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Academic Partnerships and Evaluations in Problem-Solving Courts: A Practitioner Resource Guide

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2020

Academic Partnerships and Evaluations in Problem-Solving Courts

A Practitioner Resource Guide

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Introduction

This resource guide is intended to assist criminal justice system practitioners who may be interested in measuring the effectiveness of their programs. While the guide is developed specifically in the context of problem-solving courts, much of the resources included are applicable to a wide range of criminal justice and social service programs.

Chapter 1 outlines how practitioners can work with either an academic evaluator or partner to conduct an independent, objective evaluation of their programming. Chapter 2 explains the differences between two types of evaluations: process and outcome evaluations. Chapter 3 covers logic models, which are a critical task prior to beginning program evaluation work. Chapter 4 then covers issues related to data collection for an evaluation.

Overall, the guide is designed to help justice system practitioners take the necessary steps to begin to discover what aspects of their programming are functioning as intended and which aspects could use improvement. While the idea of program evaluation can seem intimidating or risky for some programs, the following chapters will help prepare practitioners for a rewarding and valuable evaluation process.

Chapter 1: Academic Evaluators & Academic Partners

If you want to know whether and to what extent your program “works,” it may be helpful to collaborate with an academic researcher. The following section describes the differences between academic evaluators and partners, offers guidance in determining which type is right for your program, and details strategies for identifying interested or available academic partners or evaluators.

Evaluators and Partners: What’s the difference?

In short, an academic *evaluator* can be conceived of as an objective researcher from an institution of higher education who can help you determine whether your program achieves the desired outcomes and document what’s happening in your program to reach those outcomes. An evaluator should have a thorough understanding of research methodology and statistical analysis. Some programs think of their evaluator as their designated “number cruncher.”

An academic *partner* does everything that an evaluator does, but also advises the program on the use of evidence-based practices. When a significant body of research has linked a particular policy or strategy with desirable outcomes, we refer to it as an [evidence-based practice \(EBP\)](#).¹ For a strategy to be deemed an EBP, several statistical assessments of a given strategy must have demonstrated a relationship between that strategy and an intended outcome. For example, the use of a risk assessment instrument has been deemed as an EBP for reaching positive outcomes in drug court programs. As a result of their own scholarship as well as their training in research methods, an academic partner should be able to identify the most effective practices and policies for your specific type of specialty court based on the latest research available. Academic partners must become very familiar with a program’s policies and procedures so that they can make comparisons

to established EBPs. More specifically, they can offer input on which current program activities align with EBPs and also what the program could change in order to better align with EBPs.

Despite these differences, academic partners and evaluators are both objective and external entities. In other words, they are not employed directly by the court system and have no vested interest in a program evaluation's findings. An independent evaluation is important for several reasons. First, it minimizes the potential for bias. Practitioners may unintentionally or intentionally sway evaluation results in a more positive light for the program. In contrast, an academic researcher has little to no financial or reputational interest in the evaluation results, which reduces the likelihood of inappropriate manipulation of study findings. Second, positive results from an independent evaluation can be very compelling in efforts to secure future program funding. Governmental funding sources, in particular, place much greater weight upon formal evaluation results from an objective academic evaluator than upon less methodologically rigorous evaluations from practitioners.

Evaluator or partner? What's right for your program?

To improve outcomes, it is often preferable for your problem-solving court to seek out an academic partner because even the very best programs have room for improvement. However, program leadership needs to carefully assess whether practitioners may be receptive to the advice of an academic partner and subsequently willing to implement programmatic changes. If key stakeholders or practitioners are resistant to change or may feel insulted or intimidated by an outsider's input on program improvements, it is best to avoid an academic partner. Perhaps program founders or those responsible for designing the program feel very strongly that their current program model is the absolute gold standard in effective criminal justice interventions and that the existing model is sustainable in its current form. While stakeholder pride and confidence

in programs are valuable, excessive or misplaced confidence can inhibit program growth and improvement. For programs with these types of challenging stakeholders, work with an academic partner may not be immediately feasible. Discussions about whether the team would be receptive to a researcher's recommendations can be very delicate, but they are critical discussions in order to avoid future conflicts between stakeholders. These upfront conversations will also avoid wasting the time of all parties involved.

If resistance to change or possible hostility to an academic's advice are issues for your program, an academic evaluator can at least help you determine the extent to which your program is reaching desired outcomes. Depending on the availability of certain data points, an evaluator may also be able to tell you what aspects of the program are driving success. It can be valuable to communicate with the evaluator that some stakeholders strongly believe in the existing program model and may be resistant to outsider input. This may help the evaluator to present evaluation findings in a more palatable way so that she is essentially holding a mirror up to the program and communicating "here is what your program is currently doing" as opposed to "here is what your program *should* be doing" (as an academic partner may communicate).

For those who believe an academic partner would be the right fit, you may be limited by resource constraints and the availability of interested academics in your area. For researchers, it is much more time-consuming (and thus more expensive) to be an academic partner because they need to be familiar enough with your program to regularly advise on evidence-based practices. However, many researchers may prefer to be an academic partner because they will have the opportunity to positively influence a program on the ground. This of course varies greatly for different researchers, but if you're seeking an academic partner with little to no funding available,

it may be worth trying to “sell” it as an opportunity to make a real-world impact. Which brings us to our next topic – how to find a researcher.

How do you find an academic partner or evaluator?

It’s important to first note that many researchers may not label themselves an academic partner or evaluator. When seeking a researcher, it’s likely more helpful to describe the tasks or duties you’re looking for as opposed to simply using one of those two terms.

One strategy for securing a researcher is to contact individual faculty members at local colleges and universities. Depending on your specific type of problem-solving court, it is perhaps best to start searching within the following types of departments: criminal justice / criminology / justice studies, sociology, psychology, and social work. Most higher education institutions have a faculty page that details each faculty member’s research interests. Browse for faculty with research interests that may include program evaluation, problem-solving courts, specialty courts, alternatives to incarceration, and/or the specific crime type or participant your own court addresses (i.e., substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, firearm violence, etc.). If you find faculty with fitting research interests, you can contact them directly. If there are no research interests listed on the university’s website, or none appear to match what you’re looking for, you may want to contact the chair of the department to ask if she knows if anyone is interested.

