

# Recapping the SACSI and COMPASS Projects

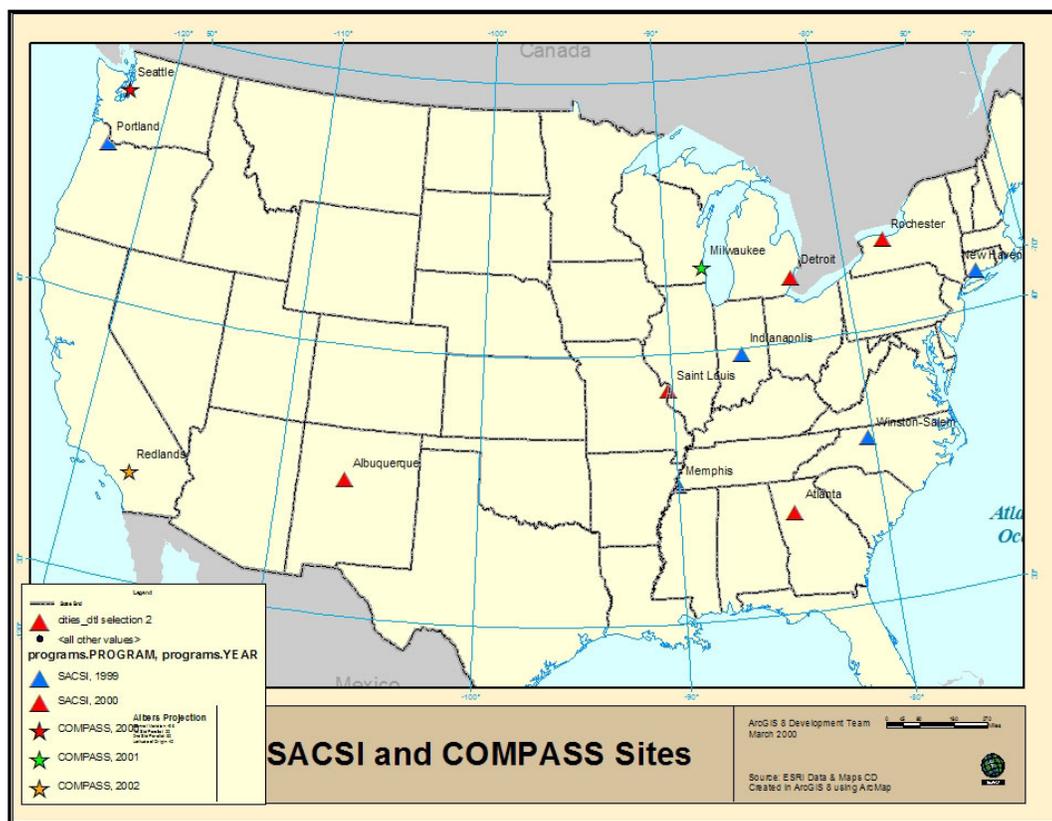
*A model to describe what Community Safety Systems are, and what they can do for a local community.*

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Since 1998, The US Department of Justice – Office of Justice Programs – National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has made a significant investment in local initiatives that seek to make public-safety decision-making more collaborative, strategic, and data-driven. Specifically, NIJ has funded 10 local sites under the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI), and three COMPASS (Community Mapping, Planning and Analysis for Safety Strategies) project sites.



At least one evaluation has reported positive outcomes from one of these sites (McGarrell, et al, 2002), and cross-site evaluation efforts of both programs are underway.

Regardless of the criminal-justice impacts from these programs, NIJ has already succeeded by one important measure: local sustainment. Many of the SACSI sites continue, funded by other grants as well as local budgets, to employ incident review, and to use and expand upon the Community Safety Information System (CSIS) shared-data projects developed as part of SACSI. All three COMPASS sites have also received at least one year of additional funding, and prospects are good that all three will continue with some form of locally-supported data-sharing and problem-solving initiatives.

