



# Kiosk Supervision for the District of Columbia

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The majority of people involved with the criminal justice system are under community supervision. In 2009, 5 million of the 7.2 million individuals under some form of criminal justice system control were supervised in the community (Glaze 2010). Although all individuals under supervision are required to report regularly to their supervising officer, the intensity and structure of supervision varies considerably according to the risk of re-offense. Managing this population to facilitate their success in becoming law-abiding citizens is a huge challenge for community supervision agencies across the country as they struggle to distribute scarce resources across their supervised population without diluting interventions and monitoring to the point of ineffectiveness. Providing the appropriate level of supervision and intensity of treatment based on an individual's assessed risk and need is the key to meeting that challenge.

One supervision method that states and localities across the nation have adopted to supervise low-risk offenders and pretrial defendants efficiently is kiosk supervision. Kiosk systems can replace in-person reporting requirements, are convenient for both supervisees and supervision agencies, and help shift resources to moderate- and high-risk probationers and parolees who need more intensive interventions and monitoring. With supervision budgets under increasing stress and caseloads rising, these aspects of kiosk supervision systems are highly attractive.

In 2008, the Court Supervision and Offender Services Agency for the District of Columbia (CSOSA) set out to implement a kiosk reporting pilot program for the probationers and parolees the agency supervises. CSOSA engaged the Urban Institute to conduct an outcome evaluation of the pilot. Due to software integration problems, implementation was delayed, and the Urban Institute instead conducted a simulated analysis.<sup>1</sup> The simulation was designed to identify, if possible, low-risk offenders who posed the same risk whether supervised passively (i.e., with a minimal compliance reporting requirement or Kiosk reporting) or actively (i.e., in-person reporting to community supervision officers).

After the simulation analysis was complete, the Urban Institute co-sponsored (with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the District of Columbia) a symposium titled *The Risk Principle in Action: Right-Sizing Supervision Monitoring for High- and Low-Risk Offenders*. The symposium presented an overview of research on kiosk supervision for low-risk supervisees and global

positioning system (GPS) monitoring for higher-risk offenders as examples of different technology-based approaches used to allocate supervision resources according to offender risk level. Local criminal justice leaders joined the symposium to address issues raised and discuss implications for the future direction of practice in the District.

This brief draws upon and summarizes findings from both the simulation and the symposium. It discusses the capabilities of kiosk supervision technology, how kiosk supervision fits within a broader risk reduction supervision strategy, challenges of kiosk implementation, and empirical evidence regarding kiosk supervision impacts. It concludes with recommendations for implementation of a kiosk supervision system in the District of Columbia.

## How Do Kiosk Systems Work?

Supervision kiosks are automated machines, much like bank ATMs, to which supervisees can report in lieu of in-person reporting to a probation, parole, or pretrial supervision officer. Some kiosk supervision systems use biometric technology in addition to a unique password to confirm individuals' identities. Supervisees can use the kiosk to submit payments; schedule appointments with their supervising officers; update personal information, such as addresses, phone numbers, and emergency contacts; and answer questions related to their conditions of supervision (such as whether their employment status has changed or if they have attended treatment). Kiosks can also transmit instructions to supervisees. For example, New York City uses its kiosks to randomly select low-risk probationers for drug testing. After kiosk sessions are complete, a receipt is printed that includes information such as the location, date, and



**Figure 1.**  
**A Supervision Kiosk**

Source: NYC Department of Probation

time of the session, as well as comments and messages from supervision officers. If offenders do not check in as required, kiosks can notify supervision officers with an electronic alert and automatically send a letter to the offender asking them to check in immediately.

Kiosks can be placed in easily accessible locations and operate outside normal business hours. This gives individuals the flexibility to meet their conditions of supervision without conflicting with other obligations, such as work, school, or treatment. The system provides equivalent operational flexibility to the supervision agency, which can conduct operations in locations and at times that would otherwise pose logistical difficulties. Kiosk supervision systems also offer a way of automating data entry by supervisees, which would otherwise be handled by agency staff. Criminal justice agencies and their community partners can share these data and use them for ongoing monitoring and improvement of kiosk operations.

