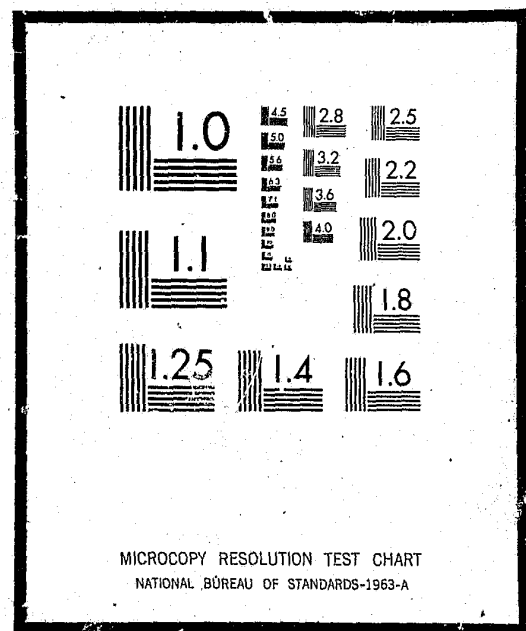


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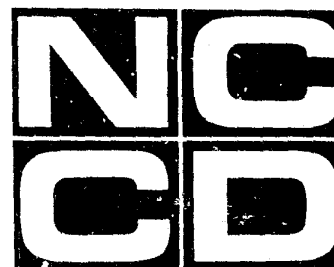
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RESEARCH  
CENTER

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

## THE BAY AREA COUNTIES PROBATION RESEARCH PROJECT

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May, 1973

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PROBATION RESEARCH PROJECT

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## Administrative Abstract

This administrative summary of the Bay Area Counties Probation Research Project (BACPRP) furnishes a synopsis of the project and serves as a guide to the information to be found in the various parts of the final project report.

### History and Inauguration: Chapter I

The Bay Area Counties Probation Research Project commenced in a setting almost bereft of probation information. The project undertook to remedy this by the development of a comprehensive information system model for the collection, storage, retrieval and analysis of probation data. Amidst burgeoning probation populations, management planning and sound probation research capabilities were primary needs it sought to fill.

Surprisingly, recent scientific and technological advances have left unmet the need for a comprehensive information system within the field of criminal justice, especially corrections. The President's Task Force on Corrections in 1967 identified the greatest of all needs in this area as "the need to know". As corrections has come under increasing attack for its inability to reduce criminal behavior, probation administrators have found themselves without the information necessary to delineate the effectiveness of their programs. Occasional, one-time studies have been made using post hoc data of dubious accuracy. These efforts are expensive and produce outdated results. Even when done well, these studies have

not been replicated. Generalization of results beyond the department studied and comparisons among departments have been virtually impossible.

Rarely are probation departments provided with resources with which to develop and maintain the necessary information services. Except for some of the largest departments in the country, assistance is needed from outside sources.

The goals of BACPRP were to develop:

- A. Procedures for defining and describing the various types of probation program elements to which probation clients are assigned
- B. Data elements that describe program input as well as probation clients' characteristics and performance for use in monitoring and determining the effectiveness of probation programs
- C. Data collection methods, with consideration given to the range of capabilities and the requirements of individual agencies--based on their probation loads, resources and data-processing facilities
- D. The data-processing and statistical analysis procedures required for determination of program effectiveness
- E. Information "feedback" that is useful to and usable by probation managers
- F. Procedures for the exchange of data and results between cooperating counties and cognizant state agencies
- G. Approaches to integration of the probation data system into the criminal justice information systems that are being developed by the separate counties and the state.

## Project Unfolds: Chapter II

The underlying principles and operational concepts upon which the BACPRP model was built were developed in their entirety by a Steering Committee composed of representatives from the participating probation agencies. The result of this unusual approach is an information model designed by the "user" group to serve that group.

Steering Committee members recognized that the lack of management information and definitive measures of effectiveness were hampering them in their efforts to expand the scope of their operations, to improve program effectiveness, and to institute innovations. The information model developed by the project grew as Steering Committee and project staff worked to develop a system that would enable probation departments to collect and evaluate data from all phases of the probation process.

The project began in the fall of 1971. By mid-year of 1972 the conceptual design of a "live-case" model was developed. From that time to the completion of this project, the focus was upon detailed effort to make the model workable and to assess its feasibility.

## The System: Chapter III

A non-restrictive working model emerged that was flexible enough to deal with program diversification and population differences existing in the probation field. Based upon the variations in size, program emphasis and client population of the participating agencies, this model provides a base sufficient for statewide, and probably nationwide, application.

The project developed as a result of the concerns of the Bay Area Chief Probation Officers Association and the Bay Area Counties Probation Subsidy Supervisors who were unable to evaluate adequately probation subsidy and non-subsidy programs. The needs these persons perceived were elementary and complex. The first products of the project were descriptions of the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, focusing on their probation components; detailed and abstracted descriptions of probation programs; and prototypical designs of devices to protect the security of any information that might eventually come into the BACPRP data system. Probation programs were categorized into: 1) special alternatives to incarceration or formal probation, 2) client screening approaches, 3) client/staff matching techniques, 4) interpersonal adjustment techniques, 5) special problems programs, 6) surveillance devices, 7) vocational impactors, 8) client intervention by non-staff persons, 9) administrative/research, 10) staff training, and 11) special services.

The flow models and program abstracts were "overlaid". A transactional, rather than a "closed-case" approach, was developed to permit "case-in-process" recording of the correctional happenings in a client's life, e.g., transfers to new treatment programs and new convictions.

