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# Electronic Supervision and the Importance of Evidence Based Practices

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## Electronic Supervision and the Importance of Evidence-Based Practices<sup>1</sup>

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**THERE ARE MORE THAN** two million adults in jails and prisons, about 800,000 more on parole, and another four million adults on probation. This is about seven million adults currently under some form of criminal justice supervision, and this figure does not include the millions of additional former inmates that continue to feel the stigma of past incarceration (Pager, 2007; Uggen and Manza, 2002). The U.S. prison population during the first three-quarters of the 20th century was marked by stability, despite some fluctuations (Blumstein and Beck, 1999). The U.S. penal system has grown from about 110 inmates per 100,000 people in the population between 1925 and 1973 to slightly over 700 per 100,000 by the end of the 20th century. This growth places a significant burden on government budgets, as local, state, and federal direct expenditures for criminal justice services totaled \$35.8 billion in 1982 and climbed to nearly \$204.1 billion by 2005, a nearly six-fold increase (Bureau of Justice Statistics Facts at a Glance, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/expgovtab.htm>). When combining both institutional and community corrections figures, it is clear that about 3.2 percent of the adult population is serving a criminal justice sanction.

Criminal justice policy debates need to be reframed to consider emerging research findings. Currently, crime control rhetoric pits rehabilitation against retribution. The 1980s drug war fostered a political environment in which politicians were afraid to be thought of as soft on crime or coddling criminals. In such a context the only policy options considered possible involved building more prisons, lengthening prison sentences, and reducing treatment options. Michael Tonry (2004) simplifies the explanation for the prison buildup by pointing out that incarceration rates have little to do with crime rates, but instead are the result of a series of important political, bureaucratic, and organizational decisions and choices.

Prisons and jails have reached their capacity, as federal, state, and local budgets are stretched

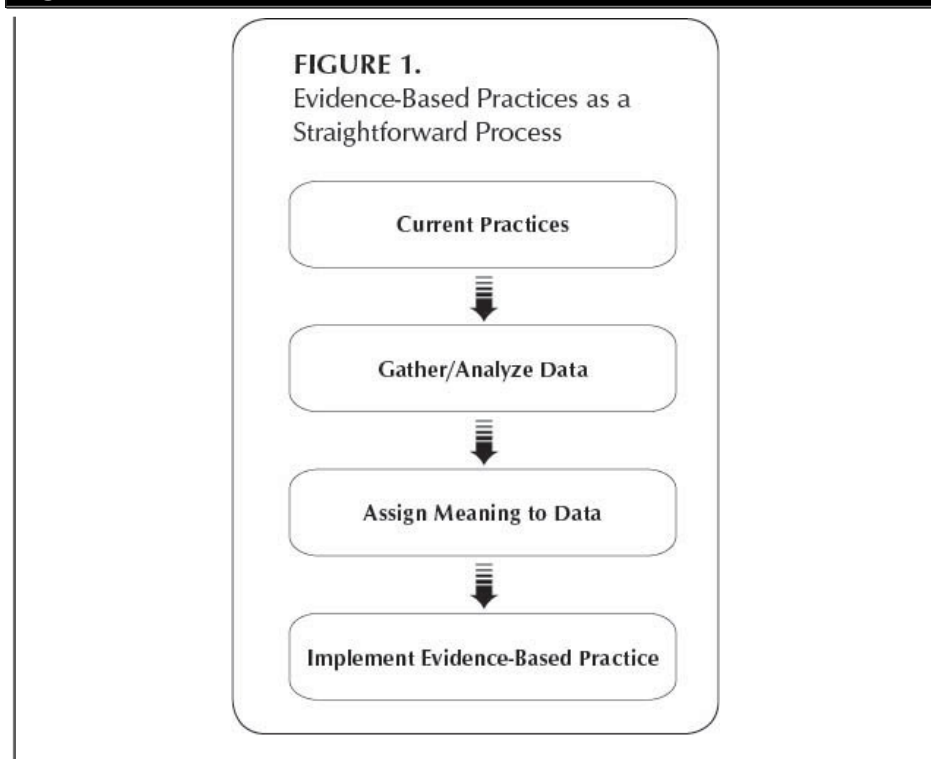
thin by incarcerating more and more offenders. The bulk of inmates eventually will be released back to communities all across the country (see Petersilia, 2003). Many of these released offenders are placed on parole or other post-incarceration supervision, and many others are placed on probation. The community corrections field is challenged to supervise all of these offenders with stagnating budgets. To address these challenges, many agencies across the country are relying on social science evaluations to guide policy and practice development.

