

Measuring the performance of crime prevention programs

Performance measurement is a basic tool for answering the management question: “how is your crime prevention program going?” As such, it is an important part of efficiently implementing crime prevention and reduction programs.

Performance measurement systems are ways of measuring how well the goals and objectives set for a program are being met. For example, if the program is intended to reduce the rate of domestic burglaries by encouraging people to lock their doors when they go out, a suitable performance measure is the degree to which the rate of door locking goes up. If it doesn't, then the ultimate program goal (i.e. a reduction in burglary rates) is unlikely to be met. If the performance measure (i.e. the door locking rate) does not improve within a given time then changes in the program are needed.

To be effective, performance measurements should be embedded into your program planning, operation and development processes. Performance measurement systems should include a sufficient number of appropriate measures to give a balanced picture of a program's performance. One measure is usually not enough, but too large a set of key performance measures will be unmanageable so it is best to limit the set to the most important measures. For the domestic burglary example, while the rate of door locking is a vital performance measure, the speed with which the door-locking message gets around and is adopted will also be an important measure of program efficiency and cost-effectiveness. A number of other measures, such as the most common way that people hear about the message, will also be important (knowing this may mean you know how to adjust the balance of your communication modes to be most effective).

Performance measures may relate to a program's:

- **inputs**, which concern resources (both human and other) used to produce program outputs;
- **processes**, which concern activities undertaken within a program;
- **outputs**, which concern products or services produced or delivered; and/or
- **outcomes**, concerning all the impacts or consequences of the program beyond its direct outputs.

What is measured should reflect a balance between the cost of collecting the data and the value of the information provided. Where possible, much of the data required should be needed for day-to-day management of the program. In addition it is important to keep performance measures up to date to meet changing circumstances and needs. A balance should be struck between having consistent information to monitor changes in performance over time, and taking advantage of new or improved data and reflecting current program priorities.

Further reading

Australian National Audit Office 2002. *Performance information in Portfolio Budget Statements better practice guide*. Canberra: Australian National Audit Office

Audit Commission (UK) 2000. *On target: the practice of performance indicators*. London: Audit Commission