## Kiosk Supervision within a Risk-Reduction Framework

The purpose of community supervision is increasingly defined both as risk control (constraining the immediate ability of supervisees to commit crimes) and risk reduction (changing supervisee behavior in ways that will last after the period of supervision ends). Risk reduction is necessary to deliver public safety improvements over the long term, but it is not easy.<sup>2</sup> Changing offender behavior generally requires interventions targeted to address identified criminogenic needs, sustained over time, and supported by incentives and regular reinforcement. Kiosk supervision can support supervision agencies in carrying out a risk-reduction approach in several ways:

- *Shifts Resources away from Low-Risk and toward Moderate- and High-Risk Offenders.* It is well accepted in the field, and supported by a strong body of research, that active supervision and intensive treatment have the greatest benefit for moderate- and high-risk offenders (Andrews and Bonta 2006; Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006). In contrast, treatment has little, if any, benefit for low-risk offenders, and intensive supervision without treatment does not reduce recidivism (Andrews and Bonta 2006; Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006; Petersilia and Turner 1993). Many supervision agencies have large caseloads that spread intervention resources too thin to

achieve the behavior changes that reduce risk to re-offend. Kiosk supervision systems reduce the resource investment in supervising low-risk populations, particularly in terms of officer time. This allows agencies to reinvest time and resources into supervision and interventions for higher-risk supervisees.

- *Facilitates Front-Loading Supervision Resources.* Risk of recidivism for returning prisoners is greatest at the time of release, as they must deal with the immediate challenges meeting basic survival needs and face temptations that could lead to reoffending (Binswanger et al. 2007; Grattet, Petersilia, and Lin 2008; Langan and Levin 2002; Travis 2005; National Research Council Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance from Crime 2007). Probationers who fail also tend to do so early in their terms of supervision (Gray et al. 2001; Petersilia and Turner 1986). Supervision agencies seeking to reduce risks in their populations should therefore front-load supervision resources to provide more support and monitoring in the initial stages of the period of supervision. If interventions are successful early in the supervision period, supervisee risk will be reduced and the need for close supervision will diminish. Supervisees who are staying out of trouble can be transferred to kiosk supervision, and the resources initially dedicated to their supervision can be redistributed to the supervision of newly released, high-risk individuals.
- *Incorporates Incentives and Rewards into the Supervision Process.* Offenders are more engaged and less likely to fail when they receive rewards for meeting the conditions of their supervision (Bogue et al. 2004). Kiosk supervision is less time consuming and inconvenient for supervisees than general or intensive supervision. While offenders may miss work or other obligations and spend a greater part of their day waiting for and meeting with their parole or probation officer, they can access kiosks outside business hours and can be finished checking in within minutes. Accordingly, kiosk supervision status is a meaningful incentive that can be offered as reward for meeting conditions of supervision; in contrast, losing kiosk supervision eligibility can be used as a sanction for offenders who fail to meet their conditions.

Valid risk assessment is fundamental to incorporating kiosk supervision (or any practice) into a risk reduc-

tion supervision strategy. Assessment allows supervision agencies to identify the level of risk an offender poses to public safety, which is necessary to select appropriate candidates for initial placement on kiosk supervision, or to determine when it is appropriate to transfer supervisees from in-person to kiosk supervision. Placing improper supervisees onto kiosk supervision resulted in the failure of kiosk supervision in Dallas (Wilson, Naro, and Austin 2007). CSOSA's risk assessment tool (developed in house and validated by the Urban Institute) is sophisticated and capable of accurately predicting an offender's risk; CSOSA can use the instrument with confidence to immediately select an appropriate, low-risk population for a kiosk supervision program.