Transactions (sets of data elements describing an event or series of related events) were designed to facilitate reporting of initial data and of correcting data at each input stage. Additionally, they provide for reports of client actions (such as new offenses) which call for "recycling" through a part of the criminal justice process. They are categorized in the succeeding manner.

Adult transactions

- A. System Entry
- B. Client Attributes at Entry
- C. Intake/Investigation
- D. Stay of Proceedings
- E. Court Action
- F. Supervision
- G. Supervision Workload Change
- H. General Change
- I. (not used)
- J. Termination
- K. Subsequent Probation Hearings
- L. Absconder
- M. Absconder Return
- N. Post Termination Action
- O. (not used)
- P. Program Entry
- Q. Return from Program
- R. Work Load

Juvenile transactions

- A. System Entry
- B. Client Attributes at Entry
- C. Intake/Investigation
- D. Detention
- E. Adjudication/Disposition Hearing
- F. Supervision
- G. Supervision Workload Change
- H. General Change
- I. (not used)
- J. Termination
- K. Subsequent Probation Hearings
- L. Absconder
- M. Absconder Return
- N. Post Termination Action

- O. (Not used)
- P. Program Entry
- Q. Return from Program

This model is "elastic"; it encourages departments with special needs to gather large quantities of data and it facilitates the participation of small departments with relatively limited data gathering capabilities. Modules can be added and, with modifications, deleted. In addition, this system is designed for easy interface with compatible systems describing other portions of the criminal justice system.

A large number of data elements (well over 200) are collected via this transaction technique, input to the information system being accomplished in stages over the course of the probation process so no single juncture carries an overwhelming data coding requirement. Further, the data are collected only when appropriate; if a particular transaction does not apply to a given case it simply is not submitted to the system. A system check device is provided - to assure that inadvertent omissions do not occur.

The Test: Chapter IV

To keep BACPRP from being only another air castle, a computer systems design, software specifications, and a test were devised and completed.

The test of the model's feasibility was structured, of necessity, to gather data from closed files. It was an examination of data item "codeability" and of information utility. It was not a test of the operating system in its final transactional form, which would have had to have been longitudinal. Time and resource constraints made



this impossible.

Eleven participating Bay Area Counties\*, plus Santa Barbara and Fresno counties\*\*, provided input data for the test. The test application of the data elements was designed to fulfill the major requirements of all probation departments for:

1. Referral and Investigation Information
2. Active Caseload Information
3. Termination, Historical Research, and Evaluation Information
4. Statistical information.

The test proved successful, thus documenting that, systematically maintained, the BACPRP model will greatly enhance the probation administrators' information armamentarium.

The test demonstrated that computer files can be set up to keep track of cases: 1) granted court continuances or involved in post-sentence offending, 2) referred to a given department, program, etc., 3) placed in designated settings, 4) provided on-going agency services, 5) terminated, etc. The test generated reports which can be secured regularly (or sporadically) detailing, *inter alia*, current workload for investigation, supervision, etc.; level of agency responsibility to juveniles/adults; number of subsequent offenders in designated population subsets; caseload by officer, geographic locale, supervisor, etc;

---

\*These were: Alameda, Mendocino, Monterey, Sacramento, San Francisco Adult, San Francisco Juvenile, San Mateo, Santa Clara Adult, Santa Clara Juvenile, Santa Cruz, and Sonoma counties.

\*\*The fact that these two counties did not participate in the initial design phase of the project increased their value as "test" agencies.

terminations in specified time periods; and specialized research/statistical analyses.

#### Feedback: Chapter V

The research chapter of this report gives example analyses which emerge from BACPRP data. Using a variety of statistical techniques - from frequency counts to factor analysis - it was demonstrated that questions like those below can be addressed:

What is the age and ethnic distribution of violators and non-violators in subsidy and regular supervision?

What is the typical prior record for each age group in adult probation?

Is there any connection between ethnic origin and drug difficulties?

Do probationers who have felony records and have been convicted of a crime involving violence have higher violation rates than others?

What is the relationship between the rate of unsuccessful probation terminations and the length of time on probation?

Is the type of probation termination for the subsidy caseload different from that of the non-subsidy caseload?

Are the characteristics of persons placed on subsidy supervision different from those placed on normal supervision?

Can program outcome be predicted from the characteristics of the probationer?

What is the agency's active probation caseload today?

Inquiries of this nature can be approached from a variety of statistical/analytical perspectives. The BACPRP model is designed to respond in a wealth of information display and formatting options. Data can be presented in tables, scatter-grams, bar graphs, line charts and so forth.

### Implementation: Chapter VI

One large hurdle remains. Although it was neither the plan nor the purpose of BACPRP to operationalize a probation data system, implementation is the next logical step.

Thus the project report moves to a close by describing generally the steps necessary to implement the BACPRP information system. The current data processing status of each of the county probation departments represented in the project Steering Committee is set forth and, against that backdrop, implementation is addressed. Substantiating the approach, Fresno County has provided a summary of its preliminary implementation plans.

Chapter VI also revisits the set of dilemmas which surround data security and privacy considerations. It undertakes to describe a succinct approach to these concerns which will make a central gathering and analytical locus, accessed by remote terminals, a viable operating entity.

### Assessment: Chapter VII

This report terminates with the reactions of the Project Assessment Group. The project was structured to include assessment of its product by a group of professionals knowledgeable about research and probation. This assessment provides the benefit of the opinions of persons independent of the project staff.

### Conclusion

To fulfill the aim of this summary - to the extent that the reader is encouraged to continue - this abstract closes with a beginning. The Table of Contents, infra, allows entry into the report body at whatever point the reader desires.

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- B Master List of Elements
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  - Juvenile
- C Percentage of Completion of Each Data Element by Each County

**END**