



Improving Public Safety and Reducing Recidivism: Police–Corrections Information Sharing and Collaboration

Why Collaborate and Share Information?

Partnerships between local law enforcement and corrections agencies such as probation and parole are more common as agencies continue to learn the value of leveraging their resources to meet the common goal of public safety. In fact, the August 2012 issue of *Police Chief* magazine featured an article titled “The Importance of Police–Corrections Partnerships,” in which Chief Walter McNeil (former president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police) acknowledged the value of these collaborations and that they can lead to improved officer safety, recidivism rates, and economic efficiency.¹

At the core of these partnerships is information sharing, specifically with regards to data and analytics. Over the last 20 years, both police agencies and correctional agencies have independently embraced data analytics and geographic information system (GIS) mapping techniques to assist with operational planning. Corrections officials often utilize mapping to assign probation and parole officers by geographic location, direct probationers and parolees to services and treatment centers, and make site selection decisions for the placement of new facilities within a community.² Police officials rely upon GIS mapping to identify “hot spots” of criminal activity and adjust patrol deployment. However, when these analytical approaches are interwoven, a more complete and accurate community public safety picture emerges and agencies can make better-informed decisions. For example, from 2000 to 2009, 25 percent of all offenders who killed law enforcement officers were on probation or parole.³ Additional research has shown that in some major U.S. cities, up to 80 percent of homicide offenders and 56 percent of homicide victims were under probation or parole supervision at the time of the crimes.⁴ With the sharing of corrections data on probationers and soon-to-be-released parolees, corrections agencies can help law enforcement partners improve officer safety, increase investigative clearance rates, and reduce crime.

Police departments may not regularly know who are returning to their communities and one of the most important benefits of police-corrections relationships is the opportunity for timely intelligence. For example, if police officers have verified addresses for returning individuals, that information may be useful for preventing crimes of retaliation or the recurrence of domestic violence, for example.⁵ Such information should not be used by police



to “keep tabs” on probationers and returning prisoners, but rather to pursue the public safety needs of the community.

In addition, many police departments are developing reentry strategies or participating in reentry task forces. Having this common platform of information is critical to ensuring all team operations are synchronized to best support returning individuals and/or probationers. **“Prisoner Reentry and Community Policing: Strategies for Enhancing Public Safety,”** is a document issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Urban Institute that identifies evidence-based opportunities for collaboration in this area.⁶ The report notes that research suggests that law enforcement’s direct discussions with reentering prisoners and probationers about the range of sanctions for unlawful behavior as well as incentives for staying clean and drug free increase the odds of compliance. Furthermore, the document goes on to state:

“Information exchange among police and parole officers can create new opportunities to intervene proactively and to mobilize resources in response to circumstances or behaviors that threaten stability or compliance with the conditions of supervision. Further, sharing information can advance efforts to enforce accountability by ensuring that appropriate sanctions are meted out quickly and consistently in response to noncompliant behavior.” (p.26)

What Do Information Sharing Partnerships Look Like?

Recent research on the prevalence of law enforcement agencies collaborating with probation and parole agencies indicates that “information sharing and specialized enforcement partnerships were the most common partnership types, partnerships were more common with adult and juvenile probation than with adult parole, and partnerships remain predominantly informal.”⁷ While informal partnerships through handshakes or long-standing working relationships are beneficial and encouraged, there is added value for agencies to formalize these relationships through memoranda of understanding (MOUs).

MOUs are developed to outline the purpose of a relationship, the goal of the effort, and responsibilities, expectations, performance metrics, and actions; serve to facilitate concrete agreements of partnerships between police and corrections agencies; and can promote understanding about information sharing capabilities and capacities. For example, MOUs can detail who can access different types of data and when; when, how, and in what format data can be transferred (e.g., Excel files versus Word files); exactly what data fields can be shared



(e.g., date of birth, height, weight, or personal appearance—scars, marks and tattoos); data storage details (e.g., security of data storage after transfer, access to data, or length of time data will be kept); and reports that will be generated from the data (e.g., monthly maps of crime data overlaid with maps of parolees' release addresses).

What Kind of Information Can Be Shared?

The types of Information sharing between police and corrections agencies can range from simple Excel spreadsheets that organize data to sophisticated GIS mapping and data analytics. The types of data shared between police and corrections agencies may include the following:

- Parolees' addresses after release
- Neighborhood-level and block-level crime data
- Sex offender registration data (addresses)
- Gang affiliation information
- Social networking information (e.g., links between individuals in crime networks)
- Maps that overlay probationers' addresses and time-bounded crime data
- Criminal history reports, including mugshots
- Probation and parole cases databases

How Have Agencies Done This Effectively?