Identifying effective justice system interventions is a central goal for many working in the community corrections field. Evidence-based practices provide the field with strategies to collect and analyze data to support or refute the efficacy of certain programs and practices. Evidence-based practices are rooted in an applied scientific approach to determine what interventions assist agencies to reduce recidivism levels and accomplish various intermediate outcomes with limited resources. To date, however, there seems to be much confusion, ambivalence, and anxiety about evidence-based practices. That is, when introducing social science methods, statistical analyses, and the potential for unfavorable findings, many practitioners, administrators, and policy makers are uncertain of what evidence-based practices will do to the delivery of services.

This article provides baseline information about evidence-based practices to assist policy makers, administrators, and line staff to understand better what electronic supervision can accomplish realistically with different offender populations. Often evidence-based practices are referred to in overly scientific terms that may intimidate, confuse, or frustrate some people. We hope to clarify the notion of evidence-based practices so that this strategy can be applied effectively in agencies to guide organizational decision-making regarding electronic supervision.

The phrase evidence-based practices may conjure up certain images for those working in the community corrections field. Often, researchers use “scientific” terms that have little meaning to the people actually implementing the policies and practices. However, in this case, evidence-based practices is a rather straightforward concept, though implementation of evidence-based practices may not always be easy. Agencies collect and analyze evidence to determine what practices should remain, be eliminated, or be altered. This is what some refer to as data-driven actions (see [Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1.



## Evidence-Based Practices: Rationalism over Emotionalism

The justice system, unlike many other public service fields, must satisfy the public's emotional desire to see punishment delivered to those breaking laws. There are few types of crimes that generate as much emotionalism as sex-related offenses. When the public reads about or sees television depictions of sexual-related crimes, many become outraged and demand that something be done. The individual responsible is to be punished. Often, fueled by public outrage, new laws are created, many times in the name of specific victims, especially when a child is victimized. This sort of emotionalism is not new, but rather is part of the nature of justice policies and practices, dating back to the tradition of corporal punishments and public executions. Such publicly delivered punishments included brandings, ear clipping, whipping, and executions conducted in public as a way to demonstrate the government's ability to protect the public and inflict pain on law breakers. Today, we do not rely on corporal punishments; instead, laws and policies are created to maintain public safety. Unfortunately, however, many justice system policies are developed with too much emotionalism and not enough rationality. This is not to diminish the importance of the desire by both victims and the public to see victimizers punished. However, it is important to recognize that evidence-based practices can contribute to more effective policies and practices. [Table 1](#) provides a list of differences between evidence-based and emotion-based policies.

Central to the use of evidence-based practices is the identification of the justice system's goals. We must ask ourselves what the justice system is to accomplish. Is it designed to punish offenders, rehabilitate them, do both, or do neither? Obviously, this is a complex question that

**Table 1.**

### *Evidence-Based Versus Emotional-Based Practices*

	<b>Evidence-Based Practices</b>	<b>Emotional-Based Practices</b>
Purpose	Provide efficient and effective responses to problems	Respond to individual beliefs and desire for pain
Assumption	Policies and practices should be based on evidence	Policies should be responsive to emotions
Relationship to the goals of the Criminal Justice System	Practices are developed with a focus given to all goals of the criminal justice system	Focus is primarily on retribution and just deserts
Focus on cost	Cost effectiveness is central to decision-making	Limited focus
The role of the community	The community plays an active role by providing information that can be used to determine effectiveness	The community plays a passive role with opinions serving as the public's input
The role of leaders	Leaders promote cultural change in the organization	Leaders manage and maintain traditional strategies
Role of line officers	Implement and set new practices	Maintain status quo
Time orientation	Focus on present and future	Focus on the past
Focus on evaluation	Extensive	Limited
The role of researchers	Researchers evaluate programs to determine effectiveness and recommend changes	Researchers study public attitudes and provide little input to program effectiveness
Definition of Success	Quality of program	Quantity of offenders

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cannot be answered fully here, but what can be agreed upon is that the public wants justice system policies to increase public safety. Therefore, what is needed, especially given the public's emotionalism, is a rigorous approach to identifying practices that are less concerned with inflicting revenge upon an offender and more focused on shaping an offender's behavior.

Shaping offender behavior refers to attempts by community corrections officers to utilize a system of positive and negative responses to offender behaviors to promote long-term behavior change. This approach embraces social learning theories that suggest that offenders and non-offenders are not born as much as they are made through a combination of life experiences and psychological makeup. That is, some individuals learn—for many reasons—that it is acceptable to commit crimes, while others learn that it is unacceptable to commit criminal acts. If people can learn to commit crimes, then the community corrections field should develop policy responses that facilitate approaches to shape pro-social individuals, not just punish them.

## **Evidence-Based Practices: What Counts as Success?**

Individual agencies need to define exactly what they are looking for from a particular policy or program, and then create ways to measure the level of success. Recidivism is typically suggested as a benchmark, but there is controversy about how to define and measure recidivism. Should agencies only be concerned with counting the number of arrests, convictions, revocations, or returns to prison or jail? Or should they be concerned with whether offenders are working toward being alcohol and drug free, employed, and following the conditions of their supervision? The point here is that there are many ways to measure recidivism (e.g., Albonetti & Hepburn, 1997; Andrews et al., 1990; Dejong, 1997). Although there is little empirical research on the crime-reducing impact of electronic supervision for offenders supervised in the community (Renzema & Mayo-Wilson, 2005), it might be that electronic monitoring is most effective at helping offenders reach intermediate goals.