Most researchers will want to know if funding is available so it’s best to be prepared to answer that question ahead of time. Some researchers will be willing to do the evaluation for free. Others may be interested in working with you to secure a grant to complete the evaluation. If you know there is no funding for a researcher, it’s important to be open about that from the first conversation. Universities with doctoral programs may have graduate students willing to gain the research experience and conduct an evaluation without any funding. The department chair would

be able to put you in touch with interested graduate students, but be sure to seek recommendations from faculty on a graduate student's level of expertise and preparedness to do an independent evaluation. Ideally, there should at least be a faculty member willing to advise the graduate student on the evaluation.

Some researchers may request a relatively small budget to cover expenses like travel to the court or incentives for your court participants to complete surveys. And, for more thorough evaluations, some researchers may require a larger budget that would compensate them for their time. One form of compensation is a "course buy out" in which the faculty member could teach one less class per semester. Every university has a different formula for what percentage of a faculty member's salary is needed for her to "buy out" a class, but the idea is that your program or a grant would pay the university for the faculty member to teach one less class per semester so she would have more time available to work on your evaluation.

Once you've identified an interested researcher, it's often helpful to have the researcher meet with all the key stakeholders together. For an evaluation to have practical use, stakeholders need to buy into the process. For example, stakeholders may want to know about the researcher's prior evaluation experience, her vision of the ideal stakeholder-researcher collaborative relationship, or specific plans for the project to be completed. Developing a trusting relationship with your researcher may take some time, but is a crucial step in implementing any lessons learned from an evaluation.

Chapter 2: Process & Outcome Evaluations

Researchers commonly conduct two different types of evaluations. [Process evaluations and outcome evaluations](#)ⁱⁱ entail different methods of data collection and result in different types of lessons for the program. This section will describe each type of evaluation and provide guidance on how to know which type is right for your program.

What are process and outcome evaluations?

A process evaluation documents your program's activities while an outcome evaluation determines whether your program is achieving certain goals. A [process evaluation](#)ⁱⁱⁱ identifies the key components believed to be driving a program and assesses the extent to which those components are implemented as intended. For example, a process evaluation may examine the number of court participants who are referred to various types of social services, the average length of time participants spend speaking to a judge during a status hearing, and how participants and stakeholders perceive the program.

Researchers may observe status hearings and workgroup meetings, conduct interviews or surveys with participants and stakeholders, as well as collect case management data from the court. Process evaluations often involve both [quantitative and qualitative](#)^{iv} research methodologies. Quantitative research methods seek to measure program processes in terms of numbers (i.e., the percentage of participants who attend mental health treatment, the number of courtroom status hearings a participant attends, or the number of different service referrals made per participant). Researchers generally use qualitative methods for measuring programing processes in a way that captures non-numerical data (i.e., participants' perceptions of treatment staff, observations of the nature of interactions between participants and the judge, and stakeholder perceptions of key program components).

Outcome evaluations focus on whether program participation is associated with measurable features of success – i.e. recidivism, supervision revocation, reduction in mental illness symptoms, or increased treatment compliance. While there are many different research methodologies that could be used for an outcome evaluation, researchers normally use quantitative methodologies for outcome evaluations. One common strategy is to identify a comparison group of similarly situated individuals who are justice-system involved, but not in your problem-solving court. A researcher may attempt to match program participants to a comparison group based on age, gender, risk level, offense type, criminal history, or other variables. This would enable a researcher to compare recidivism rates or relapse rates for the comparison group to rates in your problem-solving court (i.e., the “treatment group”) within a certain period of time. It’s also possible for a researcher to include some [control variables](#)^v in the analysis in order to isolate the independent or unique effects of program participation on a given outcome. Control variables are things that may influence your outcome of interest (recidivism, relapse, etc.) besides participation in your program. For example, drug treatment participation or demographic characteristics could be used as control variables. Including control variables enable a researcher to determine the effects of program participation on an outcome of interest holding constant these other things that may also influence that outcome.

What type of evaluation is best for your program?

Both process and outcome evaluations can yield great benefits for problem-solving courts, but may also create challenges for the program. If a researcher is willing and available, it is generally preferable to do a process evaluation followed by an outcome evaluation, with the possibility of follow-up evaluations as well. A process evaluation is critical in helping you to determine the extent to which your program is being implemented as intended. Sometimes, things

that stakeholders think are important program components are not being implemented in practice. For example, perhaps a program presumes that judges will develop supportive and friendly relationships with participants with the expectation that this level of social support will influence recidivism rates. A process evaluation may uncover that participants do not actually have very positive views of their relationship with the judge. If the judicial relationship is believed to be a major driver of recidivism reduction, then this process evaluation finding can demonstrate the need for programmatic changes to improve the quality of judicial relationships and also provide insight into any negative outcome evaluation findings on recidivism. In sum, the results of a process evaluation can be extremely valuable for a program to assess its strengths and weaknesses and subsequently initiate programmatic changes as needed.

However, considering the greater time commitment involved in qualitative data collection (such as status observations and stakeholder interviews), some researchers may be unwilling to conduct a process evaluation, especially if funding is not available. If your program hopes to use evaluation results to improve existing program policies or procedures, it will be important to find a researcher willing to conduct a process evaluation.

In contrast, if your program is just looking for some straightforward evidence of the extent to which your program “works,” then an outcome evaluation would be sufficient. The main benefit of an outcome evaluation is that it will inform program stakeholders of the extent to which the intended results of the program are actually being achieved. Particularly with large-scale experimental or quasi-experimental outcome evaluations, the researcher may also be able to identify which components of the program are associated with the most desirable outcomes. For example, an outcome evaluation could determine whether it is the number of different service referrals a participant receives or the number of intermediate sanctions that best influences

recidivism rates. Additionally, an outcome evaluation may also help a program identify whether a particular population of participants responds better or worse to the program. Perhaps only high-risk offenders or females or those with lengthier criminal histories receive the greatest reductions in reoffending as a result of their participation.

While the time and resource commitments are the main challenges created by process evaluations, outcome evaluations can also have their disadvantages for problem-solving courts. If your program wants to engage in a multi-year experimental outcome evaluation, the program is often required to consistently implement the same practices and policies throughout the course of the study. In order to conduct an experimental outcome evaluation of this magnitude, the researcher will need to know certain things about your program, such as exclusion/inclusion eligibility criteria and program requirements, so that an appropriate comparison group can be identified. This means that if your court determines one aspect of your program is not working as you intended it to work, you may be stuck continuing with it throughout the study period.