Within a risk-reduction supervision framework, the value of kiosk reporting for a supervision agency is in the resources it frees up for the agency to devote to higher-risk offenders. Using those resources to improve outcomes for higher-risk offenders delivers the public safety benefit that kiosk supervision potentially offers. If kiosk supervision can deliver the same outcomes for low-risk supervisees more efficiently and at lower cost, the supervision agency gains a net benefit. To this end, CSOSA has developed a workload strategy that uses kiosk reporting to lower caseloads for moderate- to high-risk offenders.

## Challenges to Implementing Kiosk Supervision

There are several potential challenges to implementing kiosk supervision. Technical challenges arise with any attempt to implement a new technology system, which is why pilot testing to detect and address problems prior to launch is important. The delay of CSOSA's initial pilot due to software compatibility issues is an example of the type of technical problems that can arise. Getting the full benefit of the data captured by kiosk systems requires integrating those data with existing systems in the supervision agency, which can be difficult. Technical challenges do not end with implementation. Maintaining the kiosk equipment and the integrity of the data system housing kiosk information will require an ongoing commitment of staff resources and attention.

Staff in supervision agencies may also be reluctant to stop supervising individuals who will be placed on kiosk monitoring, particularly if large numbers of low-risk supervisees will be supervised in this way. (New



York City probation places 70 percent of probationers on kiosk supervision [Wilson, Naro, and Austin 2007].) They may view kiosk supervision as allowing supervisees anonymity that is not conducive to accountability for complying with conditions of supervision. The supervision workload may also change. Low-risk offenders are often motivated and easy to work with, while high-risk populations require heightened supervision and have lower rates of success. Accordingly, although supervising officers will have more time and attention to devote to a smaller number of cases if kiosks shift resources to higher-risk supervisees, supervising officers may experience less frequent and less rewarding supervision successes because caseloads, on average, will be more challenging. To avoid staff burn-out, agencies considering kiosk supervision implementation may want to invest in training protocols to prepare officers for the stresses of supervising higher-risk, higher-need individuals.

An agency using kiosk supervision may also encounter concerns regarding the advisability of kiosk supervision. Reporting to an automated kiosk does not seem to fit the meaning of "supervision." Depending on past practice, however, kiosk supervision may be little different from the supervision low-risk offenders experience, or may even be an increase in responsibility. As former New York City Corrections and Probation Commissioner Michael Jacobson says, "low-level probationers in New York City, and many other cities as well, had not reported to human beings for almost two decades prior to the institution of kiosks" (Wilson et al. 2007).

## Research and Analysis Regarding Kiosk Supervision

The effects of kiosk supervision have not been the subject of extensive research, although the evaluation results that do exist suggest kiosk supervision can reduce both costs and recidivism. The most extensive research is on the New York City Department of Probation's implementation of kiosk supervision in response to burdensome probation officer caseloads. Between 2003 and 2006, approximately 70 percent of the probation population was enrolled in the "Kiosk Reporting Track." As of 2010, 30,000 adults and 15,000 juveniles are under active supervision, and 16,000 of these individuals report to 21 kiosks around the city, which are managed by 32 probation officers. This results in an average kiosk caseload of 477 supervisees per officer.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson, Naro, and Austin conducted an evaluation of the Department of Probation's kiosk program in New York in 2007 comparing outcomes for both low-risk probationers supervised via kiosk and high-risk probationers to whom resources were shifted due to kiosk supervision with those for a historical comparison group. They looked at both rearrest and failure to report outcomes and found that the two-year rearrest rate declined for both high-risk probationers (from 52 to 47 percent) and low-risk probationers (31 to 28 percent). Findings regarding missed appointments were more mixed. A higher proportion of high-risk probationers missed at least one appointment after kiosk implementation (63 percent, an increase from 40 percent), but missed appointments as a percentage of all scheduled appointments decreased from 5.2 to 4.5 percent after kiosk implementation. The greater attention devoted to high-risk probationers after kiosk implementation meant that they had more appointments scheduled (increasing from once monthly to four times monthly), and therefore more opportunities to miss them. For low-risk probationers, missed appointments increased both in terms of percentage of probationers having one (27 to 41 percent) and as a percentage of all schedule appointments (3.4 to 5.7 percent) after kiosk implementation. The authors noted that kiosks might capture data on appointments for low-risk probationers more consistently and accurately than the manual entry that they replaced, which would affect the measured prevalence of missed appointments.