The evidence-based practices literature focuses on correctional practices concerned with reducing an offender's likelihood to commit new crimes or technical violations. Interestingly, there are times when this research actually refutes mainstream thought regarding effective interventions. It is commonly thought that the *number* of officer-offender contacts is most important to ensure offender compliance. In this model of supervision, officers would scramble around town conducting home visits rather quickly, especially at the end of the month, to make sure that officers attempted or completed the correct number of visits with each offender. This approach to officer-offender interactions, however, is changing because it does not recognize the importance of the *quality* of contacts. For instance, Skeem, Encandela, & Eno-Louden (2003) found that one of the biggest contributors to successful probation outcomes occurred when officers utilized a dual-role relationship strategy comprised of trust, caring-fairness, and toughness. Others have investigated hybrid models that incorporate what is referred to as law enforcement vs. social worker orientation among probation and parole officers, and these studies also find better outcomes for offenders supervised by officers using a blended interaction approach (Dowden & Andrews, 1999; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). Officers are able to spend so little time directly with offenders, and offenders often lack pro-social interpersonal networks. Hence, the community corrections field is finding that officers' relationship with offenders can serve as an opportunity for pro-social modeling and as an intervention.

Agencies may have programs or policies in place that are not intended to reduce recidivism but to accomplish other goals. Many agencies have large numbers of offenders that are not on active supervision, referred to as banked or administrative caseloads. These offenders do not need much direct officer supervision, and may take officers away from supervising more high-risk offenders (Barnes, Ahlman, Gill, Sherman, Kurtz, and Malvestuto, 2010). The New York City Probation Department uses an electronic reporting system that allows offenders to report to a kiosk at scheduled times. The kiosks have a camera and fingerprint scanner to verify the identity of the supervisee; they are connected with police databases within New York, and they can prompt an offender to report to an officer, take a drug test, or respond to other demands. Kiosk

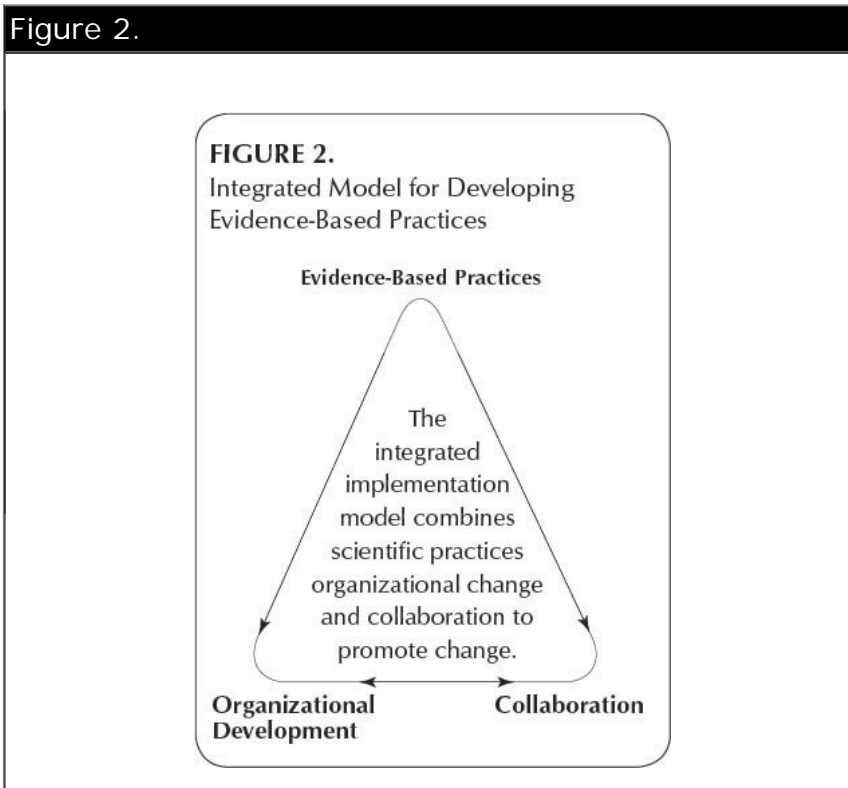
reporting is not expected to reduce recidivism—although there may be fewer technical violations because officers are not scrutinizing these offenders as closely—but this tool might alleviate workload problems in many agencies. In the New York pilot, recidivism levels for offenders on kiosk reporting were found to be about the same as before kiosk reporting. Kiosk reporting allowed officers to pay more attention to higher-risk offenders, who had slight reductions in their failure rates.