For example, perhaps your original eligibility requirements did not exclude people with serious mental illnesses. However, over the first few months of the program, you quickly learn that your program and your external partners are not equipped to handle this special-needs population. If you have committed to a large-scale experimental outcome evaluation in which a comparison group has already been identified that includes people with serious mental illnesses, you may be unable to make major changes to your eligibility requirements without consequences for the evaluation.

As another example, perhaps in the beginning, your program requires that all participants attend the entire status hearing in order to get credit for that session. But you begin to encounter several participants who have employment commitments that create a conflict for attending an

entire status hearing. Your team may decide it is best to grant special permission for these individuals to leave early or come late to status hearings because their employment opportunities are so valuable. If you're engaged in a rigorous experimental outcome evaluation, the researcher may encourage or require you to avoid any programmatic changes during the course of the study. The researcher will want to conclude whether or not the program, as originally planned, is associated with certain outcomes. If the conditions of the program change throughout the course of the study period, it will be very difficult, and in some cases impossible, for the researcher to effectively determine which aspects of the program are associated with desired outcomes.

While the typical format is to first engage in a process evaluation and then an outcome evaluation, ideally, programs should engage in an ongoing practice of both process and outcome evaluations. In many ways, process and outcome evaluations can go hand-in-hand. A process evaluation can take stock of what a program is currently doing then a subsequent outcome evaluation can determine whether those activities are resulting in the desired outcomes. If a process evaluation reveals that the program is not actually implementing the components as designed by the program, then changes can be made to better align practices with intended practices. If an outcome evaluation reveals the intended results are not achieved by existing program efforts, then program practice and policy can be amended with the intention of improving outcomes. A follow-up process evaluation can then determine whether new practices and policies are being implemented as intended before a follow-up outcome evaluation assesses their effectiveness. Evaluating your work on a continuing basis allows you to determine what progress has been made and what new challenges may arise. Working with an academic partner or an evaluator creates an opportunity for a continual process of self-reflection and program improvement.

Chapter 3: Logic Models

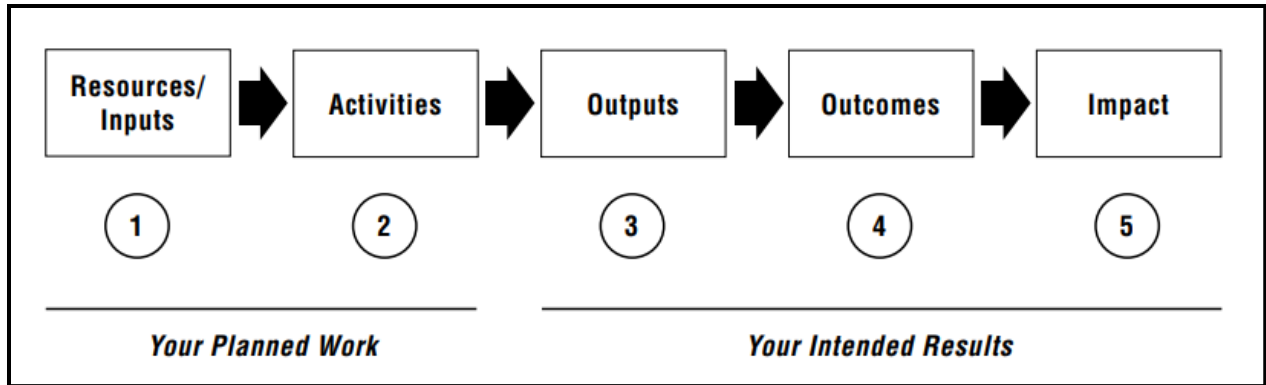
Prior to completing either a process or outcome evaluation, a researcher should be able to guide you in developing a logic model for your program, if you do not already have one. This section summarizes a logic model's purposes and offers a starting guide for beginning to develop your own logic model.

What's a logic model?

A logic model is a visual representation of how you define your program “working” and what you do to make it work. One way to think about a logic model is a “[theory of change](#)^{vi}” – what does the program do to create certain changes in participants?

A number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)^{vii}, [the National Institute of Corrections](#)^{viii}, [the RAND Corporation](#)^{ix}, and [The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)^x, provide template logic models that can be easily adapted for problem-solving courts. Perhaps the model most easily adapted for problem solving courts comes from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Courts that are developing a logic model for the very first time may want to begin with the Kellogg model below, but more advanced courts may want to explore other formats from the options above.

The following template and description of each section of the logic model comes directly from the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Logic Model Development Guide](#)^{xi}.



Your planned work describes what resources you think you need to implement your program and what you intend to do.

1. *Resources/Inputs* include the human, financial, organizational, and community resources a program has available to direct toward doing the work.
2. *Program Activities* are what the program does with the resources. Activities are the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of the program implementation. These interventions are used to bring about the intended program changes or results.

Your intended results include all of the program's desired results (outputs, outcomes, and impact).

3. *Outputs* are the direct products of program activities and may include types, levels and targets of services to be delivered by the program.
4. *Outcomes* are the specific changes in program participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, status and level of functioning. Short-term outcomes should be attainable within 1 to 3 years, while longer-term outcomes should be achievable within a 4 to 6 year timeframe. The logical progression from short-term to long-term outcomes should be reflected in impact occurring within about 7 to 10 years.

5. *Impact* is the fundamental intended or unintended change occurring in organizations, communities or systems as a result of program activities within 7 to 10 years.

Guidance on creating your own logic model are provided at the end of this chapter, but other problem-solving court logic models are available in Appendix I.

Why Is a Logic Model Important for Research and Evaluation?

Logic models are critical for assessing your program because you want to be able to say not just that your participants have lower recidivism or relapse rates, but also document what you're doing to create those outcomes. A researcher will need to be able to link processes (what your program does) to outcomes (what happens as a result of what you do). As explained in the previous chapter, there should ideally be a feedback loop between process and outcome evaluations. A logic model is an invaluable tool for documenting what a program strives to accomplish and how. In other words, it can be a visual representation of what a process evaluation should uncover as the key components of a program and how those components yield particular outcomes.

If working with an academic partner, she may be willing to help you build or at least refine a logic model, especially through conducting a process evaluation. Instead of program stakeholders drafting a logic model through internal discussions, the findings from a researcher's process evaluation could be used to create a logic model. For example, a researcher could use interviews with stakeholders and court participants, an analysis of program manuals, as well as observations of status hearings and stakeholder meetings to identify program activities and expected outcomes. Program stakeholders could then provide feedback to refine the researcher's draft logic model.

