



U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Justice Programs  
Bureau of Justice Statistics



# State and Federal Corrections Information Systems

*An Inventory of Data Elements and  
an Assessment of Reporting  
Capabilities*

**A joint project:**

**Association of State Correctional Administrators  
Corrections Program Office, OJP  
Bureau of Justice Statistics  
National Institute of Justice**



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An empirical common core

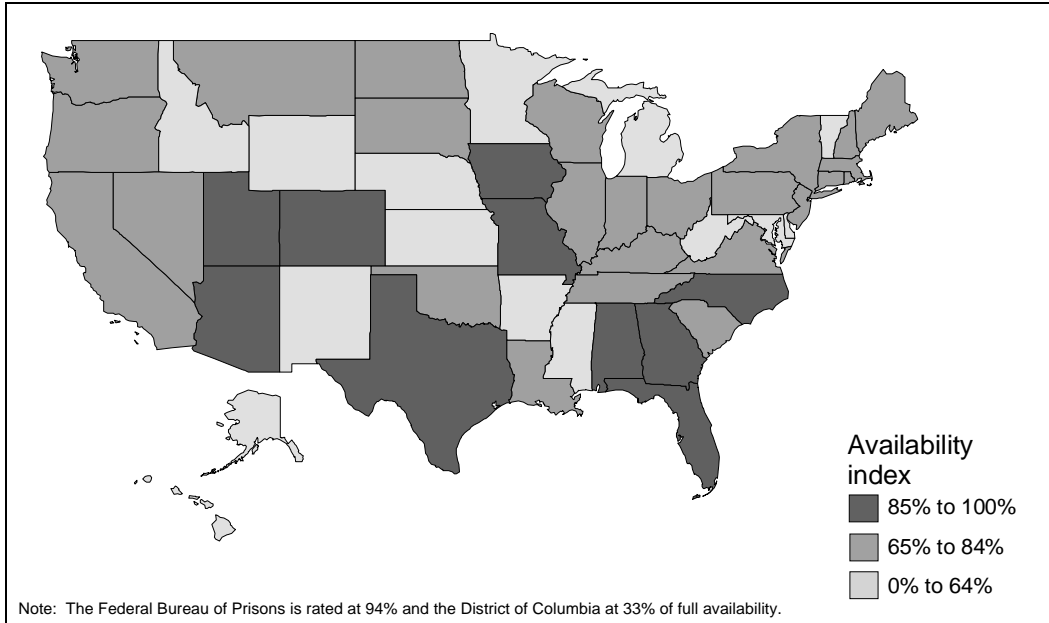


Figure 7. Departments' full-availability ratings for all core data elements

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**Common-core data elements in all stages of corrections processing**

Stage, dimension, and data element

**Profiling offenders**

*Demographics*

Sex	Citizenship
Race	State of birth
Hispanic origin	Country of birth
Religious affiliation	Address
Date of birth	If illegal alien
Age at commitment	

**Committing offenders**

*Conviction offenses*

Number of offenses	Charges on commitment
Type of offense	Severity of offense
Title/section penal code	Charges in indictment
Written description	

*Sentences imposed*

Co. of sentencing court	Mandatory minimum
Sentencing judge	Split or mixed
Date of sentencing	Length of supervision
No. of sentences	Reason for mandatory
Concurrent/consecutive	Monetary sanctions
Total length of sentences	Amount of sanctions
Length of each sentence	

*Current commitments*

Type of commitment	Release authority/agency
Date of commitment	

*Expected time to be served*

Expected date of release	Date sentence expiration
Expected parole date	

*Risk assessment*

History of violence	Weapon used
History of escape/AWOL	Gang membership

*Classification decisions*

Security level	Reason for class change
Agency making decision	Date of class change
Initial classification date	Psychological index
Classification index	Medical index or score
Risk assessment index	

*Confinement characteristics*

Type of facility	Special unit
Type of housing unit	

**Managing offenders**

*Post-commitment movements*

Transfer	Reason for transfer/move
Date of transfer	Who authorized transfer
Movements	Who authorized move
Date of movement	

*Good time and other sentence adjustments*

Change in sentence	Date of good time calculation
Reason for change	Reason for change
Good time available	Amount of change
Good time accrued	Change to release date
Changes in good time	
Special credits	

