

Framework for Defining and Measuring Recidivism

Wisconsin Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)

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DEFINING RECIDIVISM

Recidivism refers broadly to re-offending, with the most common measurements including re-arrest, re-conviction, and/or re-incarceration. Recidivism rates measure the frequency with which individuals re-engage with the criminal justice system within a defined time period.*

MEASURING RECIDIVISM

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

- You can only count what you can count.
- You should only report on what you can count.
- You should only report on what you can count that is valid, defensible, and can be independently replicated.
- The method for measuring and reporting recidivism should be consistent over time.

POST-RELEASE OR POST-PROGRAM RECIDIVISM

STARTING POINT

- ☑ A **date on which a criminal justice event occurs** that starts the measurement period
 - ☑ Must be defined clearly and measured consistently for all individuals in the cohort.
 - e.g., date of arrest, date of conviction, date of release from jail or prison, date of admission or discharge from supervision, date of program completion, etc.

COHORT

- ☑ A **group of offenders who are at risk to recidivate**, tracked over a consistent period of time.
 - ☑ The parameters of the cohort must be clearly defined.
 - e.g., all participants who were discharged from drug court during a particular year; all offenders released from DOC custody in a particular year, etc.
 - ☑ The cohort size (N) must be large enough to be meaningful.
 - Often best to report both the raw numbers, particularly with small cohorts.
 - ☑ Individuals who could no longer recidivate before the end of their follow-up period should be removed from the cohort.
 - e.g., individuals who die, move out of state, are extradited, are incarcerated during the entire follow-up period, etc.
 - ☑ An individual should only be counted once in a cohort.

*Adapted from the Urban Institute, *Measuring Recidivism at the Local Level: A Quick Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/recidivism-measures_final-for-website.pdf

RECIDIVIST EVENT

- ☑ A **criminal justice event during the follow-up period** that can be reliably and validly counted based on official records, and is clearly defined and consistently measured for all individuals in the cohort.
 - ☑ More than one type of recidivist event may be collected. However, each event must be tracked separately for all members of the cohort.
 - e.g., re-arrest, re-charge, re-conviction, and/or re-incarceration
 - ☑ The event must take place during the follow-up period.
 - e.g., if the follow-up period is 3 years, an event that occurs in year 4 would not be included
 - ☑ The event must have an associated date and the date must be collected consistently for all members of the cohort.
 - e.g., offense date may be used, regardless of whether the event is measured based on re-arrest, re-charge, re-conviction, or re-incarceration
 - ☑ The event needs to be clearly defined as to whether it is general or specific.
 - e.g., for sex offenders, measurement may include both overall recidivism for any crime (general), as well as recidivism for sex offenses only (specific)

FOLLOW-UP PERIOD

- ☑ From the starting point, the **time period** in which the individuals in the cohort have the opportunity to engage in a recidivist event.
 - ☑ Must be the same amount of time for every individual in the cohort, based on their starting point.
 - e.g., if the follow-up period is 1 year, data should be tracked on all individuals in the cohort for 1 year from their individual starting point.
 - ☑ Must be a minimum of 6 months long.
 - ☑ Common measurement periods are 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, and 5 years (or longer).
 - ☑ Recidivism is typically calculated as the percent of offenders who engage in at least one recidivist event during the follow-up period, out of the total offenders in the cohort who have completed the follow-up period.
 - ☑ Tracking can include the first or last recidivist event and/or the total number of recidivist events in the follow-up period.

IN-PROGRAM RECIDIVISM

STARTING POINT

- ☑ A **date on which a criminal justice event occurs** that starts the in-program measurement period and is clearly defined and consistently measured for all program participants.
 - e.g., admission date to treatment court, entry date to a program, etc.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- ☑ A **group of offenders who are at risk to recidivate**, during the period of program participation

RECIDIVIST EVENT

- ☑ A **criminal justice event during the program period** that can be reliably and validly counted based on official records, and is clearly defined and consistently measured for all program participants.
 - ☑ More than one type of recidivist event may be collected. However, each event must be tracked separately for all program participants.
 - e.g., re-arrest, re-charge, re-conviction, and/or re-incarceration
 - ☑ The event must take place during the program period.
 - e.g., an event that occurs after the program has ended would not be included
 - ☑ The event must have an associated date and the date must be collected consistently for all program participants.
 - e.g., offense date may be used, regardless of whether the event is measured based on re-arrest, re-charge, re-conviction, or re-incarceration
 - ☑ The event needs to be clearly defined as to whether it is general or specific.
 - e.g., for OWI offenders, measurement may include both overall recidivism for any crime (general), as well as recidivism for OWI offenses only (specific)

ENDING POINT

- ☑ An **event that ends the in-program measurement period** and is clearly defined and consistently measured among all program participants.
 - e.g., discharge date from treatment court, completion date for a program, etc.
- ☑ The starting and ending points of the program define the time period in which the individual has the opportunity to engage in a recidivist event.
 - Length of measurement period depends on program length
- ☑ In-program recidivism is typically reported as the percent of participants who engaged in a recidivist event during the program time period.

WHAT RECIDIVISM IS NOT

- ☑ In most cases, recidivism does not include:
 - ☑ Non-criminal justice events
 - e.g. treatment episodes/failures, civil violations, ordinance violations, etc.
 - ☑ Events that do not result in direct criminal justice action, where there is no arrest, charge, or conviction
 - e.g. contacts with police, positive drug tests, etc.
 - ☑ Absence of an event
 - e.g. failure to appear, failure to submit to a drug test, etc.

DOCUMENTATION

- ☑ All steps of the recidivism analysis should be clearly documented including the starting point, cohort description, recidivist event(s), and follow-up period or ending point
- ☑ Documentation should also include:
 - ☑ Methodology for counting the recidivist events
 - e.g. how arrest, charge, conviction, and/or incarceration events are counted and what is included or excluded
 - ☑ Data source(s) and known limitations
 - ☑ Information that is or is not included in the recidivism analysis
 - e.g. whether the analysis includes out of state arrests or convictions, technical violations or revocations, misdemeanors and felonies, etc.