In short, NIJ’s investment in this powerful idea of data-driven problem-solving is one that is capable of significant leverage at the local level. In fact, at least seven sites have received funding, or a commitment for funding, in at least one budget cycle following the end of the grant period. As a result, it makes good sense to think about how such initiatives could be implemented and sustained in other communities.

In June 2003, NIJ convened all three COMPASS projects and some of the SACSI sites that have remained active in data-driven problem-solving. A day-and-a-half workshop in Milwaukee featured extended discussions on the successes and challenges of creating shared-data systems, and implementing more data-driven decision-making.

The participants presented several examples of successful collaborative “action-research” efforts, which will be presented in this session.

The meeting highlighted the different types of challenges presented by the effort to create a community-side, shared-data platform for problem-solving. Challenges fall into several general categories: confidentiality and risks to sharing data; technical challenges; the selection of public-safety problems or issues that are a good “fit” for such an approach; community outreach, to gain acceptance and diffusion of the idea among a significant majority of the key local stakeholders; long-term sustainability of the projects and processes. These challenges have been overcome to varying degrees by the sites. Future evaluative work should include a “best practices” list of the most successful ways that

### **Sustainability: Local Return on NIJ’s Investments in Community Data Infrastructure Projects**

<b>Project Site</b>	<b>Sustained as...</b>	<b>Primary Funding Sources</b>
Winston-Salem, NC	The Center for Community Safety at Winston-Salem State University	A major local foundation grant, research and project grants
Memphis	The Center for Urban Studies at Memphis University	Research grants focused on the local community
Indianapolis	The Indianapolis Violence Reduction Project	City and County funding?
Rochester, NY	Rochester Institute of Technology	?
Seattle	City of Seattle Neighborhoods Department – COMPASS Office	Grants and local tax-supported budget
Milwaukee	City of Milwaukee Information & Technology Management Division	Grant funding
East Valley	Redlands, CA Police Department	Grant funding

SACSI and COMPASS sites have overcome these barriers.

The participants in the Milwaukee meeting also developed a theoretical model for creating a “community safety system” that incorporates the experiences and unique characteristics of both SACSI and COMPASS. Basically, it was posited that the SACSI program emphasized a process for collaborative, data-driven problem-solving (specifically, incident review – see Solomon, 1997; Groff, 2000). In contrast, the COMPASS sites, as they have developed, have come to emphasize the development and utilization of tools – GIS, Java-based web applications, etc.

This paper provides a brief comparison of SACSI and COMPASS initiatives generally. It also presents that schematic model for visualizing and describing data-driven efforts to systematically influence and support local decision-making.

## **SACSI and COMPASS**

### *Influences*

Clearly, environmental criminology and routine activities theory are the chief theoretical underpinnings for these approaches to crime reduction (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1991; Eck and Weisburd, 1995). Operationally, a number of federal and local initiatives and investments provided the backdrop for NIJ’s development in the late 1990s of two similar, but quite distinct data-driven initiatives:

- Problem-Oriented Policing
- CompStat
- The Boston Gun Project
- Weed & Seed
- Arrestee Drug Abuse and Monitoring (ADAM)
- Project CeaseFire in Richmond, VA
- The Urban Institute’s National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership

While SACSI was explicitly an attempt to replicate and systematize the incident review process developed by Kennedy, Braga and others in the Boston Gun Project (Schmerler, *et al*, 1998; US Department of Justice, 1999) COMPASS was described as an effort to assimilate lessons learned from a wider variety of federal and local initiatives (US Dept of Justice, 2000).

### *Common Elements*

Both projects were based on gathering and integrating administrative data sets from diverse sources. Both also attempted to apply those integrated data to convening, supporting and improving collaborations or partnerships formed to address public safety problems. A third common basic element is direct interaction between practitioners and researchers. That is, both anticipated some sort of “action research,” or “grounded research” approach taken by local academic partners.