*Releases from custody*

Type of release	Jurisdiction of release
Date of release	Facility released to
Time served in custody	

*Offender registry*

Victim notify required	Requirement to register
Actually registered	

**Supervising offenders**

*Behavior on supervision*

Type of supervision	Date of technical violation
Supervision terminated	Date of new crime
Length of supervision	Date of administrative closure
Date supervision compltd	Date offender absconded
Type crime committed	Type technical violation
Administrative closure	
Absconded on release	

*Responses to violations of conditions of supervision*

If offender arrested	Date convicted
If offender convicted	Date returned to prison
If offender sentenced	If offender adjudicated
Date sentenced	Date offender arrested
Change of release status	Date adjudicated

### An empirical common core

#### Highlights

- Departments maintain a common core of data about 14 dimensions of corrections processing that contain 100 of the 207 offender-based data elements in this Inventory.
- For the 100 core elements, most departments (48) rate above 50% of full availability—the extent to which they maintain core data elements electronically for more than 75% of offenders. Eight departments rate above 90% and 29 rate above 70%.
- Thirty-nine departments rate above 70% of full availability in the profiling offenders stage, as do 35 in the committing offenders stage, 22 in the managing offenders stage, and 18 out of the 40 that maintain data on offenders released into the community.
- Within non-core dimensions, there are 15 data elements that more than 26 departments maintain in high-availability form.

#### Commonly maintained, high-availability data elements

Departments of corrections currently maintain a common core of data about 14 dimensions of corrections processing. These dimensions describe several aspects of who offenders are, what they have done, how they arrive in prison, how they are managed, and what happens to them upon release. The common core is based on the dimensions of corrections processing for which most departments maintain data in electronic form for most offenders. Each core dimension contains several data elements. All of the data elements in a core dimension are included in the common core of data elements. To say that a common core of data exists for a given dimension does not mean that every data element in that dimension is maintained in a high-availability form by every department. It means that, within a dimension, enough data elements are maintained by a majority of departments in high-availability form to constitute a meaningful core of information measures for a given dimension. Dimensions determine the core because many corrections concepts are best measured by several data elements. The high-availability standard (maintained electronically for more than 75% of offenders) reflects the form of data that can most readily be analyzed, shared electronically, and processed into the types of statistical information that measure corrections performance.

Data elements in 14 of the 28 dimensions of corrections processing are included in the common core (table 7.1). Each stage of corrections processing has at least one dimension in the common core, and a total of 100 of the 207

offender-based data elements fall within the dimensions that comprise the core. By stage, the core dimensions include:

- *Stage 1, profiling and identifying offenders:* demographic characteristics (11 elements);

Stage, concept, and dimension	Number of data elements	Belongs to the high-availability core
<b>Profiling and identifying offenders</b>	29	
Demographic characteristics	11	Yes
Socio-economic status	13	No
Family characteristics and living arrangements	5	No
<b>Committing offenders</b>	70	
<b>Offenses leading to commitments</b>		
Criminal incident	14	No
Conviction offenses	7	Yes
Criminal history	8	No
<b>Sentence information</b>		
Sentences imposed	13	Yes
Current commitment	3	Yes
Expected time to be served	3	Yes
<b>Assessment and confinement decisions</b>		
Risk assessment	4	Yes
Needs assessment	6	No
Classification decision	9	Yes
Confinement characteristics	3	Yes
<b>Managing offenders</b>	63	
<b>Routine offender management</b>		
Post-commitment movements	7	Yes
Offender program participation	11	No
Drug testing	2	No
Medical care	6	No
<b>Methods of release from prison</b>		
Good time and other sentence adjustments	10	Yes
Releases from custody	5	Yes
Offender registry	3	Yes
<b>Internal order and security</b>		
Misconduct and infractions	11	No
Responses to misconduct	3	No
Proceedings against offenders	5	No
<b>Supervising offenders</b>	45	
<b>Offender behavior after release</b>		
Employment and residence information	7	No
Behavior on supervision	12	Yes
Response to violations of conditions of supervision	10	Yes
<b>Details about new crimes and victims of crimes</b>		
Information about new crimes	9	No
Information about victims of new crimes	7	No

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- *Stage 2, committing offenders:* conviction offenses, sentences imposed, current commitment, expected time to be served, risk assessment, classification decisions, and confinement characteristics (42 data elements);
  - *Stage 3, managing offenders:* post-commitment movements, good-time and other sentence adjustments, offender registry, and releases from custody (25 data elements); and
  - *Stage 4, supervising offenders:* behavior on supervision and responses to violations of conditions of supervision (22 data elements).

