

# Remote Check-In Reporting

## Evidence Informed Case Justification

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A theoretical basis for using remote check-in to supervise the low-risk population per the risk > need > responsivity principle.



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# Introduction

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), at the end of 2016, over 4.5 million adults, or 1 in 55, were under the supervision of probation or parole. Although the number of adults under community supervision in 2016 was the lowest it had been since 1999, only 50% of probation exits and 57% of parole exits were the result of successful completion, and nearly 15% of the almost 2.4 million combined exits from probation and parole resulted in some term of incarceration. The Council of State Governments estimates that as many as 1 in 4 prison admissions is the result of a technical violation of community supervision. <sup>1</sup>



*This paper will demonstrate the theoretical basis for using a technology such as FieldWare Remote Check-In™ to supervise a low-risk population (i.e., adherence to the risk-need-responsivity principle).*

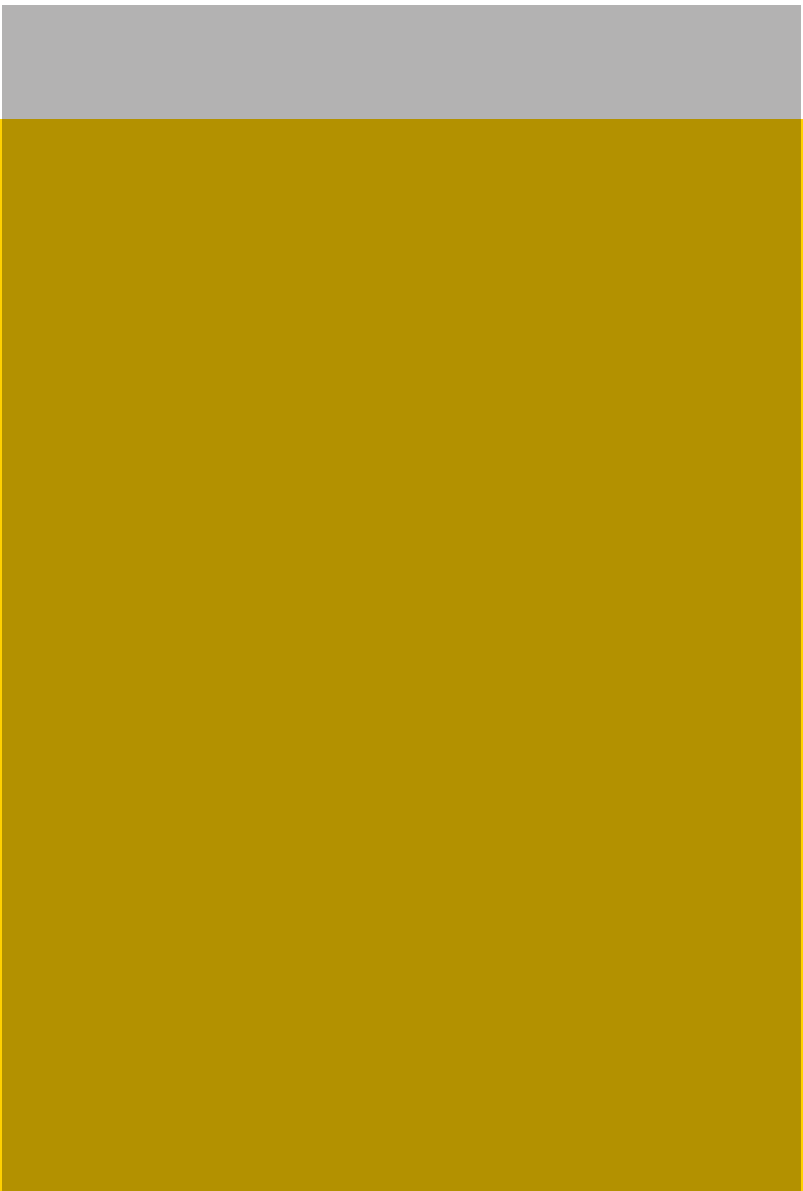
It will describe and summarize the existing research that evaluates different strategies for supervising people who are low risk to reoffend, including the use of technology to provide distance-based supervision. Finally, it will offer a summary of benefits and challenges to consider for the various supervision strategies suggested in the existing research, including Remote Check-In.