Alternatively, if your program already has a logic model prior to a process evaluation, the researcher could use results of the process evaluation to inform you whether the logic model accurately represents your program. It is possible that what stakeholders perceive to be the most important aspects of a program are not always what a process evaluation reveals to be the driving forces. Such a discrepancy is particularly common when a process evaluation involves interviews with court participants and status hearing observations.

If your program is working with an academic evaluator and you are primarily focused on an outcome evaluation, a logic model is still very important. Many academic evaluators will ask for a logic model prior to evaluation. They will want to understand what activities your program is engaged in so that they can capture some type of measurement of those activities and determine how those activities link to the outcomes identified in your logic model.

As a simplified example, perhaps a key program activity is completion of substance use disorder treatment and you believe that treatment leads to a reduction in recidivism as a key outcome. For an outcome evaluation, a researcher will not just want to measure the outcome (recidivism rates), but also the process (treatment completion rates). The researcher may find no significant differences in recidivism rates between people in your court and a comparison group, but also determine that only a fraction of court participants actually complete treatment. That's a very important finding. These results would not indicate that your program doesn't work in reducing recidivism, but rather indicate that your program is not being implemented as intended. In other words, if a higher number of participants completed the key activity (treatment), then the program may yield the intended outcome (recidivism reduction). Without a clear logic model, a researcher would not know what program processes to include in an outcome evaluation.

How do you develop a logic model?

The process of formulating a logic model should involve all key stakeholders. Many programs like to plan at least one day-long retreat for logic model development in which stakeholders have an opportunity to brainstorm and engage in healthy debate about what should and should not be included. An academic partner could be a valuable facilitator or mediator for these discussions.

Researchers often have different views on whether a logic model should be an exhaustive list of all program components or if the logic model should be a streamlined summary of the key program components. If you are developing a logic model prior to working with a specific researcher, decide as a group in the beginning which format you're striving for – an exhaustive list or a streamlined summary. Oftentimes, even if your group prefers a streamlined summary of the program, you must first create a rather exhaustive list that then gets whittled down to a summary format.

If using the Kellogg logic model template from above, or a variation of it, your team could use the following prompting questions to build your logic model.

Resources / Inputs

- What are the people and things necessary for your program to run?
- Examples: specific staff positions, funding sources, or social service partners.

Program Activities

- What does your program do to create the outcomes you want?
- Is there anything your program does that it could stop doing and still arrive at the intended outcomes? If so, that shouldn't be included in the Activities.

- Examples: judicial status hearings, types of treatment programs, case management activities.

Outputs

- What are the most immediate observable changes as a result of your activities?
- Examples: rate of attendance at status hearings, rate of participation in treatment programs, referrals to and receipt of services.

Outcomes

- In what ways do you expect participants to act and be different after their participation in the program?
- How will the program change participants? Participants can include stakeholders / staff in addition to clients.
- Examples: participant reduction in recidivism, participant reduction in substance use, participant increase in employment, greater experience with different assessment tools for probation officers, increased awareness of existing community resources for all stakeholders.

Impact

- How do you expect the criminal justice system and the community to be different as a result of your program?
- Examples: improvement in public safety, expansion of access to treatment for justice-involved individuals.

Logic models should be perceived as living documents that undergo regular revisions.

Program activities, priorities, and expectations continue to change over time so there should be a

process in place for stakeholders to regularly revisit the logic model and make any changes to reflect current program realities.

Chapter 4: Data Collection

Depending on what activities and outcomes are included in your logic model, the data collection process will vary for your program evaluation. However, this section can provide you with a general sense of what to expect in terms of what types of data your researchers will need as well as how those data will be collected and shared.

What are the first steps?

Before beginning either a process or outcome evaluation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the researcher, your problem-solving court, and either the court system or probation and pretrial services office should be executed. Generally, whichever entity will be responsible for sharing data with the researcher (either the court or probation and pretrial services) should be the other party to sign the MOU.

A sample MOU can be found in Appendix II. The main purpose of a MOU is to outline the roles and responsibilities of each party involved. Your problem-solving court should be clear about what you expect the researcher to do, when it will be done, and how it will be completed. The researcher should outline what she expects the court to provide in terms of access to data, what format the data will be provided in, and how data will be sent or collected.

Furthermore, the MOU should describe who “owns” the data and any research findings from the data. You may request that the researcher permanently destroy the data after an evaluation is complete so it could not be used for other purposes. You may also request that the court needs to grant written approval for any publication or other dissemination of study findings before the researcher releases them. While many researchers may easily agree to the destruction of data request, most researchers will want full ownership of study results, especially if no or limited

funding is provided for the evaluation. A common compromise is for the court to have the opportunity to provide feedback on any publications based on the evaluation, but the researcher ultimately controls the dissemination of findings. In addition to being a fair compensation for the researcher's time and effort by being free to publish the study findings, this compromise also helps to protect the integrity of an independent and objective evaluation.

Following the completion of a MOU, the researcher may need to secure [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#)^{xii} approval from her university or college. All research involving human subjects, even when the research does not entail direct interaction with humans, requires researchers to demonstrate they have appropriately weighed the potential risks to human subjects with the potential benefits of the research. The IRB protocol will require the researcher to detail data collection plans, including steps taken to protect data confidentiality and security. The IRB may require a letter of support from your court program that details your willingness to share data with the researcher.

How will the researcher get the data?

After the IRB grants the researcher approval for the protocol, data collection for the evaluation can begin. The data collection process will vary greatly for a process evaluation compared to an outcome evaluation. Recall that a process evaluation generally involves more qualitative data collection while an outcome evaluation relies more heavily on quantitative data. While individual researchers will each employ different research methodologies, the following will give you a general idea of what you can expect from the data collection process.

[Qualitative data](#)

In addition to looking at any program case files, a process evaluation may involve at least three forms of data collection: (1) observations of status hearings and/or stakeholder meetings, (2)

surveys or interviews of stakeholders, and (3) surveys, interviews, or focus groups with court participants.

For observations of status hearings or stakeholder meetings (such as pre-status case review meetings), the researcher may request to audio record the proceedings for later transcription or simply take notes during the proceedings. For either approach, the researcher will generally protect the identities of court participants by removing any personal identifiers from the transcripts or notes. In order to conduct these observations, all stakeholders should feel comfortable with the researcher's presence.