### *Key Differences*

From these basic similarities, the initiatives

diverged in significant ways. The table that follows is a very simplified comparative analysis of the two projects. It ignores very important variation among the local sites as well as cross-over between the two approaches. For example, most SACSI sites did incorporate contextual data

Key Dimensions	SACSI	COMPASS
Leadership	US Attorney	Mayor/Chief (local)
Participants	Criminal Justice agencies	Criminal justice, plus , local gov't, and community-based organizations
Problem Analysis	In-Depth; problem	Single Diversified
Data	Mostly criminal justice data	Crime and its context – land use, education data, demographics – a more comprehensive data collection effort
Key Innovation	Incident Review	GIS with multi-source data

such as land use or demographics. And most of them also brought in stakeholders from beyond the local criminal justice community. However, while the COMPASS approach explicitly drew on data and participants from beyond the criminal justice system, SACSI sites generally involved them only after an investigation among criminal justice agencies had pinpointed a problem, and defined “outside” partners that were needed to help develop or implement a solution.

Another important difference lies in the “key innovation” that served as the centerpiece for each approach. For SACSI, this was explicitly the incident review process that was developed by Kennedy, Braga and others in Boston (cite the “Gun Violence” report from OJP). COMPASS, on the other hand, was primarily a spatial analysis project. Indeed, “Mapping” is one of the words that makes up the acronym.

This difference is more than simply a difference in the sorts of computer resources employed. In fact, it represents a foundational assumption about the degree of effort needed to integrate data from diverse datasets in a way that is meaningful for policy analysis. Specifically, SACSI’s incident review process requires a record-level linking of datasets, in order to develop shared intelligence on specific events, actors and patterns. On the other hand, COMPASS’ emphasis on geographic posits that geocoding is the only “linking” that needs to be done.

In other words, one of the key assumptions behind COMPASS is that as long as data from diverse sources can be geocoded and mapped as layers on the same mapping space, analysts need not invest the energy, time and resources required to directly link data records based on common key identifiers. This promises to greatly simplify the process of making sense of diverse data sets. However it does so at the expense of important

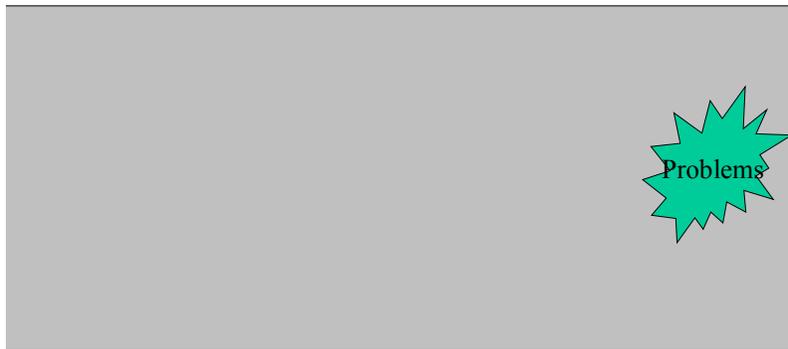
collateral information gains that come from those record-level linkages. It also places much greater weight on the inconsistencies across agencies in the way geographic data are entered and stored.

### **A Model for Comprehensive, Data-Driven Community Problem-Solving**

SACSI and COMPASS were both designed to help partners apply data (mostly extant data) to defining and solving problems. How you accomplish that is basically the debate here.

Let's refer to them collectively as "Community Safety Systems." Not a completely descriptive title, but a useful shorthand for now. What follows is a schematic that highlights the key components in building a shared data system that is capable of leveraging truly collaborative public safety problem solving. This schematic should be useful for thinking about constructing such a process/system in another community, and for evaluating existing initiatives like SACSI and COMPASS.

