a forum for humiliation where the goal was to trip up commanders and reveal their shortcomings, the leadership of the department has promoted

commanders who produced results and moved out those who did not. This very public form of accountability sent the message and created the sense of urgency that drove fundamental change in a rather short time.

Perhaps more than any other strategy, Compstat can reverse both the perception and reality of underperformance in community corrections. To be sure, many agencies need additional resources to raise results to where they ought to be, just as the NYPD's staffing and funding were increased during Commissioner Bratton's tenure. But for Commissioner Bratton, the purpose of Compstat was not only to boost the performance of his department, but also to prove that the police could bring down crime. They did, and by adopting a similar strategy for accountability, parole and probation can too.

Policy makers can play a critical role in getting probation and parole departments to adopt and abide by the Compstat model. They can support more advanced data systems so community corrections agencies can track results in real time, and they can provide stronger oversight of the agencies, encouraging them to adopt Compstat and keeping a closer watch themselves on the results. Better measurement and management of results in community corrections is a key part of any strategy to protect public safety, hold offenders accountable and control corrections costs. 🏛

Notes

1   Sabol, William J. Todd D. Minton and Paige M. Harrison. (2007) **Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006.** Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

2   Glaze, Lauren E. and Thomas P. Bonczar. (2006) **Probation and Parole in the United States, 2005**. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

3   Osborne, David and Ted Gaebler (1992) **Reinventing Government**. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

4   DiIulio, John. J. Jr., ed. (1993) **Performance Measures for the Criminal Justice System**. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

5   Boone, Harry N. and Betsey Fulton. (1995) **Results-Driven Management: Implementing Performance-Based Measures in the Community Corrections**. Lexington, KY: American Probation and Parole Association.

6   http://www.asca.net/pbmstraining/

7   This work emulates the pioneering efforts of the Conference of Juvenile Correctional Administrators in its award-winning Performance-based Standards system. See http://www.pbstandards.org/

8   Thomas, Doug. (2006) **How Does the Juvenile Justice System Measure Up? Applying Performance Measures in Five Jurisdictions**. Pittsburg, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

9   http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CourTools/ tcmp_courttools.htm

10 Bratton, William J. with Peter Knobler. (1998) **Turnaround.** New York: Random House. p. 202.

11 Kelling, George L. and William H. Sousa, Jr. (2001) **Do Police Matter? An Analysis of New York City's Police Reforms**. New York: Manhattan Institute. p. 11.

12 Henry, Vincent E. (2002) **The Compstat Paradigm**. Flushing, NY: Looseleaf Law Publications. p. 247.

13 Much of this section is borrowed from Adam Gelb, (2006) "Compstat for Community Corrections," **Perspectives**. Winter Issue, pp. 30-33.

14 Behn, Robert D. (2005) "The Core Drivers of Citistat: It's Not Just About the Meetings and the Maps." **International Public Management Journal**. vol. 8, n. 3. p. 307.

15 O'Connell, Paul E. (2001) **Using Performance Data for Accountability: The New York City Police Department's Compstat Model of Police Management**. Arlington, VA: Center for the Business of Government. p. 6.

16 Kelling, George L. and Ronald Corbett. (2003) **This Works: Preventing and Reducing Crime**