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May 2020

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A recent publication by the Pew Charitable Trusts suggests that one strategy for managing this large community supervision population is to improve the supervision practices used to manage low-risk probationers and parolees.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, the report suggests using technology to supervise this population from a distance. FieldWare Remote Check-In™ is a supervision management and monitoring system. Designed to replace in-person reporting for lower risk offenders under community supervision, it can improve efficiencies and decrease workload associated with the supervision of this population.



# THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

## RISK > NEED > RESPONSIVITY

Backed by a number of meta-analyses, the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) framework was developed in the early 1990s as a set of guiding evidence-based principles for effective community-based supervision of offenders in the criminal justice system, and it is the framework that is widely used today.<sup>3</sup> Quite simply, the RNR frame is made up of the following principles:

- **RISK:** resources should be directed to those people who are highest RISK for reoffending,
- **NEED:** interventions should target criminogenic NEEDS, or those needs that are contributing to a person’s offense pattern, and
- **RESPONSIVITY:** treatment should be RESPONSIVE by incorporating cognitive-behavioral strategies and matched to a person’s learning style and other personal factors (e.g., gender, language, culture, etc.).

In other words, Risk tells us WHO to pay attention to. Need tells us WHAT to address during supervision. And Responsivity gives us guidance about HOW we should address these factors. When all three parts of the RNR principle are followed, the demonstrated impact is up to a 50% decrease in recidivism.<sup>4</sup>



Taking a closer look at the risk principle specifically, not only is it suggested that the highest risk people should receive the most intensive services, but the opposite is also recommended: that the lowest risk people should receive the least intensive treatments and supervision. In fact, there is substantial research to suggest that providing low-risk people with more intensive service can actually have an adverse effect and increase their risk.<sup>5</sup> For example, a 2006 study by Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Holsinger explored the impact of the risk principle on 97 correctional programs serving over 13,000 offenders in Ohio. The study found that not only was the recidivism reduction greatest for programs serving high-risk populations, but that recidivism rates actually increased when these programs served a greater proportion of low-risk people.

There are at least two reasons why high-intensity services provided to low-risk people can increase risk.<sup>6</sup> The first is that placing low-risk people in more intensive programming may put them in closer proximity to higher concentrations of high-risk people. This could lead to the strengthening of social bonds with people who are more anti-social, a known risk factor for criminal behavior.<sup>7</sup> Second, a low-risk person is low risk because they have protective factors such as employment and attachments to positive prosocial family or friends. Putting them in more intensive programming could disrupt these protective factors; for example, a person may find their job in jeopardy if they have to report to their probation officer during the workday on a frequent basis.

# LOW-RISK COMMUNITY SUPERVISION RESEARCH



While community supervision agencies have tried a number of different strategies to reduce the workload created by low-risk clients, ranging from a simple reduction in office visits, to using kiosk reporting (machines like an ATM that a probationer or parolee physically reports to), to using on-line or remote reporting, there are very few studies that explore the effectiveness of the various supervision practices that specifically target people (probationers and / or parolees) who are low risk to recidivate.<sup>8</sup> That said, the research that exists is generally favorable to utilizing lower intensity and technology-based reporting options for low-risk people, both in terms of the impact of these supervision strategies on public safety and on resource (e.g., time and cost) allocation. Table 1 provides an overview of existing research findings.

Although limitations vary from study to study, on the whole, these studies demonstrated that decreasing supervision intensity and shifting to technology-based supervision for low-risk individuals did not jeopardize public safety.