The goal of repeated observations is not to draw conclusions about individual participants or stakeholders, but rather to identify larger themes that regularly arise. For example, the researcher may note that a common theme is participants showing up late to status hearings or the value of one social service partnership or the extent to which the non-adversarial model is fully implemented.

For the researcher to conduct surveys or interviews with stakeholders, she will likely request a list of all key stakeholders with their contact information. This may include representatives from justice system partners, such as the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Federal Defender's Office, Probation and Pretrial Services, as well from community-based organizations, such as social service providers. The researcher will then be responsible for contacting the stakeholders and scheduling interviews or surveys. Interview or survey questions will likely ask about perceptions of the program's strengths and weaknesses, the most critical activities the program engages in, and the expected outcomes of program participation. Again, the goal will not be to identify an individual stakeholder's perceptions of the program, but rather to identify larger themes across stakeholders.

Lastly, for data collection from court participants, the researcher may be interested in administering surveys, conducting individual interviews, and/or holding focus groups (group interviews). The researcher may want to recruit interested participants prior to or after status hearings while participants are already in one location. A conference room or jury room in the courthouse could then be used by the researcher to administer surveys or conduct interviews. The researcher may ask for your assistance in reserving an appropriate space in the courthouse. Alternatively, a researcher may prefer an off-site location if she believes participants would be more comfortable answering sensitive questions about the program outside of a justice system environment. In either circumstance, the researcher will likely ask for a few moments at the start of a status hearing so that she can introduce herself to participants and explain the purpose of the research.

As part of the human subjects protections granted by an IRB, participation in surveys or interviews will always be voluntary. In order for participants to make the decision to voluntarily participate, the researcher will provide participants with an informed consent form, which will detail issues such as:

- the anticipated benefits and potential harms of study participation,
- confidentiality and/or anonymity,
- the expected length of time the survey or interview will require,
- any compensation provided for participants' time, and
- how the study results will be used.

After receiving this information about their participation, interested participants will be required to sign the informed consent form prior to their completion of a survey or interview. Despite the voluntary nature of participation, justice-system involved individuals are generally

eager to share their experiences with researchers. Depending on resource availability, the researcher may provide interested participants with small financial compensation, such as a gift card.

Participant identities will likely be kept [confidential, or possibly even anonymous](#)^{xiii}. The researcher may want to audio record interviews or take notes. Survey and interview questions may ask about the individual's perceptions of various aspects of the program and the program's strengths and weaknesses. Some survey items may be quantitative in nature; for example, a researcher could conclude what percentage of participants agree that the program is helpful for them. Other survey items may be qualitative in nature; participants could be asked to explain what they would like to see done differently in the program. It will be important to alert the researcher to any significant literacy challenges that may limit participants' ability to complete a written survey.

Quantitative data

While the researcher is responsible for doing the majority of the data collection work for qualitative data, your problem-solving court must be more involved in collecting and organizing the quantitative data needed by a researcher. Whether you are ready to start working with a researcher now or think it may be a possibility at any point in the future, it is critical to begin maintaining data on program participants in a format that will be usable for a researcher. While there will be great variation in the pieces of information you keep on each participant depending upon the key activities of your program, at a minimum, your program should be maintaining an Excel spreadsheet or using another data management tool with the following data points about your participants:

- Name
- A unique identifier (Give every participant a different number. It's fine to just number them 1 through XXX.)
- Date of birth (in a consistent format, such as MM/DD/YYYY)
- Risk level or score
- Gender
- Program start date
- Program end date
- Number of status hearings attended
- Number of status hearings with unexcused absences
- Graduation date
- Date of probation violation
- Date of new arrest

To be of most use to a researcher, each participant should be on a different row and each of the items listed above should be in a different column. See Appendix III for a sample spreadsheet based on these items. Depending on the key aspects of your individual program, it may be helpful to include additional measures. Here is where a logic model is particularly helpful. Ideally, you want to have some type of measure for every key activity and some type of measure for every key outcome of interest. If social service provision, participation in treatment, or some form of wraparound case management is a key part of your court program, it may be helpful to keep an additional spreadsheet to record referrals to services/treatment and completion of services/treatment.

Particularly if you are working with an evaluator with little to no funding available, the evaluator may request that someone in the problem-solving court do all of the data collection manually. However, it is also possible, especially if funding is available, for a researcher to be granted access to court or probation and pretrial services records in order to complete some of the data collection. Alternatively, a researcher may create a data collection worksheet for each participant and ask someone with access to justice system records to fill out each worksheet with the needed data. Appendix IV includes a sample data collection worksheet.

The researcher should help you identify the best strategy for data [validity and reliability](#)^{xiv}. If multiple court employees are responsible for data collection, it will be critical to develop a detailed data collection guide that instructs employees on how to specifically tally or measure each data point.

Additionally, your team should discuss any concerns about data confidentiality and security. One option is for the researcher to only receive data spreadsheets with each participant's unique identifier instead of their name. A separate key can be kept with the court that links participants' names to unique identifiers.

After the researcher possesses all necessary data for the evaluation, all data analyses will be conducted outside of the court system. It may be helpful to discuss a reasonable timeline with the researcher for learning results of the evaluation. Some researchers may be willing to provide a condensed summary version of the key findings prior to completing a full evaluation report.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

