

Community Court Mentor Sites: 2014 Request for Proposals

To encourage the replication of the community court model and the application of community court principles to wider populations, the Center for Court Innovation and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance will select up to five U.S. community court mentor sites to serve as national resources for the field. These sites will provide examples of best practices, host site visits, participate in conferences and workshops, and provide advice to practitioners around the country seeking either to launch their own community court projects or to replicate community court practices, such as using assessment tools, adapting procedural justice principles, and expanding sentencing options. This initiative succeeds the previous Community Court Mentor Site program launched in 2009. We invite all U.S. operational community courts to apply, including those serving as mentors under the 2009 initiative.

How Will Mentor Sites Be Selected?

Applications will be evaluated through a two-tiered process. Interested community courts should complete the 2014 Application Form.

Community court applications will first be reviewed and scored by peer reviewers. The Center for Court Innovation will then conduct an in-depth review of the highest ranked projects and select up to five community court mentor sites in consultation with the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Applicants will be evaluated based on the following seven criteria:

1. Length of operations (must be operational for at least two years)
2. Application of the six community court principles
3. Data collection and performance measurement system
4. Program effectiveness and use of research-driven practices
5. Documented operations and protocols
6. Sustainability plan
7. Suitability as a training site

In the selection of mentor sites, geographic diversity will be taken into account.

Application Process

Community courts interested in applying must complete the 2014 Application Form (INSERT LINK) and send it to Danielle Malangone at malangoned@courtinnovation.org. Hard copies of proposals may also be mailed to Center for Court Innovation, ATTN: Danielle Malangone, 520 Eighth Ave., 18th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

Submission Deadline

Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. EST on Wednesday, March 12, 2014.

Questions

For questions about this solicitation, please email Danielle Malangone at malangoned@courtinnovation.org.

What Is a Community Court?

Community courts are neighborhood-focused courts that attempt to harness the power of the justice system to address local problems. They can take many forms, but all focus on creative partnerships and problem-solving. Community courts strive to create new relationships, both within the justice system and with outside stakeholders such as residents, merchants, churches and schools. And they test new and aggressive approaches to public safety rather than merely responding to crime after it has occurred. Community courts employ the following principles:

1. Enhanced Information

Community courts are dedicated to the idea that better staff training combined with better information (about litigants, victims, and the community context of crime) can help improve the decision making of judges, attorneys, and other justice officials. The goal is to help practitioners make more nuanced decisions about individual defendants, ensuring that they receive an appropriate level of supervision and services.

2. Community Engagement

Community courts recognize that citizens, merchants and neighborhood groups have an important role to play in helping the justice system identify, prioritize and solve local problems. By actively engaging citizens in the process, community courts seek to improve public trust in justice.

3. Collaboration

Community courts engage a diverse range of people, government agencies, and community organizations in collaborative efforts to improve public safety. By bringing together justice players and reaching out to potential partners beyond the

courthouse (e.g., social service providers, victims groups, schools), community courts improve inter-agency communication, encourage greater trust between citizens and government, and foster new responses to local problems.

4. Individualized Justice

By using validated evidence-based risk and needs assessment instruments, community courts seek to link offenders to individually tailored community-based services (e.g., job training, drug treatment, safety planning, mental health counseling) where appropriate. In doing so (and by treating defendants with dignity and respect), community courts help reduce the use of incarceration and recidivism, improve community safety, and enhance confidence in justice. Linking offenders to services can also aid victims, improving their safety and helping restore their lives.

5. Accountability

Community courts send the message that all criminal behavior—even low-level “quality-of-life” crime—has an impact on community safety. By promoting community restitution and insisting on regular and rigorous compliance monitoring—and clear consequences for non-compliance—community courts seek to improve the accountability of offenders.

6. Outcomes

Community courts emphasize the active and ongoing collection and analysis of data—measuring outcomes and process, costs and benefits. Dissemination of this information is a valuable symbol of public accountability.

What Is a Community Court Mentor Site?

Under this initiative, the Center for Court Innovation in consultation with the Bureau of Justice Assistance will select up to five mentor sites. In an effort to help spread community court principles and practices, the mentor sites will provide real-life examples for criminal justice officials nationwide who are interested in how to plan and operate a community court or apply community court principles. The mentor sites will model how justice system players can develop new skills, utilize new tools, and embrace new strategies.

Although the mentor sites will represent a diversity of models—in design, client population, geography, etc.—they will nonetheless share common elements:

- they will have been operational for at least two years;
- their efforts will reflect the principles described above;
- they will employ evidence-based practices or be testing new ideas;

- they will have experience overcoming challenges of planning and operations;
- they will have clearly articulated goals and documented outcomes; and
- they will be willing to share their experience and materials (by hosting site visits, answering questions over the phone or internet, sending staff to conferences and workshops, etc.).

What Are the Benefits of Becoming a Mentor Site?

Mentor sites will not receive direct financial assistance. However, they will receive technical assistance at no charge from the Center for Court Innovation. Among other things, Center staff will visit each mentor site to provide guidance on hosting high-quality, structured site visits; designing materials to showcase project elements; and addressing any current challenges. In addition, the Center for Court Innovation will create a promotional fact sheet for each mentor site. The mentor sites will be prominently featured on www.courtinnovation.org and regional practitioners will be encouraged to contact them for assistance.

What Are the Responsibilities of Mentor Sites?

Sites will be asked to commit to being mentors for two years and will be expected to maintain their programs at an exemplary level. Mentor sites will be expected to host site visits, make staff available upon request, participate as speakers at conferences or workshops, be available to answer questions via the phone or internet from other practitioners around the country, and report on technical assistance activities on a quarterly basis. There is the possibility that mentor sites will be asked to participate in research projects seeking to identify and develop new practices that can be disseminated to the field. When appropriate, the Center will direct requests for technical assistance to mentor sites.