The common core for stages 1, 2, and 3 is based on the responses from all 52 departments. The common core for stage 4 excludes the 12 departments that do not use their adult, sentenced prisoner information systems to collect data on offenders released into the community; it is based on the responses of the 40 departments that do maintain data elements on released offenders.

The common core describes offenders' demographic characteristics such as age, sex, race, and country of origin. It contains data elements about commitments, convictions, sentences, and offenses that describe how and why offenders arrived in prison. The common core also describes classification, confinement, and risk assessment decisions, and it contains data elements that describe how long offenders can expect to stay in prison.

In the management of offenders stage of processing, the core describes reasons for changes in sentences and changes in expected length of stay; it also describes offenders' movements and releases from prison. The core also includes limited information about victim notification requirements. Finally, the core dimensions of the supervising offenders stage include data elements that describe the form of supervision, the reasons for termination of supervision, whether a new crime was committed by an offender on supervised release, and if so, whether an offender was arrested, convicted, sentenced, and returned to prison.

Of the 100 core data elements, 8 are collected by all departments, 60 are collected by more than 70% of departments, and only 9 data elements are collected by fewer than 50% of departments (not shown in a table). The common core data elements that are collected by all departments include transfer to another facility, date of transfer, type and date of release, sex and race of offender, and type and date of commitment. The 60 data elements that most departments collect include nearly all of the data elements that describe demographic characteristics, sentencing, time to be served, classification decisions, confinement characteristics, post-commitment movements, good time and releases. The nine data elements that are less commonly collected are the offender's psychological index, who authorized a prison movement, amount of change to sentence, amount of change to expected release date, special credits

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to sentences, if offender actually registered as a sex offender, if and when a release violation was adjudicated, and the date a released offender is rearrested (not shown in a table).

### **Full-availability ratings for common-core data**

Assessed on the extent to which they maintain all data elements included in the common core in high-availability form, 29 departments rate at greater than 70% of full availability, and only four departments rate at less than 50% (table 7.2). Colorado maintains all 100 core data elements in high-availability form, and seven other departments maintain more than 90% of their core data elements in high availability. Departments that rate less than 70% on the availability index generally maintain many core data elements in paper form, or do not collect a majority of this information.

For the 11 data elements in common core of Stage 1 (profiling offenders)—the demographic characteristics of offenders—39 departments receive full-availability ratings of greater than 70%, and 9 have full-availability ratings of 100%. Only 4 departments rate at less than 50% of full availability (table 7.3).

In Stage 2 (committing offenders), 35 departments receive full-availability ratings above 70%; and 2 have full-availability ratings of 100% for 42 core data elements. Only 4 departments receive full-availability ratings of less than 50%.

For the 25 core data elements in the third stage (managing offenders), 22 departments receive full-availability ratings greater than 70%. Twelve received full-availability ratings of less than 50%.

Of the 40 departments that maintain 22 core data elements in the Stage 4 (supervising offenders on release), 18 have full-availability ratings greater than 70%. Eleven departments rate at less than 50% of full availability.

#### *Departments maintain core data elements in high-availability form*

Within each stage of processing, relatively few core data elements are maintained in low-availability forms, and there are few data elements that are not collected. Only 12 departments maintain fewer than 7 of the 11 demographic data elements in high availability form, but 9 have all 11 data elements in this form, and 20 collect all demographic core data elements (Appendix H). In the committing offenders stage, half of the departments maintain high-availability core data for at least 30 out of the 42 data elements. Colorado and North Carolina maintain all core commitment data elements in high availability. In the managing offenders stage, 2 departments—Colorado and Ohio—maintain all 25 core data elements in high availability, and an