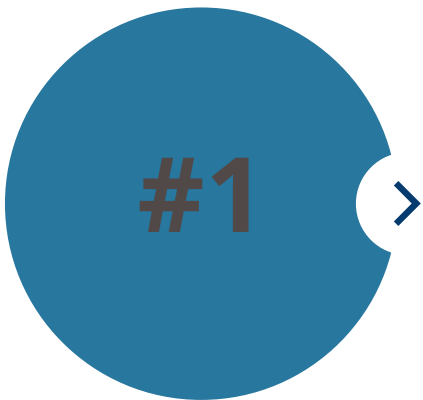
Table 1 – Summary of Studies Evaluating Low-Risk Supervision Strategies<sup>9</sup>

Study / Location	Supervision Strategy	Design	Findings
Ahlin et al., 2016; Crosse et al., 2016 <sup>10</sup>	Kiosk Reporting & Telephone Reporting	Two different studies, one compared kiosk reporting to traditional face-to-face reporting and the other compared kiosk reporting to telephone reporting with interactive voice response	No difference in violations or re-arrest between kiosk and face-to-face reporting; no difference in re-arrest between telephone reporting and kiosk reporting; telephone reporting was significantly less likely to have a failure to report violation; telephone reporting was cheaper than kiosk reporting
Ahlman & Kurtz, 2008; Barnes et al., 2010 & 2012 / Pennsylvania	Reduction in Contacts	A randomized controlled trial tested the impact of a reduction in officer contacts and increase in low-risk caseload size; office reporting reduced to once every 6 months, with telephone reporting between office visits	No difference in reoffending between experiment (reduced contact group) and control group, including volume and seriousness of crime; experimental group had significantly less absconding
Cohen et al., 2016 / Federal Probation	Reduction in Contacts	Examined recidivism rates for low-risk probationers before and after the implementation of a low-risk supervision policy	No change in recidivism after implementing low-risk supervision policy, reducing probationer contacts
Johnson, Austin, & Davies, 2003 / Oregon	Reduction in Contacts	Quasi-experimental design using non-randomized comparison groups from 3 timeframe cohorts, representing 3 stages of implementation of supervision	Redesigned supervision model that reduced supervision for low-risk probationers worked at least as well as prior supervision model Note: study found concerning level of assessment overrides that may have impacted findings
Viglione & Taxman 2018 / "Mid- Atlantic state"	Telephone Reporting	Kiosk ReportingQualitative process evaluation that explored the implementation of a telephone reporting system	Staff placed 74% of low-risk probationers on telephone reporting, but implementation of the program varied across probation offices
Wilson, Austin & Naro, 2008 / New York City	Kiosk Reporting	Studied outcomes pre- and post-kiosk supervision expansion; outcomes included reallocation of officer resources to high-risk probationers	High-risk probationers were provided intensive supervision following kiosk expansion; 2-yr. re-arrest rate declined for both low and high-risk populations



# BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF REMOTE CHECK-IN

Given that the existing research demonstrates that there is no significant negative impact on public safety when low-intensity and technology-based supervision such as kiosk, online, and telephone reporting are used to supervise low-risk probationers and parolees, there are a number of benefits for officers, supervision agencies, clients, and the public to implementing a Remote Check-In program.



## OFFICER TIME REALLOCATION FOR HIGHER RISK CLIENTS

First, reducing the amount of time that officers spend with low-risk people can allow them to reallocate that time to providing increased supervision to those who are higher risk;<sup>11</sup> if this reallocated time is spent on activities known to positively impact outcomes (e.g., addressing criminogenic needs), agencies may be able improve recidivism outcomes for the higher risk population and improve public safety as a result.<sup>12</sup> Agencies can especially see time savings and improved data collection efficiencies if the technology-based supervision strategy is integrated with the agency’s existing case management system.<sup>13 14</sup> Finally, technology-based supervision such as Remote Check-In or kiosk reporting costs less than face-to-face supervision, with Remote Check-In being less expensive than kiosk reporting.<sup>15</sup>



## LESS TIME AWAY FROM PROTECTIVE LOW RISK FACTORS FOR CLIENTS

For clients, any reduction in supervision requirements, whether it is reduced office visits or some form of technology-based supervision, means less time away from the protective factors that keep them low risk, like family, work, or school, and technology-based supervision methods also provide the client increased flexibility and autonomy over his or her supervision;<sup>16</sup> Remote Check-In and online reporting have the added benefit of removing any barriers associated with the access to transportation needed to report at a physical location.