First, here is a picture of the local community before any of our NIJ grants. There have always been problems. Call them "opportunities." Or challenges, or issues. Economists probably have the most accurate, if not accessible term: *market failures*. Which reminds us that they are the reason that the public sector exists.



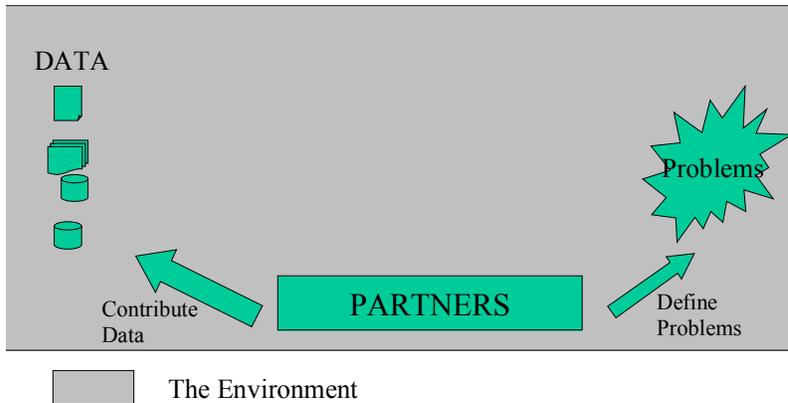
 The Environment

There have always been data describing those problems (see below).

And, to some extent, there have always been partners acknowledging that they need to work together to successfully solve (or at least giving themselves political cover, by spreading the accountability around ).

Those partners (SACSI and COMPASS refer to them more specifically as *stakeholders* are critical for two reasons: they hold both the raw data, and the skill and capacity to

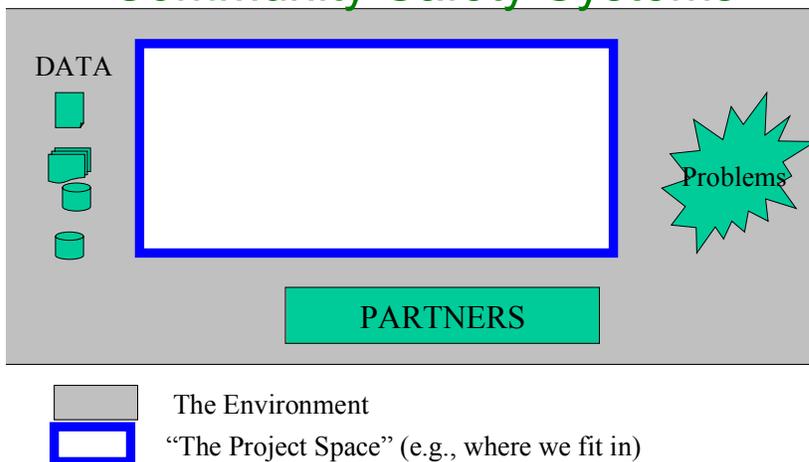
define and solve the problems.



COMPASS and SACSI operate in a specific project space: the intersection of community-level problems, the data that describe those problems, and the community stakeholders that have some stake in helping to solve them.

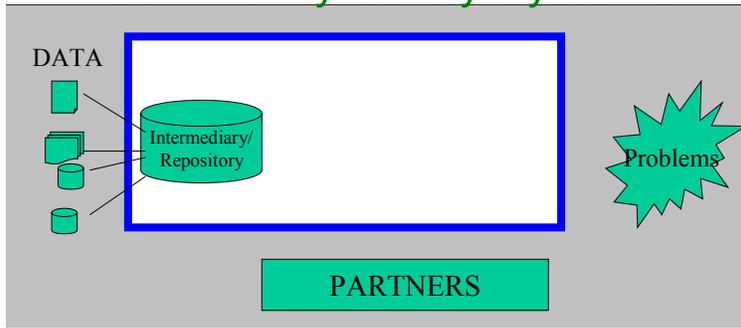
So, the most basic commonality is that both attempt to occupy the same virtual “space” in their local community: the intersection of data, problems, and the partners working to solve them.