**Table 7.2. Availability ratings for all core data elements**

Department	Percent of full availability	Number of data elements					
		In electronic format for—		In paper format	Not collected	Missing	Unknown
		More than 75% of offenders	Less than 75% of offenders				
<b>Data about released offenders are within the scope of the information system</b>							
Colorado	100%	100	0	0	0	0	0
North Carolina	99	99	0	0	1	0	0
Arizona	98	98	0	1	1	0	0
Iowa	96	94	0	6	0	0	0
Missouri	95	95	0	0	5	0	0
Alabama	92	91	1	2	6	0	0
Florida	91	91	0	1	7	1	0
Texas	90	89	0	3	8	0	0
Utah	85	80	2	11	1	6	0
Tennessee	83	82	2	0	16	0	0
Illinois	82	79	4	2	15	0	0
Ohio	79	56	34	0	5	4	1
Indiana	77	72	0	16	12	0	0
South Carolina	77	67	15	0	18	0	0
South Dakota	76	75	1	0	15	9	0
Kentucky	74	66	1	22	11	0	0
Oklahoma	74	67	4	13	16	0	0
New York	74	73	1	1	24	1	0
Montana	74	73	0	2	24	1	0
Louisiana	73	70	4	0	25	0	1
Wisconsin	73	71	3	0	26	0	0
Washington	73	68	7	0	25	0	0
Oregon	70	69	2	0	29	0	0
California	69	64	0	16	19	1	0
Virginia	69	58	4	24	10	4	0
Massachusetts	68	56	11	14	19	0	0
North Dakota	68	66	0	6	28	0	0
Kansas	64	58	9	1	32	0	0
Wyoming	62	49	1	37	12	1	0
Arkansas	60	54	9	0	36	1	0
Mississippi	60	47	4	30	6	13	0
Michigan	57	56	1	0	42	1	0
Delaware	54	42	0	37	15	6	0
Minnesota	53	51	3	1	45	0	0
Idaho	52	45	9	3	43	0	0
Nebraska	50	48	0	5	47	0	0
Vermont	45	35	6	19	39	1	0
New Mexico	43	39	5	1	54	1	0
District of Columbia	33	32	2	0	66	0	0
Alaska	24	14	13	0	64	5	4
<b>Data about released offenders are outside the scope of the information system</b>							
Federal Bureau of Prisons	94%	72	0	3	3	0	0
Georgia	86	62	6	4	6	0	0
Rhode Island	85	65	0	3	9	1	0
New Hampshire	80	56	1	17	4	0	0
New Jersey	78	55	2	13	8	0	0
Pennsylvania	73	51	3	12	12	0	0
Maine	73	51	4	9	13	1	0
Nevada	69	47	9	2	12	8	0
Connecticut	68	50	5	0	23	0	0
West Virginia	65	47	5	0	26	0	0
Maryland	62	41	3	17	17	0	0
Hawaii	60	41	9	0	28	0	0

**Table 7.3. Percent of full availability for core data elements for each stage of corrections processing**

Department	Stage of corrections processing			
	Profiling offenders	Committing offenders	Managing offenders	Supervising offenders
<b>Data about released offenders are within the scope of the information system</b>				
Alabama	79%	94%	92%	95%
Alaska	52	25	19	14
Arizona	100	98	96	100
Arkansas	52	67	60	52
California	82	74	48	79
Colorado	100	100	100	100
Delaware	73	55	59	39
District of Columbia	73	46	24	0
Florida	82	98	80	95
Idaho	73	54	43	48
Illinois	91	79	73	95
Indiana	85	77	75	77
Iowa	100	95	92	100
Kansas	82	76	47	53
Kentucky	48	80	65	85
Louisiana	67	82	57	77
Massachusetts	94	71	81	35
Michigan	45	55	67	55
Minnesota	58	62	45	44
Mississippi	48	74	49	50
Missouri	100	98	88	95
Montana	100	74	39	100
Nebraska	73	47	48	45
New Mexico	64	43	27	50
New York	79	67	60	100
North Carolina	100	100	96	100
North Dakota	91	67	60	68
Ohio	61	82	100	59
Oklahoma	76	71	80	71
Oregon	70	83	56	64
South Carolina	97	84	91	38
South Dakota	79	83	80	55
Tennessee	82	91	56	100
Texas	82	89	92	94
Utah	88	93	57	100
Vermont	61	58	33	27
Virginia	82	75	65	55
Washington	91	81	76	44
Wisconsin	64	75	77	68
Wyoming	94	65	68	33
<b>Data about released offenders are outside the scope of the information system</b>				
Federal Bureau of Prisons	100%	94%	89%	N/A
Connecticut	64	82	48	N/A
Georgia	76	87	89	N/A
Hawaii	82	69	36	N/A
Maine	85	67	76	N/A
Maryland	48	68	59	N/A
Nevada	82	71	59	N/A
New Hampshire	94	77	79	N/A
New Jersey	88	80	69	N/A
Pennsylvania	100	72	63	N/A
Rhode Island	100	78	89	N/A
West Virginia	97	58	61	N/A