## LESS ENCOUNTERS WITH HIGHER RISK CLIENTS AND INCENTIVE MOTIVATOR

Technology-based supervision can also minimize or eliminate the time that a low-risk probationer or parolee might sit in a waiting room with higher risk clients, waiting for a face- to-face office visit with their officer;<sup>17</sup> consequently, the opportunities to strengthen bonds with anti- social people is also reduced.<sup>18</sup> And finally, clients may be motivated to work toward a low-intensity reporting option as an incentive or reinforcement for compliance and progress toward reaching supervision goals.<sup>19</sup>



## TECHNICAL CHALLENGES



Implementation of any initiative for the nimblest of organizations can still be challenging.<sup>20</sup> These challenges can generally be sorted into technical (e.g., equipment or IT infrastructure) or adaptive (e.g., attitudes and perceptions of staff or clients). Although none of the research cited above explored the technical challenges to the implementation of Remote Check-In specifically, one might reasonably assume that some of the technical challenges that exist for kiosk and online reporting would not be barriers for Remote Check-In.

For example, Remote Check-In does not require the purchase and placement of physical kiosks.<sup>21</sup> Although online reporting requires access to the internet, Remote Check-In only requires access to a telephone, and it is estimated that 96% of adults in this country own some sort of mobile phone,<sup>22</sup> not to mention the people that continue to utilize landline telephone service. Other challenges for technology-based supervision tools include the enrollment process for officers and clients, confidential data protection, and client identity verification—is the person under supervision actually the person reporting?<sup>23</sup> Agencies are encouraged to address these issues with potential vendors prior to selecting a supervision service.<sup>24</sup>



## ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES



As identified in Viglione and Taxman's 2018 study, implementation of a Remote Check-In system is certainly not without adaptive challenges. As this research suggests, should an agency decide that the use of a Remote Check-In is a viable way to adhere to the risk principle and allow staff to focus time on higher risk people, it is critical to address a number of implementation issues prior to and during the implementation process, including staff perceptions of the program, the extent to which adaptation of Remote Check-In utilization will be allowed, and how (or if) internal and external influences support it.<sup>25</sup> In addition, since this population tends to be more motivated and more likely to succeed on supervision, staff may be reluctant to substitute a reduction in contacts with low-risk people for an increase in contacts with more challenging high-risk clients and special attention should be given to equipping staff to work with this different population.<sup>26</sup>

Although research suggests that low-intensity and technology-based supervision of low-risk people poses no increased risk to public safety, agencies and officers need to be able to accurately identify the low-risk population at the outset.



## ACCURATE VALIDATION RISK ASSESSMENT

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Finally, successful implementation of a Remote Check-In program, or any low-intensity supervision practice, for low-risk probationers and parolees also requires agencies to use and accurately administer a valid risk assessment.<sup>27</sup> Viglione, Rudes, and Taxman studied the issues of “technology transfer” related to risk need assessment—how does assessment information get transferred and operationalized in supervision practices within the complicated context of officer decision-making, the nature of the risk need assessment itself, organizational culture and leadership, and internal and external support for the need and utility of assessments?<sup>28</sup>

The study found wide variance in how risk need assessment was transferred to supervision practice, and while it is beyond the scope of this paper to address issues related to risk need assessment, the importance of administering valid risk need assessments with fidelity and utilizing that information to make decisions related to the management and supervision of a low-risk population probably cannot be understated. Although the research suggests that low-intensity and technology-based supervision of low-risk probationers and parolees poses no increased risk to public safety, agencies and officers need to accurately identify the low-risk population at the outset.

