

5 Ways Juvenile Probation Administrators Can Use Data

Juvenile probation agencies use data every day to help them to develop case plans for holding youth accountable, protecting the community and promoting positive outcomes. The same information used to make decisions about individual youth can be aggregated to help juvenile probation administrators improve practices and monitor system improvements. Collecting, analyzing, and reporting on key performance measures helps juvenile probation agencies be accountable to those they serve including youth and families, the community, and their partners in the justice system. It can also help administrators ensure their practices are efficient and effective. Here are five important ways that juvenile probation administrators can use data:

01 Support positive outcomes for youth

One of the primary purposes of juvenile probation is to support youth to become productive, law-abiding citizens. Often, this is measured by subsequent offending (recidivism); however, opportunities exist to measure positive changes that youth may experience while under supervision, such as progress in education, obtaining employment skills, or decreasing criminogenic risk. Collecting output and outcome information about programming delivered both by probation staff and community programs can help probation administrators monitor whether the programming is resulting in positive youth outcomes.

02 Ensure youth on probation are treated fairly

Fairness is an enduring issue in the juvenile justice system, and juvenile justice professionals are not only concerned with fairness pertaining to youth entering the system, but also with the equity of how youth are treated within the system. Juvenile probation agencies can use data related to responses to technical violations and other conduct issues to ensure that similar situations are handled similarly, without bias related to race and ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, religion, or social class. Reviewing data related to responding to negative behavior can illustrate whether a specific type of youth is receiving harsher responses than other youth who exhibit similar behavior.

03 Implement evidence-based practices

Research supports that matching youth to services that respond to their risk level and individualized needs leads to improved outcomes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Vieira, Skilling, & Peterson-Badali, 2009). This benefit cannot be attained without collecting data to assess a youth's risk to reoffend and individual needs and maintaining a continuum of effective services that address specific risks and needs. In the aggregate, data collected from risk/need assessments can help agencies understand the risk and need profile for all youth under supervision. This big picture helps the agency ensure that they have the necessary array of services, informs validation of risk/need assessment tools, and will later assist in interpreting long term outcomes, such as subsequent offending.

“

For Bannock County Juvenile Justice, collecting data is about being accountable. It is not just about what we do, but how well we do it. Data helps us demonstrate to elected officials that we are effectively using the taxpayer dollars we receive. Data helps the Court determine whether or not we can be trusted to deliver on the expectations of the Court's order. Data is about being transparent with the community members regarding the degree to which our system promotes positive youth outcomes and community safety. Data increases hope in youth and parents that the juvenile justice system can help them. Finally, data also helps our staff have confidence in the evidence-based practices and protocols we implement, and to experience greater job satisfaction.



MATT OLSEN

PROBATION DIRECTOR BANNOCK COUNTY, IDAHO

04

Increase collaboration with other agencies

Youth on probation are also involved in many other agencies, some juvenile justice-related and some not. They are court-involved and attend school, and their families may be involved with the child welfare agency, the criminal court, or the mental health system. To understand the full picture of a state's juvenile justice system, a probation agency should have data sharing relationships with related agencies such as law enforcement, juvenile corrections, juvenile and criminal court, and community-based service providers. The exchange of information may initially be sharing aggregate counts of the number and type of youth involved in probation with other juvenile justice-related agencies to describe the work of probation and build trust across agencies. Later, it may expand to sharing individual-level data through individual requests, data extracts, or shared databases that can not only inform case planning, but also help with assessing system performance.

“

In the juvenile justice system, data is a vital component in determining the effectiveness of programming provided to children and families. The Davidson County Juvenile Court (DCJC) is quickly becoming a data informed court focusing on data to enhance the daily practices of probation officers to strengthen intervention strategies offered to children and families in meeting their goals. At DCJC, data is being examined within specific geographical areas to ensure probation support services are responsive to the needs and demands in their respective areas. As juvenile justice has become more data driven, we seek to go beyond that and add a human element to the discussion of data usage. In the words of John Wilder Tukey, an American mathematician, 'The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see.' It is my hope within DCJC that data becomes an empowering instrument that allows us to produce the best possible outcomes for all children and families served.



RAYMOND JENKINS

CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The OJJDP Juvenile Justice Model Data Project aims to enhance the quality and consistency of juvenile justice information and to increase its appropriate use in policy and practice decisions by providing guidance to states and jurisdictions on data improvements. The Model Data Project is a collaboration between the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA), the Performance-based Standards Learning Institute (PbS), and researchers from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FLDJJ).



05

Demonstrate accountability to the community

Juvenile probation is partly responsible for upholding community safety, and as taxpayers, community members have a right to understand the work of juvenile probation and the extent to which they are achieving expected outcomes. Juvenile probation agencies use data to demonstrate accountability to the community in various ways, including answering media inquiries, developing agency performance metrics and regularly publishing annual reports. An annual report that includes a description of the vision of the juvenile probation agency and statistics to support the vision demonstrates transparency to both staff and stakeholders. It helps to describe the purpose of juvenile probation to the community, the number and types of youth who are under supervision, and how their cases moved through the system. An annual report is also a beneficial to gaining staff and community buy-in by highlighting progress made by the agency toward improving services.

CONTACT

Teri Deal, Senior Research Associate
Email: tdeal@ncjfcj.org, Phone: 412-246-0846

SUGGESTED CITATION

Johnson, T. & Deal, T. (2018). *5 Ways Juvenile Probation Administrators Can Use Data*. Lexington, KY: American Probation and Parole Association.

REFERENCES

Andrews, D.A., & Bonta, J., (2010) *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*. New Providence, NJ: Matthew Bender & Company, Inc.

Viera, T., Skilling, T., & Peterson-Badali, M. (2009). Matching court-ordered services with youths' treatment needs: Predicting treatment success with young offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 385-401.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-JF-FX-K003 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.