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additional 12 departments maintain at least 20 high-availability data elements. Four departments collect all core management data elements in some form. In the supervising offenders stage, 8 departments out of 40 collect all 22 data elements in high-availability form. Seventeen departments collect all core supervision data.

### *Common definitions*

Many corrections departments have data elements needed to generate statistical information on a core set of information issues. Of the 40 departments that collect data on all 4 stages of corrections processing, almost all are above 50% availability for the 100 core data elements (table 7.3). Colorado is at 100% availability for all core data elements. Departments maintain a large number of data elements, and they do so in a high-availability form that facilitates processing, analyzing, and sharing the data maintained on these elements. Not surprisingly, the common-core data reflect information issues that revolve around the day-to-day management concerns of corrections. These day-to-day management concerns include many important pieces of information that are related to corrections performance.

For example, counts of offenders who enter prison, complete their stay without incident, leave prison for supervision, and complete supervision without incident are fundamental for corrections performance indicators. The ability to provide such counts for subpopulations of offenders and according to criminal justice processing variables (such as type of offense, or length of stay) enhance the comparability of performance indicators. Further, the capability to measure duration of supervision and returns to prison for new crimes or violations of conditions of supervision lie at the basis of developing measures of recidivism. This is true regardless of the controversies associated with interpreting a recidivism rate as a “good” or “bad” indicator of performance. In short, the capacities of the departments to maintain a large volume of common data elements about offenders is quite high. This is particularly impressive given the wide variation in corrections organization, legal frameworks, and penal codes operating in the States, the Federal government, and the District of Columbia.

Findings about common-core data elements do not necessarily imply that all departments define the elements in exactly the same way or collect exactly the same pieces of information in the elements. For example, several of the Inventory questions asked departments to indicate the response categories (such as type of program in which an offender participated) for data elements they collect. For some data elements, departments collect different categories of information. But for other data elements, (such as type of commitment or method of release from prison), there is greater agreement. For the latter, differences in response categories indicate a greater or lesser degree of precision rather than differences in scope or definition.

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## Non-core high-availability data elements

Within several core dimensions, there are some data elements that are collected by fewer than 26 departments. Conversely, within several non-core dimensions there are data elements that a majority of departments maintain in high-availability form. Out of the 100 core data elements, 20 are not maintained in high-availability form by most departments; out of the 107 non-core data elements, 15 are maintained in high availability by most departments.

There is one data element in the core of the profiling offenders stage that a majority of departments do not maintain in high availability: offenders' citizenship status. On the other hand, there are two data elements in this stage that are not included in the core but which a majority of departments maintain in high availability form: Education level and marital status (table 7.4).

Among the common core in the committing offenders stage, there are 8 data elements that are maintained in high availability form by fewer than 26 departments (table 7.5). These include:

- Charges on the indictment;
- The reason for a mandatory sentence;
- If monetary sanctions were imposed;
- Amount of sanctions imposed;
- If a weapon was used in the offense;
- Gang membership;
- Psychological index or score; and
- Medical index or score.

Also in this stage, there are three data elements that are not included in the core but that a majority of departments maintain in high-availability form: the criminal justice status of the offender, the medical condition of the offender at admission, and the types of need as determined by an assessment.

