



The Greening of Probation

From 1998 to 2007, the New York City Department of Probation used almost 50 million sheets of paper, the equivalent of nearly 625 trees, along with corresponding amounts of copier toner and printer ink, energy and manpower in meeting a requirement to deliver offender reports to judges prior to sentencing hearings. Since the debut of the department's Web-based Reusable Case Management System (RCMS) in November 2008, that number has fallen to nearly zero.

The department processes about 45,000 adult pre-sentence investigation reports (PSIs) and 7,000 juvenile investigation and recommendation reports (INRs) annually that are sent to court. Prior to the inception of RCMS, staff keyed reports on a manual typewriter or into a word-processing template and generated seven paper copies of each report (an average 15 pages per document) to be sent to court.

Now, with RCMS on board these investigation reports are sent to court electronically and delivered into the court's inboxes. The court clerk distributes the reports internally to the judge. These reports include information about the defendant's current offense, history of offenses, victim statements, pedigree information and an evaluated summary made by the probation officer, who constructs the PSI on the defendant's suitability for probation supervision and/or incarceration, and plays a key role in sentencing decisions.

"We are now in a position of saving trees, paper, copier, toner, faxes, ink, energy, all a tremendous green savings," says Alphonzo Albright, Deputy Commissioner and chief information officer for the Office of Information Technology and Management Analysis Planning. "New York City has adopted an enormous green approach that is actively being implemented citywide, and this effort is one of the many initiatives."

In addition to the green savings realized by the NYC Department of Probation, the advent of RCMS has also improved the department's on-time delivery rate for

reports. Albright says that when paper copies had to be delivered by hand, the department achieved only a 70-percent on-time rate, but with the onset of electronic delivery, that rate jumped to 100 percent.

Reports make up one of the many components/modules of RCMS. The first phase implemented, in 2005, is a kiosk system that allows low-risk offenders to report in electronically (using hand biometrics as identification) instead of coming to the probation office to meet with the officer assigned. This helped the probation officers to focus their time on the high-risk offenders. The use of reporting kiosks as a supervision tool automates the offender reporting process and also permits real-time information exchange. Designed with flexibility and portability, the kiosk system can be used as a standalone system or function as part of a larger case management system. Currently, 22,700 probationers report to kiosks located in department offices citywide.

"We have the reports, we have the kiosks, we have a whole suite of modules and applications that we deployed, including a data warehouse that takes in a lot of information and generates reports," says Albright, also a member of the National Institute of Justice's Community Corrections Technology Working Group (TWG). "Going green" is a high-priority requirement for that TWG. TWGs are associated with different NIJ technology portfolios, such as corrections, and identify criminal justice technology needs within that portfolio.

Albright will be participating in the drafting of an NIJ-sponsored guide on green technologies for corrections.

Prior to the advent of RCMS, probation officers had to rely on unstructured database silos that provided no measure of accountability, no potential for strategic analysis and no management transparency. As the department's needs evolved, it became obvious that the department needed an entirely new case management system.

The new system, RCMS, includes the following features:

- A workflow-based, process-driven integrated system for both adult and juvenile offenders that includes automated notification and an alert mechanism.
- Integration with the automated reporting kiosk.
- Integration with document management and e-folder functionality.
- Automated report generation and electronic submission to various law enforcement agencies.
- Real-time information exchange with various state and federal criminal justice agencies in National Information Exchange Model 2.0 XML format.
- Executive “dashboard” and management reporting capabilities. A dashboard report provides an at-a-glance perspective on the current status of a project in the context of predetermined metrics such as cost, time, requirements and/or risk.
- Data sharing that allows agencies to share critical information in emergencies and support day-to-day operations. Data sharing can take place in either real-time or through scheduled interfaces.

New York City owns the code for RCMS, constructed by in-house information technology specialists with vendor assistance, but Albright says he is willing to work with other agencies to develop mutual sharing agreements. Possibly, he says, the source code could be made available to other jurisdictions where it could be easily modified and adapted to other agencies’ needs, and there might be mutual sharing of innovations developed by other entities. (In the context of computer science/software engineering, “reusable” means a segment of source code can be used again to add new functionalities with little or no modification; thus, it can be used by others for the original purpose or for new purposes.)

In addition to the green savings created by the use of RCMS, Albright offers the following tips for agencies looking to go green:

- Use your computer to eliminate paper. Write communications on up-to-date letterhead templates and design reports in your word-processing software.
- Incorporate document management that allows report development from your word-processing software.
- Print forms and memos directly from your computer instead of using preprinted forms.
- Preview database and spreadsheet printouts on your screen to ensure best use of computer paper.

- Send and receive reports and faxes from your computer instead of using printouts.
- Offer annual reports, application user manuals and major documents electronically or on disk to interested recipients.
- Consolidate forms.
- Develop Internet Web pages to provide frequently requested information.

For more information on RCMS or other New York City Department of Probation efforts to “go green,” contact Alphonzo Albright at (212) 232-0455 or e-mail aalbrigh@probation.nyc.gov/.

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