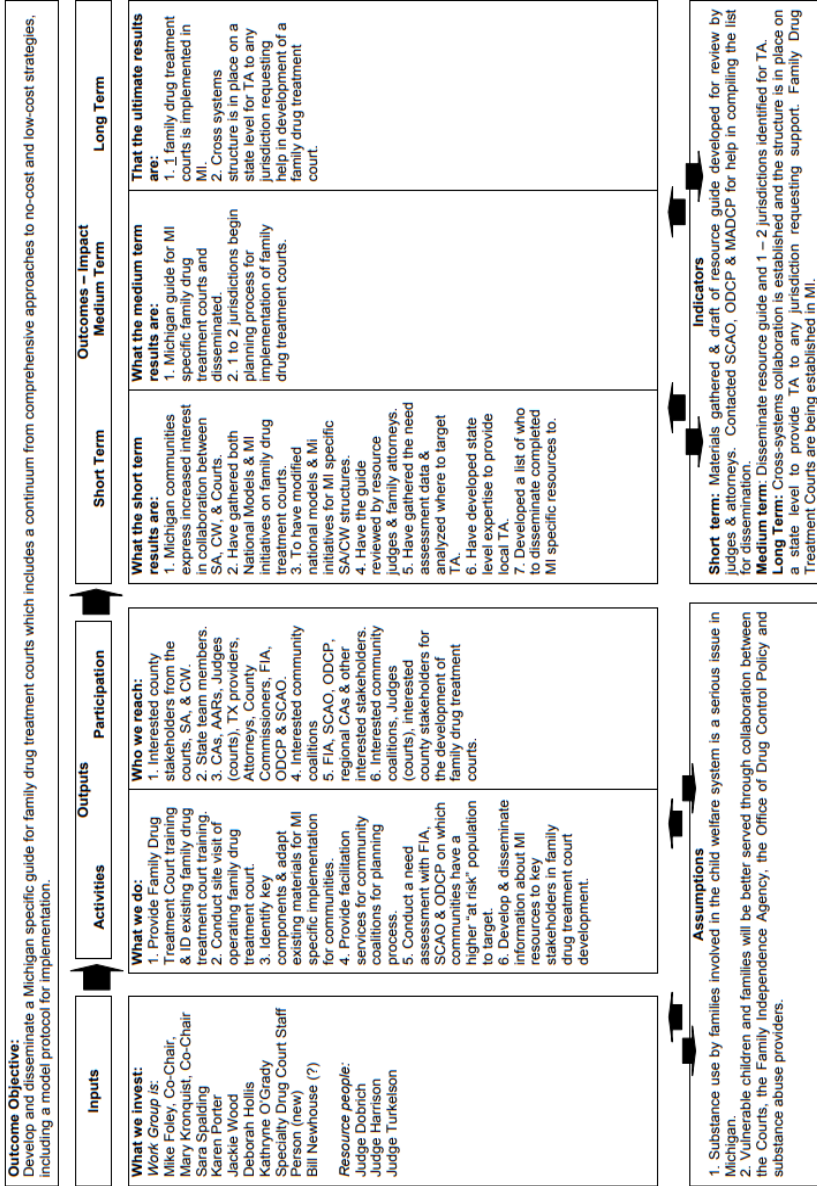
This resource guide has provided you with the necessary information to get excited about and prepared for engaging in research on your problem-solving court. The guide has sought to inform you on the following topics relevant to research on your problem-solving court:

- The differences between academic evaluators and partners, how to know which is the best fit for your court, and how to find an evaluator or partner;
- The differences between process and outcome evaluations and how to decide which type is best for your program;
- A description of logic models, an explanation of how they're used in research, and guidance on developing one;
- And how to get started with data collection, how a researcher may access data, and what types of data collection strategies a researcher may use.

Working with a researcher can be an extremely rewarding experience that creates an opportunity for your program to improve as well as advertise your successes. Perhaps most importantly, research and evaluation can improve the lives of your court's participants and contribute to public safety.

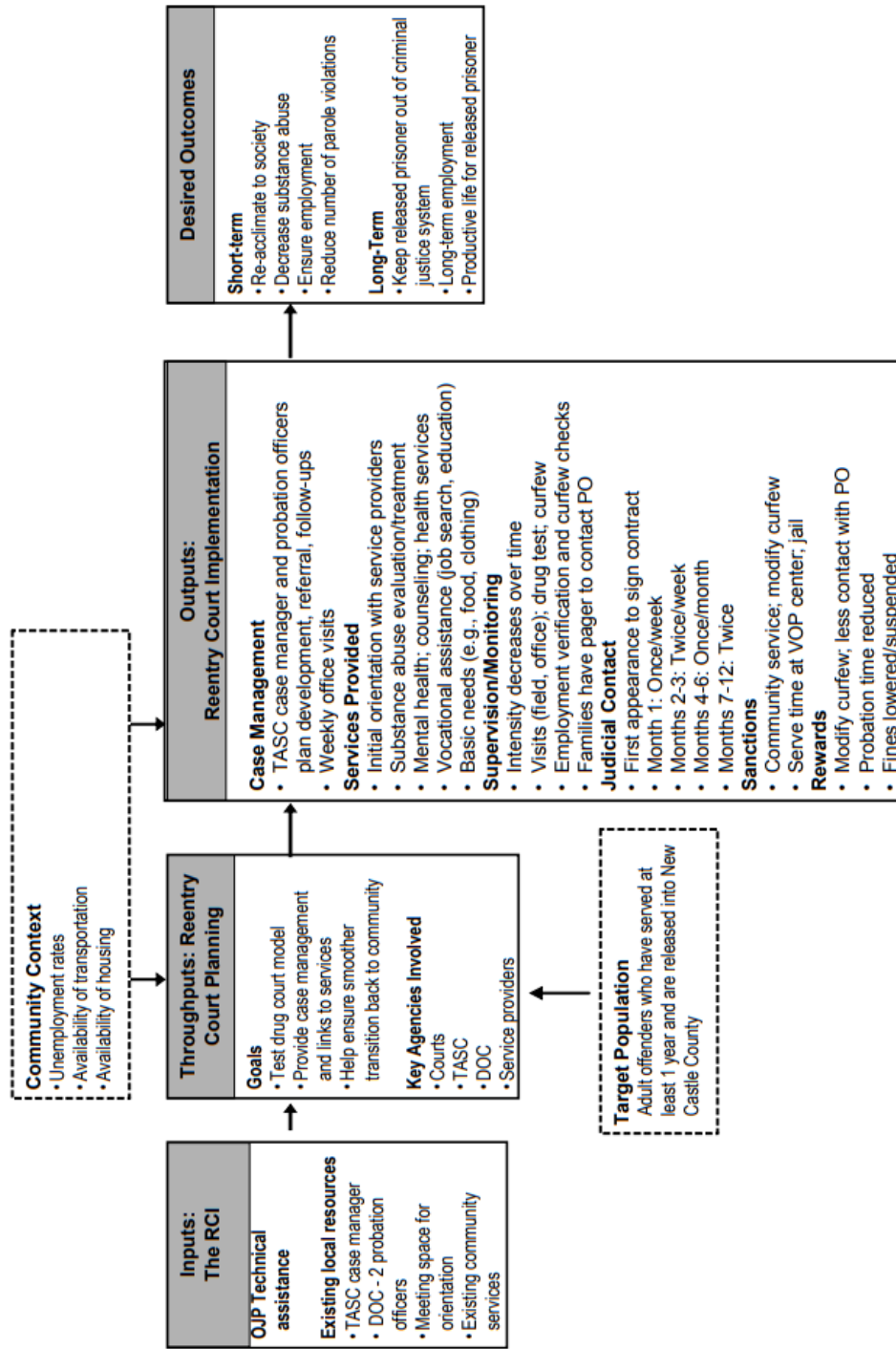
Appendix I: Sample Logic Models

Logic Model of Child Welfare/Substance Abuse Collaborative project – Drug Treatment Court