**Table 7.4. High-availability data elements in and out of core dimensions of the profiling offenders stage**

High-availability data elements in the core		High-availability data elements not in the core	
Collected by 26 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 26 departments	Collected by 26 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 26 departments
<b>Demographics</b>		<b>Socio-economic status</b>	
Sex	If illegal alien	Education level	Served in military
Race			Military branch(es) served
Hispanic origin			Type of military discharge
Religious affiliation			Length of military service
Date of birth			Employment status
Age at commitment			Length of employment
Citizenship			Length of unemployment
State of birth			Occupation
Country of birth			Sources of income
Address			Amount of income
			Types of financial obligation
			Amount of financial obligation
		<b>Family characteristics</b>	
		Marital status	Number of children
			Number of dependents
			Persons in household
			Residential status

**Table 7.5. High-availability data elements in and out of core dimensions of the committing offenders stage**

High-availability data elements in the core		High-availability data elements not in the core	
Collected by 26 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 26 departments	Collected by 26 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 26 departments
<b>Conviction offenses</b>		<b>Criminal incident</b>	
Number of offenses	Charges in indictment	Date of incident	Location of incident
Type of offense		Number of victims	Sex of victim
Title/section penal code		Race of victim	Age of victim
Written description		If victim knew offender	Relationship to victim
Charges on commitment		Weapon involved	Type of weapon
Severity of offense		Victim injury information	Extent of property damage
		Amount of restitution	Address of victim
<b>Sentences imposed</b>		<b>Criminal history</b>	
Co. of sentencing court	Reason for mandatory	Criminal justice status	Record of prior offenses
Sentencing judge	Monetary sanctions		Severity level of priors
Date of sentencing	Amount of sanctions		Number of prior arrests
No. of sentences			Number prior convictions
Concurrent/consecutive			Date of prior arrests
Total length of sentences			Date of prior convictions
Length of each sentence			Habitual offender
Mandatory minimum			
Split or mixed			
Length of supervision			
<b>Current commitments</b>		<b>Needs assessment</b>	
Type of commitment		Type of need	Psychological history
Date of commitment		Medical condition	Prior programs
Release authority/agency			Tested for drug use
			Results of drug tests
<b>Expected time to be served</b>			
Expected date of release			
Expected parole date			
Date sentence expiration			
<b>Risk assessment</b>			
History of violence	Weapon used		
History of escape/AWOL	Gang membership		
<b>Classification decisions</b>			
Security level	Psychological index		
Agency making decision	Medical index or score		
Initial classification date			
Classification index			
Risk assessment index			
Reason for class change			
Date of class change			
<b>Confinement characteristics</b>			
Type of facility			
Type of housing unit			
Special unit			

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In the managing offenders stage, seven of the data elements included in the core are not maintained by a majority of departments, including:

- Who authorized the transfer;
- Who authorized the move;
- Amount of change to sentence;
- Changes to release date;
- Special credits;
- If offender is required to register as sex offender; and
- If offender actually registered as sex offender (table 7.6).

On the other hand, there are six data elements outside of the core for managing offenders that a majority of departments maintain in high-availability form. These include:

- Type of program participation;
- Date of program participation;
- Type of misconduct in prison;
- Date of misconduct in prison;
- History of misconduct in prison; and
- Disposition of the charges of a legal proceeding (table 7.7).

Within the supervising offenders stage, 4 of the data elements in the core are collected by less than 26 departments. Three are in the responses to violations dimension: if offender was adjudicated, date adjudicated, and date the offender was arrested (table 7.7). The type of technical violation is also less commonly collected in high availability than the other elements in the dimension describing violations committed after release. There are three non-core data elements in this stage that are collected by a majority of departments: the address of the released offender, if the offender was under supervision when the crime was committed, and the type of the new offense committed.

### **Data elements about facilities**

Fifteen of the Inventory's survey questions are about facilities, costs, and availability of medical care. These data are not collected by most departments in electronic form and are not considered part of the core. They generally are maintained in paper form. The number of facilities and the number of beds per facility are the only data elements that are maintained electronically by more than 70% of the departments. Only 12 departments maintain data electronically about operational costs, annual capital costs and facility-generated revenue. Fewer than half of the departments collect information in any form about the number, qualifications, or availability of their medical staff.