# CONCLUSION

As this paper has outlined, although there is a general lack of research evaluating supervision practices for low risk people under community supervision, the studies that do exist suggest that low-intensity, technology-based supervision strategies are at least as effective as traditional supervision for this population. These strategies also align with the well-researched and evidence-based risk-need- responsivity framework. The benefits to technology-based supervision strategies are significant and range from increased efficiency in resource allocation for officers to cost savings for agencies to increased flexibility and autonomy for clients, all without increased risk to public safety; in fact some of these benefits (e.g., cost savings and flexibility) are even more pronounced for remote programs like FieldWare Remote Check-In™. In order to maximize the potential for successful implementation of any low-intensity or technology-based supervision strategy, agencies should plan for both technical and adaptive challenges to implementation and be prepared to provide ongoing officer and manager support to address staff needs.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather Garwood is an independent consultant with 20 years of experience working in public administration and non-profit criminal justice organizations. She has experience providing direct client service as a former probation officer and administrative support in the field of criminal justice community supervision. Her experience includes policy and program development and implementation, management facilitation, training, and coaching to support the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed supervision strategies. She is also a knowledgeable and experienced trainer and coach in Risk-Need-Responsivity principles, the Level of Service Inventory – Revised, case planning, and cognitive-behavioral techniques. She is committed to working with people and organizations to improve service quality and outcomes for people. For more information, go to <https://www.linkedin.com/in/heathergarwood/>



## ABOUT FIELDWARE

FieldWare, LLC was formed in 2000 and has been working with government clients in the criminal justice field since that time. We are 100% dedicated to the support, enhancement and expansion of modular FieldWare software and mobile solutions designed exclusively for government agencies.

FieldWare currently provides Remote Check-In programs and related services to twelve (12) state-wide probation/parole agencies along with many county and local agencies across the United States.

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## ENDNOTES



- 1 Council of State Governments, 2019
- 2 Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020
- 3 Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Andrews, Zinger, et al., 1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000; Prendergast, Pearson, Podus, Hamilton, & Greenwell, 2013; Viglione & Taxman, 2018
- 4 Andrews, Zinger, et al., 1990
- 5 Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Andrews & Kiessling, 1980; Bonta & Andrews 2017; Bonta, et al., 2000; Hanley, 2002, 2006; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004
- 6 Lowenkamp & Latessa 2004; Lowenkamp, et al., 2006
- 7 Bonta & Andrews 2017
- 8 Barnes, Hyatt, Ahlman, & Kent, 2012; Viglione & Taxman 2018
- 9 A number of studies referenced an evaluation of a kiosk program in Maryland that demonstrated a reduction in recidivism for low-risk clients assigned to the program, but the source evaluation could not be located and was therefore not included as a resource for this publication. In addition, Belshaw (2011) and Baker (n.d.) explored low-risk reporting options to replace face-to-face reporting in Texas and Florida respectively. As neither study was an evaluation of low-risk supervision, they were not included in the summary above.
- 10 Outcome study sites were not identified.
- 11 Ahlin, Hagen, Harmon, & Crosse, 2016; Ahlman & Kurtz, 2008; Baker, n.d.; Barnes, et al., 2010, 2012; Belshaw, 2011; Cohen, Cook, & Lowenkamp, 2016; Jannetta & Halberstadt, 2011; VanBenschoten, Bentley, Gregoire, & Lowenkamp, 2016; Wilson, Austin, & Naro, 2008
- 12 Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2016; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004
- 13 FieldWare integrates its programs with an agency's existing case management platform as a standard implementation practice.
- 14 Ahlin et al., 2016; Crosse et al., 2016; Viglione & Taxman 2018; Wilson, et al., 2008
- 15 Barnes et al., 2010, 2012; Crosse et al., 2016; Wilson, et al., 2008
- 16 Ahlin et al., 2016; Wilson, et al., 2008
- 17 Baker, n.d.
- 18 Ahlin et al., 2016; Wilson, et al., 2008
- 19 Ahlin et al., 2016
- 20 Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005
- 21 Ahlin et al., 2016; Belshaw, 2011; Crosse et al., 2016
- 22 Pew Research Center, 2019
- 23 Ahlin et al., 2016; Baker, n.d.; Wilson, et al., 2008
- 24 FieldWare utilizes highly secure data encryption protocols and offers secure voice biometric authentication.
- 25 see also Baker, n.d.
- 26 Ahlin et al., 2016; Belshaw, 2011; Jannetta & Halberstadt, 2011
- 27 Ahlin et al., 2016; Baker, n.d.; Barnes, et al., 2012; Jannetta & Halberstadt, 2011; Johnson, Austin & Davies, 2003; Wilson, et al., 2008; Viglione & Taxman, 2018
- 28 Viglione, Rudes, & Taxman. 2015

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