Evidence-based practices do not have to focus only on recidivism, but can achieve other goals. Certainly, improvements in risk assessment and offender classification can have an indirect effect on recidivism rates. Broadly defining the goals of the justice system contributes to assessing the effects (or consequences) of different programs and policies. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is a leader in defining and promoting evidence-based practices for the community corrections field, and they have developed guidelines for implementation.

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## The Integrated Evidence-Based Practices Model

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) have developed an integrated model for implementing evidence-based practices (see [Figure 2](#)). This is a tripartite model placing equal emphasis on: 1) evidence-based practices, 2) organizational development, and 3) collaboration. This model has the potential to move community corrections toward practices rooted in empirically verifiable evidence (data). NIC and CJI developed an integrated implementation model that incorporates scientific investigations (such as evaluations), organizational culture change, and collaboration. The first element of this implementation strategy involves evidence-based practices. It is not enough for agencies to merely measure effectiveness of specific practices if administrators are not flexible enough to adjust practices based upon evaluation findings. NIC and CJI emphasize the importance of developing organizational cultures that seek to improve agency functioning. Organizational development simply recognizes that implementing new practices or adopting new technologies can at times require courageous leaders. The courage comes from recognizing that the agency may need to change in certain areas—and change can be frustrating and even frightening for some. This is essential to instituting effective electronic supervision components as decision makers move away from holding onto ineffective programs, but are willing to alter, eliminate and incorporate new practices that hold offenders accountable and maintain public safety.



Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) recognize a similar trend with many large corporations and the medical field as CEOs and hospital administrators try to deliver products and services in cost-effective ways. They mention how many top CEOs have been forced to shift away from longstanding business practices due to evidence suggesting their ineffectiveness—measured as lost productivity and profits. Community corrections leaders have to adopt a new operating logic not based upon what sounds good, or the path of least resistance when implementing an electronic supervision component. Rather, administrators should create an atmosphere that empowers employees to collect appropriate information, objectively process that information, and make decisions based upon the findings. [Table 2](#) provides a list of questions that community corrections leaders can ask to assist in promoting cultural change when implementing electronic supervision technologies.

**Table 2.**

*Fifteen Questions Leaders Can Ask Themselves to Promote Cultural Change When Using Electronic Monitoring Technologies*

1. How can officers determine the amount and type of electronic monitoring intervention needed to protect and promote behavioral change among offenders?
2. How can the electronic monitoring tool raise offenders' levels of internal motivation to change?
3. How is the offenders' risk level related to chances of success on electronic monitoring?
4. How can electronic monitoring tools address offenders' current criminogenic needs?
5. In what ways can the electronic monitoring tool be matched to different offenders' culture, gender, motivation levels, and related areas?
6. What degree of electronic monitoring is needed to effect change?
7. Can too much monitoring cause a problem rather than prevent a problem?
8. To what degree should treatment programs be incorporated with electronic monitoring tools?
9. Do staff members using the electronic monitoring tools have the skills to make sure that the tools are used in ways that address the specific characteristics and needs of offenders?
10. Are positive rewards for offenders incorporated into the application of the electronic monitoring tool?
11. Is the electronic monitoring tool promoting offenders' abilities to engage in ongoing support in natural communities and restricting offenders' access to criminal networks?
12. How is the effectiveness of the electronic monitoring tool and related practices going to be defined?
13. How will information learned about the ongoing application of electronic monitoring tools be used to adjust the application of the tools?
14. How is collaboration being promoted through the use of the electronic monitoring tools?
15. How will new technological advances and cultural shifts influence the use of the electronic monitoring tools?

*Source: Developed from a discussion of the eight principles described by NIC and CJI.*

The third arm of the integrated implementation model recognizes the need for enhancing buy-in and collaboration among both agency members and other agencies as well (Joplin et al., 2004). No community corrections agency can carry out all its duties without input and assistance from other agencies. And, for this reason, probation and parole cannot be expected to tackle community supervision alone, especially for many high-risk offender populations. In fact, Kim English and her colleagues from the Colorado Department of Public Safety coined the approach known as the “containment model” to supervise sex offenders (English, Pullen, and Jones, 1996). This approach creates a highly structured life for sex offenders through a complex web of justice and non-justice agencies working together to provide external control over offenders’ lives. Community corrections agencies must reach out to other justice and non-justice



organizations to incorporate, for instance, law enforcement, judicial personnel, and victim advocates in the supervision process. Besides establishing these external communication networks, agencies should also work toward communicating and collaborating with officers inside their agency.