**Table 7.7. High-availability data elements in and out of core dimensions of the supervising offenders stage**

High-availability data elements in the core		High-availability data elements not in the core	
Collected by 19 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 19 departments	Collected by 19 or more departments	Collected by fewer than 19 departments
<b>Behavior on supervision</b>		<b>Employment and residence information</b>	
Type of supervision	Type technical violation	Address of offender	Offender had job
Supervision terminated			Type employment
Length of supervision			Date employment began
Date supervision			Employer notified
Type crime committed			Residence status
Administrative closure			Living arrangements
Absconded on release			
Date of technical violation		<b>Information about new crimes committed on release</b>	
Date of new crime		Offender under supervision	Date of incident
Date of administrative closure		Type of offense	Location of incident
Date offender absconded			Number of victims
			If victim impact statement
			Victim injury information
			Extent of prop damage
			Restitution due victim
<b>Responses to violations of conditions of supervision</b>		<b>Information about victims of new crimes</b>	
If offender arrested	If offender adjudicated		Sex of victim
If offender sentenced	Date adjudicated		Race of victim
Date sentenced			Age of victim
Change of release status			If victim was a child
Date convicted			If victim knew offender
Date returned to prison			Relationship to offender
			Address of victim

\*Forty departments collect data elements on offenders while they are under supervision; 38 collect detailed data elements about criminal incidents committed by offenders while on release.

## Conclusions

Of the 207 offender-based data elements in this inventory, 100 of them are included in the core 14 dimensions of corrections processing. Most of the common-core data are found in areas related to committing offenders into prison (7 dimensions) and managing offenders in corrections facilities (4 dimensions). For the departments that collect data on released offenders, 2 dimensions are included in the common core. The profiling of offenders has one dimension in the core.

Within these core dimensions, 20 of the 100 data elements are not maintained in a high-availability form by a majority of departments. Of the 107 non-core data elements, 15 are maintained in high-availability form by most departments. However, these high-availability non-core data elements do not measure an

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entire dimension of corrections processing, as do the data elements currently in the core.

Several implications for the objective of creating commonly-defined indicators of corrections performance flow from these findings. First, the commonality with which departments collect and maintain data in high-availability form does not necessarily (and need not) imply that departments define these commonly-collected data elements in exactly the same manner, or that they apply to exactly the same groups of offenders among the departments. Nor should it be expected that the data elements necessarily be defined in exactly the same manner among all departments. State penal codes and criminal procedures vary. And a department's adherence to its jurisdiction's laws and regulations rightly takes precedence over defining a group of data elements in the same way that other departments define them, or applying them to the same groups of offenders.

Second, there are important areas in which no common-core data currently exists. Under-covered areas in Stage 1 (profiling offenders) include information about the social and economic characteristics and family relationships of offenders. These variables can be used to indicate the degree to which offenders maintain connections with mainstream institutions outside of prison. In Stage 2 (committing offenders), under-represented areas include the criminal incident leading to the conviction—especially victim-related information, criminal history, and offender needs assessments. Within Stage 3 (managing offenders), the under-covered areas include program participation, drug testing, medical care, misconduct and infractions, and the corrections system responses. The drug testing information is especially important for developing indicators of how well corrections institutions keep offenders involved in maintaining positive behaviors. Finally, Stage 4 (supervising offenders in the community), data elements about offenders employment experiences, about new crimes they commit on release and about the victims of the crimes is not widely collected.

Although the methods to increase coverage of data elements may vary from stage to stage and dimension to dimension, there are two basic strategies to address the problem of under-covered data elements: (1) departments may collect the data themselves; or (2) departments may rely on other agencies to collect it and then obtain the data or access to it in electronic format. If the strategy of relying on another agency to collect data elements is used, then departments must solve both technical problems related to transferring and linking data, and the substantive problems associated with defining the data elements. Obtaining data from other agencies may also increase the staffing requirements for corrections information systems departments, perhaps by requiring staff with a higher level of skill.

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If departments rely on other agencies to collect data elements, they may have to expand in both directions. For example, to obtain data on offenses and victims leading to a conviction, corrections departments may have to develop links with prosecutors or the courts. Conversely, to develop additional capacities in Stage 4 (supervising offenders on release), departments may have to develop links with parole departments. In either case, the complications associated with using other agencies' data exist and may be compounded.

Third, there may be important data elements beyond those in this survey, and these may suggest areas to expand coverage of data elements.

Fourth, the capacities of departments' information systems to provide statistical information are constrained by staff, software, and to a lesser degree, data.