Anecdotal success stories of information sharing police-corrections partnerships abound. One such example is the BJA-supported Maryland Crime Mapping and Analysis Program led by Washington College. The program's Maryland Offender Management System (MOMS) mapping initiative is of particular note. MOMS is a sophisticated database that draws data from several state sources, including Maryland Community Supervision Parole & Probation cases, Department of Juvenile Services cases, Maryland court warrants, Maryland Sex Offender Registry and Travel Paths, Washington DC, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency cases (parole and probation), and the Baltimore City Gun Registry.⁸ MOMS is a secure Web-based application that allows criminal justice professionals to search, retrieve, analyze, map, and download data about individuals on adult parole or probation, individuals who have juvenile offender records, and registered sex offenders, as well as several other offender



databases. Users can “mouse over” a map symbol to quickly view case data and mugshots. When criminal justice officials log in to MOMS, they can:

- Search for an address and then find offenders from every database who live within a given distance of that address
- Develop a photo lineup of potential suspects in the area near a crime scene
- Gain situational awareness for officer safety when planning field operations
- Export offender lists for further investigation
- View photographs of offenders
- Search for offenders recently released from prison
- Search for recently issued warrants for people residing in their jurisdictions

Other considerations for agencies considering police-corrections collaboration:

- ❖ Law enforcement and corrections agencies operate within disparate systems. Agencies should examine technology to conduct federated searches across systems to provide the ability to conduct searches of data across systems.
- ❖ Most sharing between law enforcement and corrections is a one-way street, with law enforcement accessing corrections data and, less often, corrections/probation and parole accessing law enforcement investigative and intelligence systems.
- ❖ Agencies must consider privacy concerns associated with any information sharing arrangement and establish appropriate business rules for data: for example, how long after arrest or release from probation/parole an individual’s information will be considered for inclusion/examination as it relates to new criminal activity.

Available Resources

Various resources exist to support police and correction agencies in information sharing initiatives:

- The Department of Justice’s Mapping and Analysis for Public Safety (MAPS) program has shaped the use of mapping technologies throughout public safety. The MAPS program funds research that uses GIS, statistical analysis, and analysis of geospatial data toward the following goals: more effective deployment of police; better use of public safety resources; stronger crime policies; and greater understanding of crime. More information on the MAPS program can be found online at: <http://www.nij.gov/topics/technology/maps/Pages/welcome.aspx>.



- The Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (Global) serves as a Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) and advises the U.S. Attorney General on justice information sharing and integration initiatives. Global was created to support the broadscale exchange of pertinent justice and public safety information. It promotes standards-based electronic information exchange to provide the justice community with timely, accurate, complete, and accessible information in a secure and trusted environment. More information on Global can be found online at: <https://it.ojp.gov/global>.
- The journal *Federal Probation: A Journal of Correctional Philosophy and Practice* recently published a review of the empirical literature on police-probation/parole partnerships: <http://www.uscourts.gov/uscourts/FederalCourts/PPS/Fedprob/2013-06/policy.html#top>.

¹ McNeil, Walter A. 2015. "The Importance of Police-Corrections Relationships." *The Police Chief*. http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=2720&issue_id=82012. Additional IACP resources on police-corrections partnerships may be found at:

<http://www.theiacp.org/Police-Corrections-Partnerships>

² Karuppannan, Jaishankar. 2005. "Mapping and Corrections: Management of Offenders with Geographic Information Systems." *Corrections Compendium*. Vol. 30, No. 1.

³ McNeil, Walter A. 2015. "The Importance of Police-Corrections Relationships." *The Police Chief*. http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=2720&issue_id=82012. Additional IACP resources on police-corrections partnerships may be found at:

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⁴ Matz, Adam, et al. 2015. "Police-Probation/Parole Partnerships: Responding to Local Street Gang Problems. *The Police Chief*.

http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=2777&issue_id=102012%20-%205#2

⁵ Travis, Jeremy, Ronald Davis and Sarah Lawrence. 2012. *Exploring the Role of the Police in Prisoner Reentry*, New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. NCJ 238337.

⁶ La Vigne, Nancy G., Solomon, Amy L., Beckman, Karen A. and Kelly Dedel. 2006. "Prisoner Reentry and Community Policing: Strategies for Enhancing Public Safety." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411061_COPS_reentry_monograph.pdf

⁷ Bitna, Kim, Adam K. Matz, Jurg Gerber, Dan Richard Beto, and Eric Lambert. 2013. "Facilitating police-probation/parole partnerships: An examination of police chiefs' and sheriffs' perceptions." *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, Vol. 36, Issue: 4, pp. 752–767.

⁸ For more information, please see: <https://www.washcoll.edu/centers/ces/gis/projects/crime-mapping/moms/>.