

Our Jurisdiction Has Decided to Create a Drug Court. Can You Provide Guidance as to How We Should Go About Planning The Program?

1. Below is a list of common generic issues addressed in the initial planning of a drug court program. These issues can serve as a framework for developing a more comprehensive planning task outline and timetable geared to the needs of individual drug court programs:

Identify the goals/objectives for the program. What are you trying to achieve? Reduction in substance use by offenders while under court's jurisdiction? More effective supervision of offenders in community? Assist substance abusing offenders to remain drug free and crime free in community?

Define the Target Population. Who are you trying to reach in terms of offenses, prior record and characteristics of offenders (e.g., minimal prior involvement with system? with treatment? offenders who have had prior involvements and not responded to diversion opportunities? etc.)

Conduct an Assessment of the Current Handling of Drug Court-eligible cases. What is the applicable judicial system process and timeframes? Treatment service delivery process and timeframes? What outcomes are currently being achieved in terms of individual defendants (e.g., what services are they receiving? What impact are these services having, etc.)? What outcomes are currently being achieved from a program/system perspective? (e.g., what percent of defendants are receiving services? what percent are violating probation, if applicable? What percent are being rearrested? etc.)

Identify the benefits you hope to achieve for the system by implementing the drug court program. More efficient case processing? More meaningful and cost-effective provision/ coordination of services? Greater accountability of services provided? More meaningful supervision of offenders? More immediate responses to noncompliance with court orders? Reduced recidivism? Reduced drug use by defendants under justice system supervision?

Develop a Plan for Measuring the achievement of program goals and objectives. What measures will you use to determine whether the drug court has achieved its intended goals and objectives? What data will need to be collected? Who will be responsible for compiling this data? For analyzing it?

Identify the staff and functions which will be needed to support the drug court program. At a minimum, drug courts require a judge, prosecutor and defense counsel representative to address the judicial system components of a drug court program, and additional services for case management, program coordination, participant supervision, substance abuse screening and assessment, substance abuse treatment, and provision of ancillary services (education, vocational training, etc.). There is no one way in which drug courts are performing these functions and a variety of "models" are being used. The critical planning task is to assure that these functions are performed in a manner that works best in the individual jurisdiction. (See *Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components* for discussion regarding the services and capabilities drug court programs need to provide).

Identify the range of agencies and other organizations to be involved in the program. While initial planning must include the court, prosecutor and defense bar, there are a number of other agencies that need to be involved in the planning and development of the program. What agencies are already providing the services the drug court will need (e.g., screening, assessment, treatment, drug testing, case management, supervision, ancillary services, etc.). What other agencies will need to be involved in the program? In service delivery? In developing community support?

Identify existing resources available to provide services for drug court participants. Are there substance abuse treatment providers currently working with your target population? How effective are their services? Are you currently testing offenders for drug and alcohol use? Will current drug testing resources meet the needs of the drug court? Who will monitor the performance of program participants?

Develop program eligibility criteria. Comparing the general target population for the program with existing/available resources, what should be the eligibility criteria for the program? Will the current

availability of resources require restriction of the eligibility criteria for the program? What other factors may bear on who the program can serve, at least initially?

Conduct a "walkthrough" of the current process with a view to determining what steps need to be taken to expedite the screening and identification of appropriate offenders for the program. Identify problems (delays, lack of coordination/feedback, etc.) in the current system that can be addressed in the drug court process. This should include the initial intake assessment (what information is being obtained? is it adequate? are the appropriate decision makers receiving it?)

Develop the drug court caseflow and service delivery process. The drug court caseflow process will need to include events to promote: screening of cases; opportunity for offender to consult with an attorney; screening and assessment of substance use and other needs; a very early hearing to trigger program entry; frequent follow-up status hearings, etc. The intake process needs to obtain as much information as possible about the offender -- substance involvement, prior criminal activity, family situation, employment status and skills, services currently being received; existing medical problems, etc.

Identify events, timeframes and/or services for the drug court program which will require modification or enhancement of existing procedures and/or services. The "walkthrough" of the current process, coupled with the proposed design of the drug court caseflow and service delivery process, will provide a framework for identifying the changes that will be needed in existing judicial system and service delivery procedures, timeframes, and staff assignments. Will new events in the current court case process need to be introduced (e.g., court status hearings, etc.)? Will new functions need to be introduced (e.g., early defendant screening for substance abuse, etc.). Will treatment capacity need to be increased to meet program goals? How will the drug court be incorporated within the judicial process? as a pre-plea diversion program? a post-adjudication/deferred sentence program? a program for probation violators? etc.

Develop a Plan for Initial and On-going Training of the Drug Court Team. What special training will the drug court team need to plan the program? Implement the program? Understand and address the variety of cultural issues which bear on participant engagement and success? Understand and address the variety of issues relating to chemical addiction and recovery? Understand and address the variety of interdisciplinary and cross-training issues with which the various drug court team members will need to become familiar?

Hopefully, the above steps will provide a framework for developing a work-plan for the design of the program. It may also be very helpful to visit existing drug court programs to develop additional ideas about how your program might be structured.