In February 2001, the Maryland Division of Probation and Parole (MDPP) piloted kiosk supervision in a site in Prince George's County. As with New York City Probation, MDPP intended to use kiosk supervision as part of a "triage" process to facilitate the supervision of high-risk offenders at lower caseload ratios. The pilot installed one kiosk in a police station and targeted low-risk, nonviolent parolees, probationers, and sex offenders. Researchers from the University of Maryland, College Park, analyzed the pilot in terms of offender reporting, while the MDPP monitored rearrest rates for 147 offenders over a six-month follow-up period (Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services 2002). The rearrest rate for kiosk-supervised offenders was 2 percent, compared with 10 percent for low-risk offenders within 90 days of assignment to supervision. MDPP decided to expand the pilot beyond low-risk offenders to include sex offenders, who were given kiosk reporting requirements in addition to their regular in-person reporting requirements. In this way, MDPP used kiosks as a sub-

stitute for in-person meetings for low-risk offenders, and as a supplement to in-person meetings for other offenders. The frequency of reporting for both populations exceeded MDPP's expectations for the pilot.

In 2008, the Urban Institute conducted a simulation analysis seeking to identify a population of low-risk offenders in the District of Columbia who posed the same risk to the community whether supervised passively (with the minimal compliance reporting requirements of kiosk reporting) or actively (in person). If such a population could be identified, it would indicate that kiosk supervision was a viable policy option for Washington, D.C. (Bhati 2009). The simulation study used CSOSA risk-assessment scores for offenders under general supervision, as well as a control group of offenders supervised by CSOSA through interstate compact agreements, because this population receives very limited supervision. Recidivism outcomes (rearrest for any nontraffic offense; violence, weapons, or sexual rearrest; any serious alleged violation report; and any positive drug test) were tracked for both groups over one year. The study analyzed simulated outcomes using various risk score cut-offs to determine kiosk eligibility and found that the number of CSOSA supervisees appropriate for kiosk supervision could range from 125 (using very conservative placement criteria) to 2,000 (using criteria of outcomes no different from similarly scored interstate offenders who are minimally supervised).

## Key Implementation Lessons

The research and expert consensus on kiosk supervision systems suggest several important lessons for jurisdictions seeking to implement them. These lessons are summarized in this section.

### Clearly Scope the Role of Kiosk Supervision in the Overall Supervision Strategy

As this brief makes clear, a primary benefit of kiosk supervision has less to do with how it changes supervision for the low-risk populations on kiosk monitoring than with how it changes supervision for the higher-risk populations. As the most significant value of kiosk supervision systems comes from this reallocation of resources, an effective overall supervision strategy based on assessed risk level is the necessary framework for kiosk supervision. This is equally true if kiosk monitoring is an option for supervisees as an incentive to work toward, or as an enhancement to in-person reporting requirements, as was the case in Maryland. Individual attributes that are

priorities to address in the context of active supervision, such as mental health issues, should also be identified to exclude people from kiosk supervision.

### Choose the Correct Population Based on Assessment

Using appropriate methods to select supervisees for kiosk supervision eligibility is essential to the success of the system and protection of public safety. The first step is the use of validated risk-assessment instruments that can effectively predict likelihood of reoffense as basic criteria. Once the kiosk criteria are determined, they must be adhered to in practice. In Dallas, an experimental kiosk supervision program was suspended when it was revealed that eligibility criteria were not being followed and high-risk offenders were being included (Wilson et al. 2007; Egerton 2007).

Potential approaches to consider for identifying candidates for kiosk supervision discussed during the *Risk Principle in Action* symposium included the following:

- Reviewing all probationers for eligibility. Many probationers will be low-risk and immediately eligible for kiosk supervision.
- Using kiosk placement as a reward for offenders who are not immediately eligible but who have exhibited good behavior and complied with the conditions of their supervision.
- Considering kiosk supervision as a step-down strategy for individuals awaiting court or parole commission decisions regarding early termination.

