



PROBLEM-SOLVING JUSTICE

PLANNING CHECKLIST

Getting a problem-solving criminal justice initiative off the ground requires a strong concept and thorough planning. There are three main stages to planning a typical problem-solving community justice initiative: a needs assessment, a concept paper, and an implementation plan. Use the following checklist as a general guideline to mark your progress as you pass through each stage.

This practitioner tool is one in a series to support the development of problem-solving justice initiatives. For other documents in the series, please visit www.courtinnovation.org.

STAGE ONE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment identifies priority problems, goals, resources, potential community-based partners, and other key ingredients that will go into the design of a successful project. An important aspect of the needs assessment is to explore the community's own perceptions of its needs.

- Have you defined your preliminary goals for the problem-solving initiative?
- Have you defined the community to be served—whether it is a neighborhood, one or more police districts, or an entire county?
- Have you identified the key stakeholders in the project, including...
 - residents?
 - businesses?
 - justice system players?
 - government agencies?
 - community-based organizations?
- Have you investigated the views of local residents, merchants, and other community representatives (through individual interviews and focus groups) concerning local public safety and other related problems, as well as community strengths?
- Have you collected relevant data about current criminal justice practice, including community and defendant demographics, calls for police service, arrest rates, most common charges, and court outcomes?
- Have you brought stakeholders together for collaborative planning?
- Based on your research, have you identified what problems you want to address?
- Have you determined what ideas you will be testing (i.e., that if you do x, then y will happen) as a way to frame your project?

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This practitioner tool was produced as part of the Community-Based Problem-Solving Criminal Justice Initiative, a project of the Bureau of Justice Assistance that aims to broaden the scope of problem-solving courts by testing their approach to wider defendant populations and applying key problem-solving principles outside of the specialized court context. The Bureau of Justice Assistance supports law enforcement, courts, corrections, treatment, victim services, technology, and prevention initiatives that strengthen the nation's criminal justice system. The Center for Court Innovation is a non-profit think tank that works with criminal justice practitioners, community-based organizations, and ordinary citizens to develop creative responses to public safety problems, aid victims, reduce crime, and improve public confidence in justice.

- Have you summarized the findings of your needs assessment in writing?

STAGE TWO: CONCEPT PAPER

Using findings from the needs assessment, a concept paper answers why the proposed project is necessary, how it intends to solve neighborhood problems, and what resources it will need to do so.

- Have you refined the goals you started with, based upon information collected in your needs assessment process?
- Have you crafted **specific** and **quantifiable** objectives to describe what will need to change for your project to meet its goals?
- Have you described, in a clear, succinct fashion, the approach your project is testing?
- Have you broken your project down into separate, tangible components and discussed how you will implement each of them?
- Have you made a flow chart showing how cases currently progress through the system, and how this would change under the new project?
- Have you listed all the core staff that are essential to realize your project (e.g., project director, assessment and case management staff, etc.)?
- Have you: 1) approached local agencies (government and non-government) and requested staff to co-locate at your project, or 2) identified possible community-based partners who will assist your project without locating staff there?
- Have you articulated the roles community members will play in the project?
- Have you crafted a budget for the project?
- Have you developed a marketing approach for selling your concept to funders, justice system stakeholders, and the community?

STAGE THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

Finally, you need to take all your knowledge and gather all your resources to make the project happen.

- Have you identified who will have overall responsibility for implementation (e.g., a “project director”)?
- For each objective, have you identified key tasks, named the person(s) responsible for each, and set deadlines—as described on the worksheet on page 4?
- Have you determined how cases will be screened for eligibility?
- Have you set up a process for gathering and sharing information about defendants that will help improve the decision making of judges, attorneys, and other justice officials?
- Have you developed realistic and informed estimates of annual project volume, both general (e.g., number of defendants served) and for each key type of service (e.g., x mandated to community service, y mandated to substance abuse treatment, z involved in ongoing post-disposition compliance monitoring, etc.)?
- Have you assembled as many on-site services as possible?
- Have you established a roster of community-based services to link defendants to?
- Have you secured cooperation from key justice partners (e.g., judges, prosecutors, defense, probation) including both agency managers and relevant line staff (e.g., clerks, line attorneys)?
- Have you refined the project’s budget, and identified sources of any needed funding?
- Have you set up training for staff where needed (e.g., complex issues like domestic violence and drug addiction)?

- Have you set up a system for monitoring program participants?
- Have you described a clear process for collecting data, and selected or designed an appropriate database?
- Have you assigned someone the task of providing regular statistical updates utilizing the information in your database?
- Have you included an evaluation component to track your project's success?
- Have you developed a plan for communicating results to project stakeholders, including the public (i.e., through a website, emails, newsletters, regular meetings, etc.)?

FURTHER READING

Action Research: Using Information to Improve Your Drug Court

http://www.courtinnovation.org/_uploads/documents/Action%20Research.pdf

Community Focused Court Planning

http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/community/court_planning.htm

Community Prosecution Planning and Implementation Workbook

http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/cp_workbook.pdf

Defining the Problem: Using Data to Plan a Community Justice Project

http://www.courtinnovation.org/_uploads/documents/Defining%20the%20Problem.pdf

Red Hook Diary: Planning a Community Court

http://www.courtinnovation.org/_uploads/documents/Red%20Hook%20Diary.pdf