## Community Safety Systems



Both projects start with the notion of creating some data set that incorporates multiple original sources, and makes the data easier to work with --SACSI by putting it all in one custom-designed system, COMPASS by geocoding it -(of course there’s a lot more to it than that, but that’s the basic premise).

## Community Safety Systems

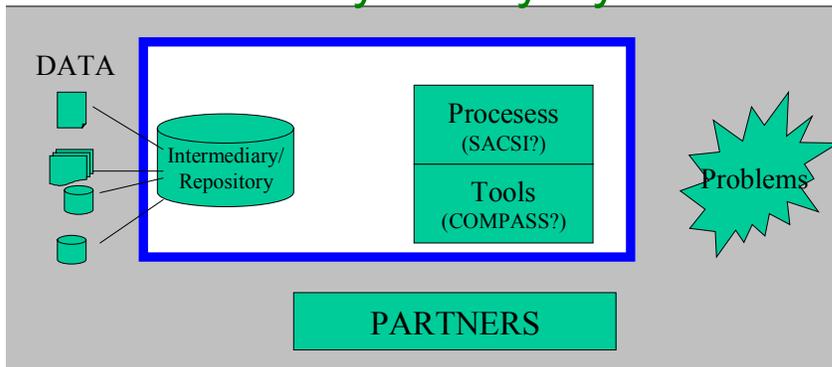


- The Environment
- "The Project Space" (e.g., where we fit in)

What may be the key difference between the two approaches lies in *what* local participants *do* with the shared data. A distinct difference emerges between COMPASS and SACSI sites when one examines the ways they went about applying their shared data resources to the problems.

It is more or less fair to say that SACSI emphasized a process (problem-solving, incident review), and COMPASS seems to emphasize tools (GIS, web applications)

## Community Safety Systems

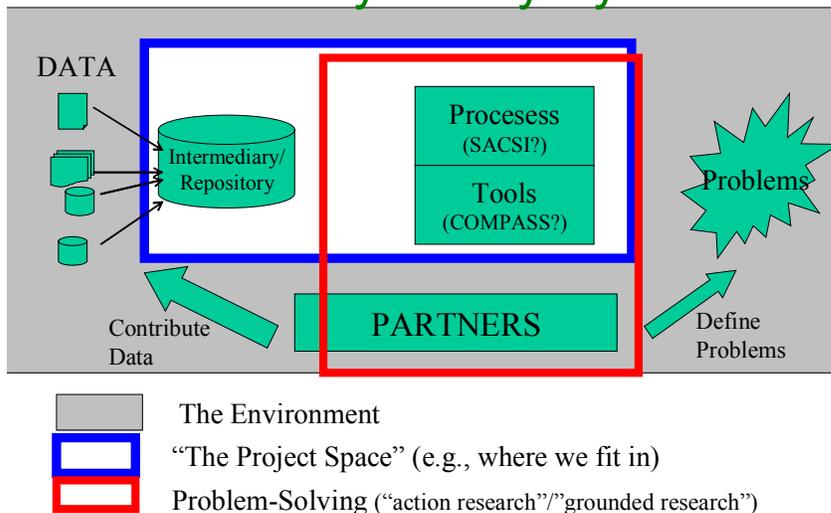


- The Environment
- "The Project Space" (e.g., where we fit in)

The key to moving forward, to continually improving the existing SACSI and COMPASS sites –and to growing and evolving the shared-data problem-solving approach in other communities– is finding the right balance between Process and Tool development and diffusion.

It is important to note here that the major limitation of this model is that it is only two-dimensional. It leaves out the complexity brought by different types of problems. It ignores the difficulty the sites experienced, and the large amounts of outreach and analytical work done to select specific problems or policy areas to deal with. This would be another dimension to this model entirely. For simplicity, we will broadly define the “issue” as “public safety”. But it is inextricably intertwined with housing, education, economic development, human capital, etc.