### Work Out Technological Capabilities before Implementation

Prior to investing in and implementing a kiosk supervision system, ensure that the agency has the ability and resources to install, implement, fully utilize, and maintain the technology:

- Ensure that the agency staff, vendor, or contractor responsible for installation can implement all desired capabilities of the system before implementation.
- Have written protocols in place and train officers on how kiosk supervision technology works, how to respond to alerts, and how to review kiosk data to ensure compliance.
- Work with other criminal justice agencies to program data systems to share kiosk data.

- Ensure that agency staff, the vendor, or other contractors will be available and able to perform regular maintenance and fix problems that occur with the kiosk system software and hardware in a timely manner.

## Place Kiosk Units Strategically

Consider how kiosk supervision systems will be used when determining where the units will be located. Does the agency want supervisees to come into supervision offices? Should supervisees come into the locations of partners, such as the police department? Would it be better to place the units in neighborhoods outside criminal justice offices? If the agency will use kiosks for selection for random drug testing or other capabilities that require individuals to immediately report to supervision officers after use, it will be more convenient to place kiosks within or near supervision offices. If kiosks are meant to be open past normal business hours and are located within parole or probation offices, they must still be accessible after the offices close.

## Provide for Enforcement of Probation Conditions and a Quick Response to Violations

Individuals on kiosk supervision must understand that the conditions of their supervision will still be enforced, even if they do not meet face to face with their probation or parole officers. Otherwise, supervisees may conclude that kiosk supervision is not “real” supervision. Accordingly, before implementing a kiosk supervision system, a supervision agency must decide what sanctions to take when violations occur. This approach, like all effective supervision sanction approaches, should be clearly communicated to supervisees and applied consistently.

## Continually Collect and Use Data

Data can be used for more than a post-implementation impact evaluation of kiosk supervision. During implementation, data on a range of supervisee behavior (including failure-to-appear rates, rates of response to officer messages, and other violations of supervision that are not classified as recidivism, in addition to recidivism data) should be collected and used for ongoing performance measurement. Reviewing these data will highlight which objectives the program is meeting, as well as areas that need improvement. It will also build confidence in the approach. Kiosk data should be shared with

criminal justice partners, such as courts and law enforcement, in addition to approved service providers, if the data will assist them in doing their work. The potential for kiosk data to support interagency collaboration was an aspect of kiosk supervision of particular interest to the criminal justice agency leaders participating in the *Risk Principle in Action* symposium.

## Evaluate Effectiveness

Evaluating the effects of kiosk supervision will help CSOSA assess the impact of kiosk supervision on public safety. Recidivism outcomes for the kiosk supervision population should be tracked for at least one year after release from incarceration. While the development of a research design can be difficult, during the initial evaluability assessment, the Urban Institute created a research design for the CSOSA pilot kiosk supervision program evaluation that can still be used.

## Conclusion

The evidence on kiosk supervision indicates that it is a valuable tool to assist jurisdictions to implement a risk-reduction approach to supervision. It allows resources to be shifted from low-risk populations to the more intensive supervision and intervention with higher-risk populations. It can also make supervision less onerous for low-risk offenders and pretrial supervisees, helping them to concentrate on the factors that will keep them low-risk: stable housing, employment, and family relationships. If implemented correctly, kiosk supervision aids supervision agencies in keeping their communities safe.

## Notes

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1. CSOSA kiosk software was acquired from New York City probation via an MOU. At the time of publication of this brief, CSOSA has corrected all software integration problems, tested its first generation kiosks, and will begin enrolling offenders during the third quarter of FY 2011.
2. For a comprehensive discussion of elements of a risk reduction approach to supervision, see Solomon et al. (2008).
3. Information presented by New York City Probation Deputy Commissioner Alphonzo Albright at *The Risk Principle in Action: Right-Sizing Supervision Monitoring for High- and Low-Risk Offenders*, April 7, 2010, Washington, D.C.

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