The integrated implementation model improves community corrections practices and programs for several reasons. First, this model moves the community corrections field away from practices performed simply because “that is how things get done around here” to practices founded on rigorous data collection, analysis, and application of the findings in a practical way. Second, this model recognizes organizational dynamics, the need for a progressive, innovative leadership style that allows for decentralized decision making, and willingness to accept evaluation findings not as either a defeat (did not reduce recidivism) or a victory (reduced recidivism), but rather as the basis for objective decisions to discontinue, maintain, or adjust practices. Finally, the integrated model acknowledges that community corrections agencies must establish broad professional networks of justice and non-justice organizations to participate in the supervision process, something especially important for high-risk offenders (e.g., sex offenders, domestic violence offenders).

Electronic supervision is not the answer to all justice system problems, but it may have potential as an additional tool for community corrections officers to shape offender behavior. Or, conversely, it could be found that electronic supervision components do not result in significant reductions in violating or criminal behaviors.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that electronic supervision is not effective at accomplishing other supervision goals. Next, we will focus briefly on the first element of the integrated implementation model, but refer readers to the NIC and CJI publications and webpage for further discussion of organizational development and collaboration (Howe and Joplin, 2005; [http://www.crjustice.org/cji/niccji\\_initiative.html](http://www.crjustice.org/cji/niccji_initiative.html)).

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## **The Eight Principles of Evidence-Based Practices**

NIC and CJI developed eight evidence-based principles for effective interventions. This section provides a brief sketch of how each of these principles applies to electronic monitoring policies and practices. The eight principles are: 1) perform actuarial risk assessment, 2) enhance intrinsic motivation, 3) target interventions, 4) conduct skills training, 5) increase positive reinforcement, 6) engage ongoing support in natural communities, 7) measure relevant processes and practices, and 8) provide measurement feedback (Clawson, Bogue, and Joplin, 2005, p. 6).

The first principle, actuarial risk assessment, is a foundational element for supervising offenders by allowing officers to determine the amount and type of interventions needed to maintain safety and most effectively work toward offender behavior change. Actuarial risk assessments provide supervising officers with an initial glimpse into an offender’s life, and are necessary to accurately classify offenders. Risk assessment instruments should be used in conjunction with other information gathered more informally, such as home and office visits, discussions with treatment providers, and collateral contacts. The point here is that actuarial risk assessments are only one part of the assessment process. Officers should continually evaluate offenders on their caseloads to determine where an offender is along a risk continuum.

Some may wonder what “risk” really means—risk of what? One of Webster’s definitions states that “risk is the probability of loss or injury.” For community corrections officers, this fear of loss or injury is measured differently across jurisdictions, and usually measures the likelihood of a noncompliant offender outcome. When supervising sex offenders, for instance, the greatest fear for officers is the occurrence of a new sex crime. Research has found that offenders with combinations of certain background characteristics (e.g., antisocial personality disorder) and other more malleable (changeable) characteristics (e.g., substance abuse issues) are more or less likely to commit another sex crime. These offender characteristics are referred to as *risk factors*, and we are aware that validated forms or instruments exist to help officers assess the cumulative impact of such risk factors. Risk assessments provide agencies with a standardized way of



determining if an offender is suitable for electronic supervision tools.

The second principle, enhance intrinsic motivation, is related to shaping offender behavior as officers attempt to use communication and interaction strategies that make offenders *want* to change. Most of us have had to change some feature in our lives, whether it was trying to lose weight, stop drinking, quit smoking, or another area of self-improvement. Accomplishing any one of these is not easy, and requires internal drive or motivation to succeed. Seldom do people give up smoking or lose weight because they were told to do so or forced to by someone else. The individual must want to change. Others may encourage and enhance this motivation by communicating to the smoker or the dieter that only he or she has the power to change. The change process is not easy and there may be times when individuals will relapse and smoke a cigarette or slip from their diet. This does not mean that they have failed, merely that they must start over again. Humans are animals of habit, and many of these habits have existed for a long time. It is unrealistic to expect someone who has smoked cigarettes or had poor dietary habits to change overnight. Similarly, it is unreasonable to expect offenders who often come from lower socioeconomic strata and have substance abuse issues and perhaps lengthy criminal records to change immediately. Community corrections officers, instead, should focus on raising the level of internal motivation to change.

Enhancing intrinsic motivation in offenders is somewhat different from motivation needed for self-improvement. For the most part, high-risk offenders are ambivalent about changing their attitudes and behaviors. Like many people, high-risk offenders may resist change, but the difference here is that offenders do not have as much choice. Officers may be able to encourage or stimulate this internal motivation. There are several ways in which electronic supervision can contribute to bringing out such motivation by providing offenders with external control by monitoring their behaviors and communicating with them in a way that breaks down areas of ambivalence. Offenders know that GPS tracking gives officers information about where they have been and when they were at particular places. This information is valuable when interacting with offenders, as they will learn that it is more difficult for them to deceive an officer. Electronic supervision of a sex offender, for instance, is only one piece of the supervision process, but it can provide useful information for officers to know where offenders are in their relapse cycle.