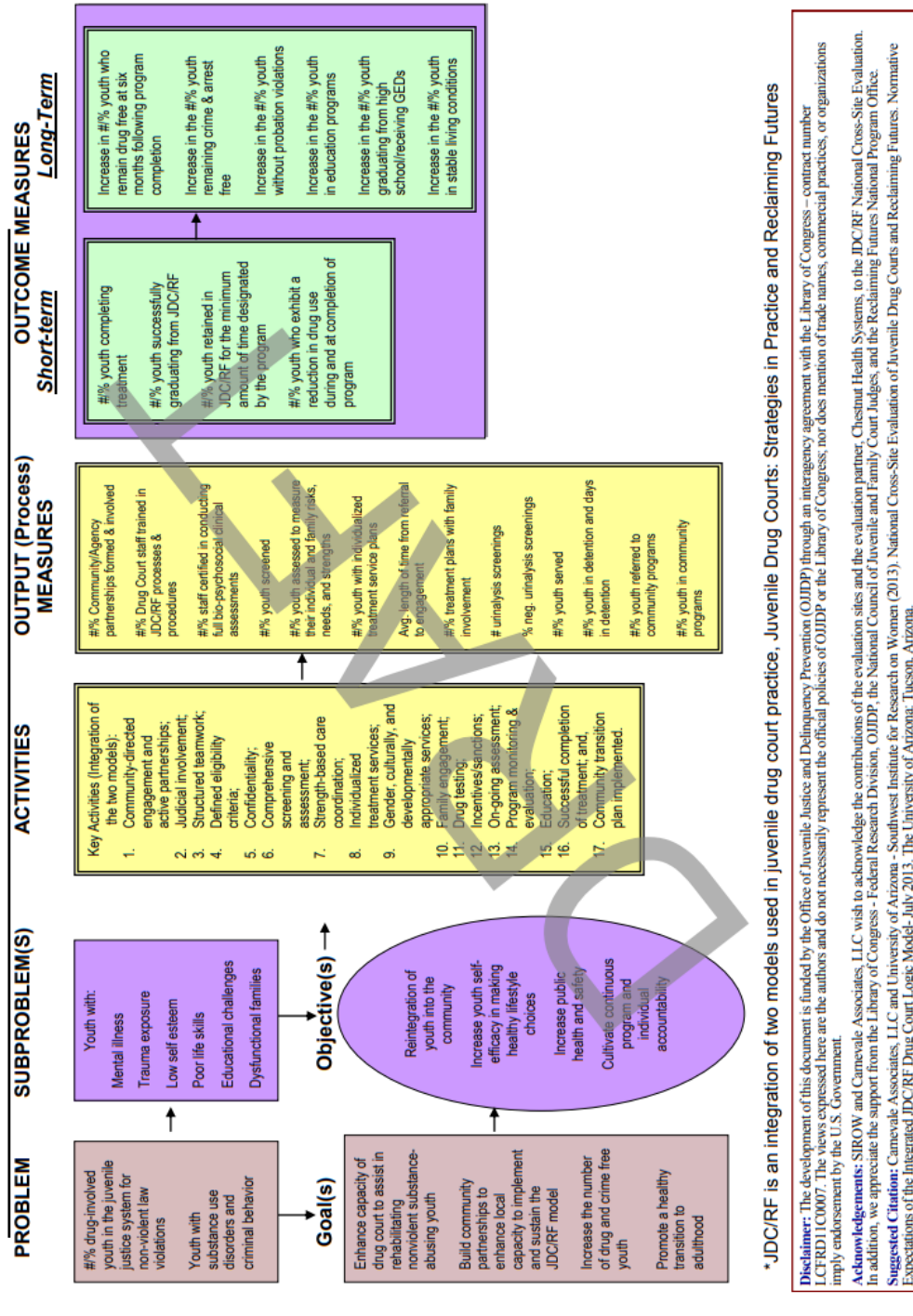
SOURCE: Michigan Logic Models: Drug Treatment Court, Communication Screening, Assessment, Engagement, and Retention Evaluation Funding Marketing Training and Technical Assistance. Retrieved from: https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/files/Michigan_LogicModels.pdf.

Exhibit 4-1. Logic Model for New Castle County, Delaware



SOURCE: Lindquist, C., Hardison, J. & Lattimore, P. (2003). Reentry Courts Process Evaluation (Phase 1), Final Report. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/202472.pdf>.

NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS OF THE INTEGRATED JDC/RF* DRUG COURT LOGIC MODEL



SOURCE: Carnevale Associates, LLC and University of Arizona - Southwest Institute for Research on Women (2013). National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts and Reclaiming Futures. Normative Expectations of the Integrated JDC/RF Drug Court Logic Model-July 2013. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona. Retrieved from: https://jpo.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/11204/1405/JDC_RF%20Logic%20Model_v%202012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

ARI Logic Models – Mental Health Court (MHC)