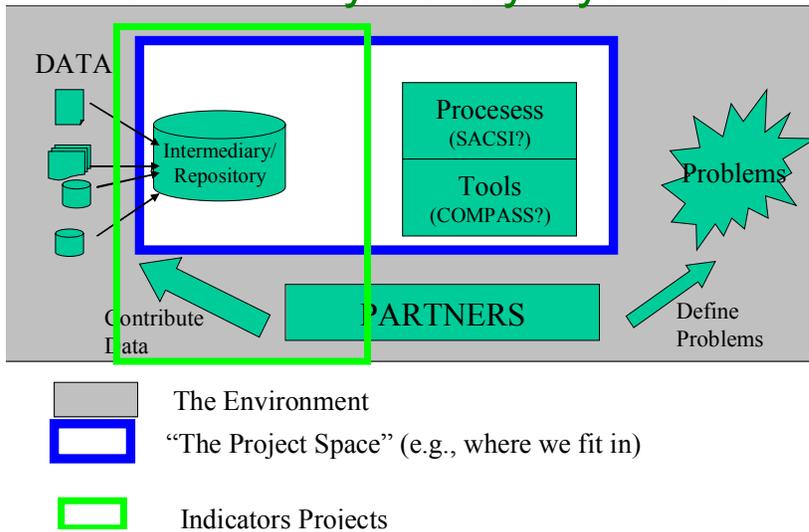
## Community Safety Systems



One sidenote: In Milwaukee, COMPASS is entering discussions with similar problem-solving groups that do in fact deal with urban population health, public health, social services, etc. The goal is to establish a *Milwaukee Data Consortium*, which define means of working together, across policy areas, but in the same three-dimensional “solution space” where data, partners and problems intersect on one plane – and problems intersect and affect each other on another dimension.

Another point: We sometimes get compared to “indicators” projects. However, they deal with packaging shared data, and stop short of putting that data to work.

## Community Safety Systems



Incidentally, this should not be seen as an indictment or criticism of all community projects labeled “indicators.” In fact, it is an important footnote that many of the participants in the Urban Institute’s National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership do in fact go beyond “indicators” into the problem-solving sphere.

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

The experiences of SACSI and COMPASS sites mesh to produce a very basic schematic that serves two important purposes:

1. Providing an analytical framework within which for COMPASS and SACSI sites can highlight, discuss and refine their approaches to employing data-driven, strategic problem-solving efforts in their communities.
2. Provide NIJ, or other potential funders, with a model that combines the best of both SACSI and COMPASS initiatives. This model could serve as the basis for future data-integration/data-driven problem-solving initiatives in other communities.

### So, what’s next?

The next step in improving local decision-making should be a more balanced model, which weaves tool development into collaborative decision-making processes. This presentation will present the graphic depiction of the model that was developed during the Milwaukee workshop. It will also summarize the sustainability efforts –successful and otherwise- of as many of the 13 sites as possible. Taken together, the “blended” model and the thoughts on local funding could help other communities develop similar data-sharing and problem-solving models.

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## B I O

Jim Pingel worked in the City of Milwaukee Mayor's Office from 2001 to 2003, coordinating Milwaukee's NIJ-funded COMPASS (Community Mapping, Planning and Analysis for Safety Strategies) project. He has recently accepted the position of Deputy Director of the State of Wisconsin's Sentencing Commission. Jim also consults on crime-mapping and problem-solving initiatives through Data-Driven Safety Strategies, a firm that will be dedicated to advocating for and implementing the ideas of data-sharing, problem-solving and action research in various policy contexts. Prior to directing the COMPASS initiative, Jim served as Finance Director at the Milwaukee Police Department, and a budget analyst in the City of Milwaukee's Budget & Management Division. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the LaFollette Institute of Public Policy at the University of Wisconsin.