The third principle, targeting interventions, is more nuanced than the others. It actually involves five parts: (a) risk principle, (b) criminogenic need principle, (c) responsivity principle, (d) dosage, and (e) treatment. The risk principle recognizes that offenders present different levels of risk of failure on supervision (however an agency may measure it), and that agencies must target interventions according to these risk levels. Essentially, do not place low-risk offenders in settings with high-risk offenders. Research has shown in the past that when low-risk offenders were placed in treatment services with high-risk offenders, the low-risk offenders did much worse (Hanley, 2006). Risk levels should be determined through an ongoing process of evaluating risk with both actuarial instruments and more informal or informed officer judgments. Triaging offenders by risk classifications allows agencies to maximize resources by differentiating among the low- and high-risk offenders and concentrating their efforts (i.e., time and money) on high-risk offenders. Low-risk offenders perform relatively well on community supervision when their lives are interrupted the least—leave social bonds, attachments, and commitments intact—making them good candidates for kiosk reporting. Location tracking with GPS is more appropriate for high-risk offenders, such as sex offenders, domestic violence abusers, and gang members.

The second element of targeting interventions is referred to as criminogenic needs. The needs principle captures those changing or dynamic offender risk factors such as mental health problems, substance abuse issues, informal networks, employment, and other individualized factors related to an offender's psychosocial functioning (Taxman & Thanner, 2006). Whereas risk factors focus on past behaviors related to an offender's criminal history, the needs principle recognizes that there are offender time-varying characteristics that greatly influence an offender's predisposition to reoffend. An example of this is the potential for a domestic abuser to be set off following the receipt of divorce or separation papers or other potentially upsetting

information, events, or processes. Taxman and Thanner (2006: 31) argue that criminogenic needs refer “to the degree to which daily functioning is impaired and involved in criminal (antisocial) behavior.” Risk and needs assessments are essential for administrators confronting growing caseloads, as they offer an objective measure of an offender’s likelihood to recidivate and they identify the most appropriate interventions based upon the unique risks and needs presented by each offender. Community corrections officers may need to adjust case plans in light of an assortment of static (risk) and dynamic (needs) factors. Cumulatively, the risk and needs principles identify the importance of considering offender past behaviors alongside changing (and changeable) characteristics that contribute to their likelihood of reoffending.

The responsivity principle argues that a variety of learning styles and approaches exist and that interventions should be assigned carefully to offenders according to their culture, gender, motivation levels, and other areas. Evidence-based practices research suggests that treatments must be matched to each offender and that particular care should be taken to match style and methods of communication with an offender’s level of readiness to change his or her behavior. This means, for instance, that it may be pointless to include substance abuse treatment interventions for offenders without a substance abuse problem. In order for agencies to maximize the impact of interventions, it is important to carefully match offenders to services, since interventions can actually have an inverse effect from their intentions.

The dosage principle acknowledges the importance of quantity of interventions. Providing either too many or too few services or structure to offenders’ lives can have significant unintended consequences. Too much supervision or monitoring can lead to what Payne and Gainey (1998) referred to as the brutalization effect. These researchers found that some offenders on home detention felt unfairly treated and frustrated by too many interventions or punishments; these offenders may believe that they cannot meet all of the conditions and stop trying to change. From an organizational standpoint, too many interventions can siphon resources by taking too much officer time. A strategy commonly accepted is to apply high levels of structure and services during the first three to six months. This initial supervision period should structure about half to three-quarters of offenders’ “free” time. GPS may be a good tool to use with many high-risk and recently returning individuals during their initial time in the community.

The treatment principle is essential for many high-risk offenders. High-risk offenders have thinking and behavior problems that lead them to commit crimes. Treatment should be directed at high-risk offenders to work toward changing offender thought patterns, which will hopefully lead to a change in behaviors. Take, for instance, a convicted sex offender that believes it is appropriate to engage in sexual behavior with children. Many of these offenders convince themselves that children are sexual beings that have had their sexual freedom restricted. Obviously, it is paramount that sex offender supervision teams work to change such thinking patterns to ones that define sexual behavior with children as victimizing behavior. Hopefully by changing such thought, we can also change offender behaviors. A group of Canadian researchers found that offenders on house arrest with electronic monitoring did not have lower failures per se. They did find that the offenders monitored with electronic monitoring and ordered to treatment were more likely to complete their treatment, and the offenders that completed their treatment had much lower failure rates (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000a).

The fourth principle, provide skills training, emphasizes the need for staff to be trained in many areas of psycho-social development and deficiencies. By training staff in social learning theory, antisocial thought patterns, and motivational interviewing techniques, offenders may learn necessary skills through role-playing and other practice sessions. This principle can be extended to include providing initial and ongoing training on any electronic supervision components.

