

# Performance measurement at the National Parole Board

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## Introduction

This article discusses the function of performance measurement at the National Parole Board and the methods it uses to measure the performance of its programs. Performance measurement is the process of identifying, gathering and analysing the information needed to measure and account for the performance of the Board's programs. It is a management tool that provides a foundation upon which sound management decisions can be made to ensure that programs are operating efficiently and effectively. Performance measurement feeds into the accountability process supporting the organizational needs to demonstrate its results.

## Background

Measuring performance and results has become more and more important for governments. Managers in the public sector are asked to manage for results and to report on those results. Managing for results is quite difficult to implement because it involves a fundamental shift in perspective as managers must collect and use performance information to strengthen the decision-making process, to learn, to improve programs, and to ensure accountability. Measurement of results in the public sector is often seen as an important challenge as, traditionally, government practices have tended to be more about process than results. Moving to a results-focused culture is seen as a huge challenge and good performance reporting, according to the Auditor General in 2000, seemed to be slow.

Setting expectations for performance normally involves setting expectations for outputs. Outputs are well understood since they represent the direct result of activities. They are usually quite visible and measurable and we can comfortably talk about them because we control them. For a management and reporting regime focusing on outcomes, the situation is different. The measurement of the outcomes themselves is quite a challenge. By definition, we do not control outcomes but rather seek to influence their occurrence by carrying out certain activities and delivering certain outputs.<sup>2</sup>

## National Parole Board

To better understand performance measurement at the National Parole Board (NPB), we have to know

its mission and mandate, and to understand its place in the correctional system.

"The National Parole Board, as part of the criminal justice system, makes independent, quality conditional release decisions and pardons decisions and clemency recommendations. The Board contributes to the protection of society by facilitating, as appropriate, the timely integration of offenders as law-abiding citizens." (NPB Mission Statement)

The NPB is an independent administrative tribunal responsible for making decisions about the timing and conditions of release of offenders to the community on various forms of conditional release.

## Stakeholders

Partnership is integral to the effective operations of the National Parole Board as it is but one component of the criminal justice system. As a key partner, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) provides information for NPB decision making. When the Board grants releases, CSC supervises the offenders in the community and provides information to NPB on changes in risk presented by offenders. In a similar manner, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other police services provide information for NPB decision making for pardons. Clearly, the Board shares accountability for "outcomes". For example, the Board cannot claim full credit when parolees succeed. "Success" is the result of many players in the system, as well as the offender.

Results for the Board's strategic outcomes are normally presented from two perspectives: progress on commitments made in *Reports on Plans and Priorities* and program effectiveness, that is, the effectiveness of the Board's efforts to contribute to public safety and the public service.

When assessing whether a program achieves its goal, a variety of data and information has to be collected and analyzed to build the evidence. While no single piece of evidence will, on its own, be enough to build a credible case concerning the results achieved by a program, a larger set of different and complementary evidence can become quite convincing. It is the totality of evidence gathered that builds the credibility of a performance story.

The Board uses a variety of information sources to collect information on the performance of its programs. Performance information is collected from management reviews and evaluation activities, as well as from results of case audits and investigations. The most important sources of information used by the Board are the Offender Management System (OMS) and the Pardons Application and Decision System (PADS), which are used for data entry and data collection. OMS is a common application used by both the NPB and CSC.

### Evaluating program performance

Timely, relevant and reliable information is essential for program monitoring and performance measurement. As conditional release is the most important program contributing to public safety, significant efforts are made by the Board to ensure the quality of information collected. In the year 2000, the Performance Measurement Division developed and implemented a new Web-based application for the production of statistical information — the Conditional Release Information Management System (CRIMS). This application ensures consistency and reliability of information. As the data base is updated on a monthly basis, the Board benefits from timely information which allows for ongoing monitoring of the outputs and outcomes of the conditional release program. This application is accessible to all NPB employees, as well as to some CSC and Correctional Investigator employees. The value added of the CRIMS is that queries can be tailored to the user's specific needs and the information generated is available instantly, at the click of a mouse. The Conditional Release Information Management System can provide information on outputs such as the number and types of reviews conducted and decisions made by Board members, the workload, the number and type of Appeal decisions, parole grant rates, as well as, on outcomes of releases on parole.

The Board is judged on the outcomes of its decisions to release offenders on parole. A range of measures is used to assess the performance of parolees in the community, such as the outcomes of conditional release, the number of convictions for violent offences, and the post-warrant expiry re-offending rate. Success rate by type of conditional release is a very important performance indicator for the Board. As mentioned earlier, the Board cannot claim full credit when parolees succeed. "Success" is the result of many players in the system, as well as the offender. Board members make decisions to release offenders from institutions, but CSC is responsible for the supervision of these offenders once returned to the community. Many factors, outside the control of the Board and CSC, influence the success or failure of parole and assessing

and reporting on the real contribution of corrections to public safety is a very complex challenge.

The Performance Measurement Division prepares an annual *Performance Monitoring Report*,<sup>3</sup> in which the results (outputs and outcomes) achieved by the programs are linked to the strategic objectives of the Board as expressed in the *Reports on Plans and Priorities*. The Division also prepares many other ad hoc reports on different issues or special initiatives. All this information is used in the preparation of the *Departmental Performance Report* submitted to Parliament every year.

Statistical information, as well as qualitative information resulting from analysis and management reviews or program evaluations conducted by the Performance Measurement Division, is not only used for reporting purposes, but it is also used for management decision making. All sectors of the Board require statistical information in support of their work. For example, the information made available by the Performance Measurement Division is used to support legislative and policy reviews, strategic objectives and priority setting, program monitoring and resource allocation, standards development, communications and public education, as well as training and research. The Division is also responsible for providing all NPB statistical information to its partners, stakeholders and to the public.

Results of case audits and investigations conducted by the Board, and decisions rendered by the Appeal Division provide very good information on the quality of conditional release decisions. They identify areas of improvement and, therefore, contribute to better quality decision-making.

### Summary

Performance measurement and reporting are integral parts of the management and governance process at the NPB. As such, they serve multiple purposes: providing essential support to decision making, program and management improvement and stewardship and public accountability. Public reporting is a powerful force in promoting better understanding about performance and how to improve it. In turn, this understanding can contribute to a better system of governance and management as a whole and more specifically to a greater public trust and confidence in the corrections and conditional release programs. ■

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<sup>2</sup> Mayne, John, (April 2003). Reporting on Outcomes: Setting Performance Expectations and Telling Performance Stories. Unpublished presentation.

<sup>3</sup> The Performance Monitoring Reports are available at the National Parole Board on its Web site.