Purpose: To divert non-violent offenders with a psychiatric diagnosis from prison who would benefit from therapeutic interventions.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
			Short	Medium	Long
Crime Reduction Act Federal & state funding ARI Oversight Board ARI Staff Local ARI Program Site Staff Local court professionals Mental health & SUD treatment providers Community restorative boards (CRBs) Target Population: Non-violent, high risk, persons with a psychiatric diagnosis ICJIA staff	Program screening, assessment & intake Psychiatric diagnoses Clinical assessment Team case planning Linkage to therapeutic services Community supervision, incentives & sanctions Program monitoring and evaluation	# clients screened for eligibility # clients enrolled # clients with current LSI-R scores # clients with DSM Axis diagnoses # clients with requirements and conditions # clients with service referrals # types of service referrals # clients obtaining therapeutic services # types of therapeutic services # In-person visits with clients # Sanctions & Incentives # Status changes # Technical violations # program graduates # revocations # arrests during the program # sent to IDOC % reduction goal attained	Divert at least 25% of caseload from prison Improve treatment outcomes Fewer arrests, jail stays, reconvictions Improved restitution payments Better data for decision-making Community supervision for non-violent offenders with psychiatric diagnosis Improved assessment outcomes Fewer arrests Fewer revocations and PTRs Treatment retention Program graduations CRB resolutions	Reduce prison overcrowding for non-violent offenders Lower criminal justice system cost to tax payers Reduce recidivism, crime, and victimization Budgeting for results Client completes probation Improve psychiatric outcomes/medication management Meet service needs Demonstrate program effectiveness using program evaluations	Greater public safety Improved public safety Stronger social service safety net for people with SUD More effective use of tax dollars Client improved quality of life and stability – psychiatric, social, and financial Reduce incidence of inmates with psychiatric diagnosis from ARI MHC sites
Assumptions: Persons with psychiatric diagnoses who are identified, supported and treated can be diverted from incarceration and adequately supervised in the community. Sites: 4 th Judicial Circuit, DeKalb, Grundy, St. Clair, Winnebago TIP			External Factors: state fiscal environment, crime trends, changes in corrections and criminal justice policies; other reform policies and laws; change in federal administration. Source: Lawson (2004) 5/10/17		

SOURCE: Lawson (2004 / 2017). ARI Logic Models – Mental Health Court (MHC). Retrieved from: https://ariallsites2017.icjia.cloud/static/summit_documents/Logic_model_mental_health_court_handout.pdf

Appendix II: Sample MOU

Date: April 10, 2020

Memorandum of Understanding

Caitlin J. Taylor, Ph.D., Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, La Salle University
Federal Probation and Pretrial Services Office for the District of XXXXX

I. Background

Since the spring of 2008, Caitlin Taylor has been conducting evaluation research for the Federal Probation and Pretrial Services Office. The on-going evaluations have involved collecting quantitative data on Reentry Court participants as well as a control group composed of persons under the standard terms of supervision. In regards to this project, Caitlin Taylor does not advocate specific public policies or have a vested interest in the results of the Reentry Court program evaluations.

II. Parties' Roles and Responsibilities

Caitlin Taylor will:

- Assist in collecting the necessary data from persons' under supervision case files.
- Conduct statistical analyses to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the XXXX program in terms of reducing recidivism.
- Compose a final report detailing the findings of the evaluation.
- Give the Probation and Pretrial Services Office the opportunity to review and approve of all final reports and academic publications based on the Reentry Court before dissemination outside of the Probation and Pretrial Services Office.

The Federal Probation and Pretrial Services Office will:

- Provide access to case files on Reentry Court participants and potential control group individuals, as they deem appropriate.

- Provide assistance with filling out data collection instruments on Reentry Court participants and the control group, when assistance is available.
- Review all final reports and academic publications based on the Reentry Court and grant approval to disseminate and publish, when deemed appropriate.

III. Data Confidentiality and Security

As approved by the Institutional Review Board at La Salle University and deemed to be HIPAA compliant, all data collected about Reentry Court participants and control group individuals will be kept confidential. Data collection instruments will only include an identification number for each person under supervision. When the data are entered into the statistical analysis software, only identification numbers will be used. The file linking identification numbers to persons' under supervision names will be kept as an encrypted file on Caitlin Taylor's computer. No written reports will reference persons' under supervision names or provide identifying information.

Signed by:

Caitlin Taylor La Salle University	Date

Chief XXXX Federal Probation and Pretrial Services Office, District of XXXXX	Date

Appendix III: Sample Data Collection Spreadsheet

NAME	ID	DOB	RISK	GENDER	START		STATUS		GRADUATION DATE	PROBATION	NEW
					DATE	END DATE	ATTENDED	UNEXCUSED		VIOLATION DATE	ARREST DATE
Jane Doe	1	12/31/1990	medium	female	3/1/2018	4/1/2019	12	1	4/1/2019	N/A	N/A
John Doe	2	5/15/1994	high	male	3/1/2018	9/25/2018	4	3	N/A	2/10/2019	8/31/2018

Appendix IV: Sample Data Collection Worksheet

DATA COLLECTION FOR REENTRY COURT PARTICIPANTS

Name: _____
 STUDY PERIOD: **Date Started** in Program: _____ **End of Follow-up Date** (18 months after start in program): _____
Original Offense(s): _____

Probation revocation before end date of follow-up date given above (check one): YES NO

Withdrawal from program before end date of follow-up date given above (check one): YES NO

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) participation (check one):

- Never enrolled in CBT before end of follow-up date [0]
- Enrolled in CBT before end of follow-up date, but did not complete CBT before end date [1]
- Enrolled in and completed CBT before end of follow-up date [2]

Graduate (check one): Did NOT graduate in study period [0] Graduated in study period [1]

Completion (check one): Did NOT complete the 52 weeks in the study period [0] Did complete the 52 weeks in the study period [1]

Employment Status at end of follow-up date (check one):

- Employed [1]
- Unemployed (unexcused) [2]
- Unemployed (excused because of death, disability, FT school) [3]
- Information not available because of withdrawal, transfer to other jurisdiction or no longer under supervision [999]

NEW ARRESTS DURING STUDY PERIOD ONLY (describe arrest charges)	DATE OF ARREST	DATE CASE DROPPED (if applicable)	DATE OF CONVICTION (if applicable)	OTHER OUTCOME (describe)

Appendix V: Job Aid: Problem Solving Court Evaluation

Checklist

Your problem solving courts may utilize the below checklist to assist in preparing for their work with a researcher.

- Decide whether an academic evaluator or academic partner would be best for your problem solving court
- Decide whether a process evaluation or outcome evaluation is the first step for your court
- Contact higher education institutions to identify interested and available researchers
- Create and/or revise a logic model
- Formulate a MOU with the researcher
- Develop and implement a data collection plan in consultation with the researcher

Endnotes

- ⁱ Justice Research & Statistics Association (2014). An Introduction to Evidence-Based Practices. Retrieved from: http://www.jrsa.org/pubs/reports/ebp_briefing_paper_april2014.pdf.
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- ^x SAMHSA (2019). Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from: <https://www.samhsa.gov/iecmhc/toolbox/research-evaluation#logic-models>.
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- ^{xiv} Trochim, William M.K. (2006). Reliability & Validity. Web Center for Social Research Methods. Retrieved from: <https://socialresearchmethods.net/kb/relandval.php>.