The fifth principle, positive reinforcement, suggests that the best way to shape behavior is by using four positive responses for each negative response given. Positive reinforcement may be a difficult thing to apply with high-risk offenders. Community corrections officers need to remember that they are not in the business of punishing or rehabilitating as much as they are in the business of improving public safety. So, if an offender has not had a travel violation (i.e., followed all inclusion and exclusion zone requirements) for a certain length of time, an officer

should mention this to the offender. This is not to suggest that by merely telling an offender that he or she is doing well that dramatic change will immediately take place. Instead, the idea behind variable response systems is that officers can make offenders *want* to receive the positive reinforcer.

Consider how good it feels when someone mentions to you that you have done something well or that they appreciate you. These sorts of interactions do have the potential to produce significant positive feelings for people, and may even make you want to be around that person more. Officers should not ignore inappropriate behavior, however. All inappropriate behavior should be responded to as quickly as possible. The idea here is to create a context for offenders in which they expect a response from their supervising officer for all behaviors. Applying more positive reinforcers is more effective than just the absence of a negative response.

Traditionally in community supervision the only offender behavior that was recognized was inappropriate behavior and all good behavior was not responded to. New learning approaches have moved to incorporate positive reward systems. A non-justice system example of this is to try to get a child to improve his or her grades in school. One approach is to let the child know that all bad grades (however defined) will be matched with something the child does not like, such as more chores, earlier bedtime, or restriction from a favorite toy. This may yield a child who does not get bad grades, or, on the other hand, the child may get bad grades and suffer the consequences, which may eventually foster a strained parent-child relationship. An alternative approach is to use those negative reinforcers if the child gets bad grades, while providing positive reinforcers such as fewer chores, later bedtime, or money, if the child excels at school. The point here is that the second approach does not shy away from letting the student (or offender) know when he or she has underperformed, but also lets the child (or offender) know that good performance may be rewarded.

The sixth principle, engage ongoing support in natural communities, identifies the importance of collateral contacts. Informal social controls are crucial to shaping behavior. The pro-social individuals within an offender's group of friends and family can contribute to keeping an offender on the right track. GPS technologies allow officers to exclude offenders from being around other offenders on GPS.

The first six evidence-based principles developed by NIC and CJI focus on how officers can work to shape offender behaviors, and the last two principles focus on important organizational features. The seventh principle, measure relevant processes and practices, allows agencies to identify important benchmarks for offender behavior as well as officer performance. Principle eight, provide measurement feedback, recognizes the need for the information from principle seven to be used in a constructive way to steer agency decisions.

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## **Evidence-Based and Scientific Research**

Despite the growing popularity of electronic supervision tools, especially GPS tracking of sex offenders, the bulk of research fails to find a significant crime reduction benefit from using electronic supervision. This is not to say that electronic supervision is not a worthwhile component for community supervision. The research that does exist, for the most part, focuses on either radio frequency home arrest programs or GPS tracking. In this section we will summarize the research findings about electronic monitoring to provide those considering including an electronic monitoring component and those with existing components to set realistic goals and expectations.

Evaluations typically focus on the direct impact of a new intervention on offender behavior. Offender behavior is usually measured as a technical violation and a recidivism measure. Some researchers have considered the potential for electronic monitoring to have an indirect effect on offender behavior. That is, electronic monitoring may not necessarily cause offenders to change their decisions to commit a new crime. But, it might make offenders more aware of their

likelihood for being caught violating other conditions of their supervision. A comparison between court- and corrections-based programs using electronic monitoring with inmates and probationers in Canada found little crime-reducing effect for either program using electronic monitoring (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, and Rooney 2000b).

Other benefits were found as offenders on electronic monitoring had more favorable attitudes toward staff (e.g., empathy, trust), and had significantly higher program treatment completion rates. In light of evidence-based principles mentioned above, these findings are significant. First, finding that offenders in the electronic monitoring groups perceived supervising officers more positively suggests the potential for officers to have more impact with offenders. Second, offenders who completed treatment were far less likely to fail on supervision, and nearly all of the offenders in the electronic monitoring groups completed their treatment.

The most robust evaluation of electronic monitoring effectiveness investigates the use of both radio frequency and GPS technologies. Padgett, Bales, and Blomberg (2006), looked at more than 75,000 offenders under house arrest in Florida, and found that offenders monitored with either technology had significantly lower rates of revocations for technical violations or new crimes as well as lower absconding rates. This is the only evaluation of electronic monitoring technologies in a community corrections setting to uncover such optimistic findings.

How should agencies interpret these findings? First, it appears that there may be some potential for curtailing offender behavior while offenders are on electronic monitoring. However, it is important to remember that community supervision is a human intensive process, and just because offenders in one place do well when they are monitored with electronic monitoring devices does not mean this will translate to another jurisdiction. There is no way of knowing from the current research what actually caused lower absconding in Florida or better treatment completion in Canada. The point here is that electronic monitoring is not a program, but rather one tool that can be incorporated in an overall supervision strategy. It may be that, in those jurisdictions where electronic monitoring appears to bring about crime reduction, there are other program components at work.

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## **Barriers to Implementing Electronic Monitoring Tools as Evidence-Based Practices**

Given the widespread support for developing evidence-based practices, it is natural to question why these practices are not more widely used. A number of barriers inhibit the use of evidence-based practices. They include:

- Resistance of policy makers to new strategies
- Concerns about cost
- Public desire for retribution
- Complacency among line staff
- Difficulties defining success
- Lack of awareness
- Working with researchers
- Fear of the unknown

[Table 3](#) provides an overview of these issues and ways that community corrections officials can overcome these issues.

**Table 3.*****Challenges to Developing Evidence-Based Practices***

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Why the Challenge Exists</b>	<b>How to Overcome the Barrier</b>
Policy makers resistant to new strategies	Policy makers are responsive to public opinion and may be unwilling to try new things.	Engage in an awareness campaign informing policy makers of the utility of evidence-based strategies.
Concerns about Cost	Because many evidence-based practices are new, start-up costs may cause resistance among the public and policy makers.	Cost-benefits analyses can demonstrate whether the start-up costs are less than the continued costs for ineffective practices.
Public desire for retribution	The public demands that offenders be punished and many evidence-based policies appear to be "slaps on the wrist."	Even less severe sanctions are experienced as punitive by offenders. Those developing evidence-based practices should demonstrate the punitive nature of those practices to the public.
Complacency among Line Staff	Some workers implementing policies may be accustomed to old practices and resistant to change.	Leaders must demonstrate how and why new practices will make the line officers' job more practical, without adding unnecessary work to workers.
Defining success	It is sometimes difficult to define measures of success for evidence-based practices when individuals are focused on punishment as the definition of success.	Indicators of success should be broadly defined so that all advantages of evidence-based practices are recognized and evaluated thoroughly.
Lack of awareness about evidence-based practices	Criminal justice officials may not be aware of practices that are deemed to be most effective.	Through collaborative efforts, different practitioners can share information about effective and promising strategies.
Working with researchers	In some places a gap exists between researchers and practitioners.	Develop partnerships and relationships with research agencies and college/university researchers.
Fear of the Unknown	Because evidence-based practices are new, leaders and practitioners may see untested practices as risky.	Pilot test the program and demonstrate to leaders and practitioners that the principles of the new practice are based on evidence that suggest the new practice should be effective.

Central to all of these issues is resistance to change by policy makers, practitioners, and the public. [Table 4](#) highlights things that community corrections leaders can do when promoting

change surrounding the use of electronic monitoring technologies.

**Table 4.**

## *Strategies Leaders and Policy Makers Can Follow to Promote Change*

**C**ollaborate with others involved in the criminal justice system.

**H**elp workers see the benefits of the new practices.

**A**adjust practices as needed.

**N**ever say never.

**G**ive incentives to workers and offenders.

**E**valuate the new electronic monitoring techniques.

### **Conclusion**

This article provided readers with a brief introduction to evidence-based practices and the integrated model developed by NIC and CJI. Evidence-based principles provide some direction for agencies considering using electronic monitoring or other electronic supervision tools in their jurisdictions. Deciding to place any offender on electronic supervision requires an adequate risk assessment to determine the individual's risk and criminogenic need factors. The assessment is a foundation for the rest of the supervision period. Forgoing adequate assessment would be like building a building on a faulty foundation. The building will ultimately collapse and fail to provide safety. Supervising offenders without assessing their needs will also fail.

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## Endnotes

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[Electronic Supervision and the Importance of Evidence-Based Practices](#)

[Developing an Effective Location Monitoring Program](#)

### **Electronic Supervision and the Importance of Evidence-Based Practices**

1. An earlier version of this article was printed in DeMichele and Payne (2009), *Offender Supervision with Electronic Technology: Community Corrections Resource*, second edition. Supported under Award number 2005-WP-BX-K177 from the Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Department of Justice. Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the authors and do not reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.
2. In fact, it is highly likely that electronic monitoring through its increased element of surveillance of an offender may uncover more technical violations and new crimes, but this has yet to be empirically verified.

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### **Developing an Effective Location Monitoring Program**

1. [http://jnet.ao.dcn/Probation\\_and\\_Pretrial\\_Services/Memos/2008\\_Archive/ppspad00109.html](http://jnet.ao.dcn/Probation_and_Pretrial_Services/Memos/2008_Archive/ppspad00109.html)
2. [http://jnet.ao.dcn/Probation\\_and\\_Pretrial\\_Services/Memos/2009\\_Archive/ppspad01009.html](http://jnet.ao.dcn/Probation_and_Pretrial_Services/Memos/2009_Archive/ppspad01009.html)

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[Collaborative Supervision Strategies for Sex Offender Community Management](#)

[Supervision of Sex Offenders: A Multi-Faceted and Collaborative Approach](#)

[Traumatized by Association: The Risk of Working Sex Crimes](#)

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