

Domestic Violence Court Self-Assessment: Revisiting Goals, Challenges and Progress

For communities that have established a specialized domestic violence court, a self-assessment is an opportunity to revisit the goals and objectives identified as part of the initial planning process.

The Center for Court Innovation's Domestic Violence Court Toolkit¹ emphasizes the importance of evaluation and progress monitoring as a court continues to operate. Many communities find that daily practices in a domestic violence court evolve over time, and that stakeholders may change or leave, causing disruption. A self-assessment provides a guided opportunity to reflect on current practice, comparing it to the original goals of the court.

A self-assessment focuses on the implementation of best practices in domestic violence courts, but the expectation is not that each best practice will be fully realized. Instead, the assessment can serve as a way to focus stakeholders' efforts on areas needing attention or improvement. The assessment can be undertaken by an individual court, or can be led by a statewide agency, such as an Administrative Office of the Courts.

Further, court staff need not conduct a self-assessment in isolation. Courts can partner with local providers and other stakeholders to review current practices and make recommendations. Additionally, jurisdictions may find it useful to invite the input of a technical assistance provider to guide the self-assessment or to help with goals identified after the self-assessment is completed. For further information on the type of assistance that the Center for Court Innovation can provide, see below.

The sample self-assessment included in this document is meant to serve as a guide. Additional questions can be added to tailor a self-assessment

to the needs of a particular jurisdiction, but this tool serves as a starting point.

One option for administering a localized self-assessment is to create an online form. Some jurisdictions may have the capacity to create online surveys internally; for example, in New York State, the Office of Court Administration created an online survey to compile results from self-assessments conducted throughout the state. There are, however, online survey providers, such as SurveyMonkey, that can provide an easy way to compile results.

Self-Assessment Topics

The topic areas and questions identified below are drawn from best practices in domestic violence courts nationally,² as well as from self-assessments used in Illinois and New York State.³ Unless otherwise specified, the topic areas are structured such that stakeholders can rate practices in their domestic violence court on a scale, with options such as "Yes, fully in place," "In progress," "Needs improvement," "Don't know," or "Not applicable." Further, one question at the end of each section addresses the goals and milestones for that topic area; this is meant to highlight potential action steps that a court/jurisdiction could take after compiling responses from stakeholders in the community.

Jurisdictions could also elect to add a field for additional comments or notes, especially if the self-assessment will be used as a working document meant to address ongoing goals and challenges. The below sample topics are not

exhaustive, but can be used as the basis of a self-assessment project. Questions that are tailored to the particular laws or regulations of a jurisdiction can be added where needed.

Technical Assistance Project

The goal of the Domestic Violence Court Technical Assistance Project, an initiative of the Center for Court Innovation, is to help court systems enhance their handling of domestic violence cases and improve outcomes for victims and children.

The project is designed to guide communities through the planning and implementation of a domestic violence court and to equip planners with skills and knowledge to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the court. The Center is dedicated to offering assistance that is responsive to the needs, resources, and challenges of jurisdictions. With support from the United States Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, the Center is able to provide a variety of technical assistance services, including:

- Assistance building successful, multi-disciplinary planning teams;
- Intensive, on-site work with individual

domestic violence courts in all stages of planning and implementation;

- Practitioner-to-practitioner guidance, in which Center staff, drawing on their extensive hands-on experience creating and running domestic violence courts, help other jurisdictions to learn from each other;
- Site visits to domestic violence courts (including Office on Violence Against Women-designated mentor courts);
- Guidance with creating strong judicial compliance reviews, promoting victim safety, and developing effective partnerships with other agencies; and
- Model documents, assessment and evaluation tools, and publications of special interest to a domestic violence court audience both nationally and internationally.

To get in touch with the Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Project, or to request any of the materials or assistance above, please contact Liberty Aldrich at aldrichl@courtinnovation.org.

<i>Enhancing Victim Safety</i>					
	Yes, Fully In Place	In Progress	Needs Improvement	Don't Know	N/A
There is a separate waiting area for the complainant/petitioner and defendant/respondent, adequate to prevent communication between the parties.					
Court officers/security personnel are assigned to the complainant's/petitioner's waiting area.					
There is clear signage at the courthouse that directs litigants to victim services and other safety-related resources.					
Resource coordinators, system-based advocates, or other court personnel work with local domestic violence agencies and shelters to provide updated resources and referrals to victims.					
The court has extra security measures (such as escorting protected parties out of the courthouse) available when requested by the complainant/petitioner or by the judge.					
The court follows confidentiality rules per each case type (i.e., address confidentiality).					

<i>Language Access for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Litigants</i>					
	Yes, Fully In Place	In Progress	Needs Improvement	Don't Know	N/A
Interpreter services are made available to litigants (i.e., American Sign Language or non-English languages) or Language Line services are used.					
Services are available both inside and outside of the courtroom, including in court-mandated programs.					
If appropriate in your community, court forms are available in multiple languages (i.e., Spanish, Mandarin, etc.).					
Training on interpreter best practices and language access obligations is available to judges.					
Training on best practices in domestic violence and sexual assault cases is available to interpreters.					

What goals or milestones will you meet in the next twelve months for items that are indicated as a work in progress or that need improvement?

<i>Offender Accountability and Compliance</i>					
	Yes, Fully In Place	In Progress	Needs Improvement	Don't Know	N/A
The court regularly reviews defendant compliance with court orders. ⁵					
The court uses appropriate sanctions/a sanction schedule to address defendant accountability (including non-compliance with mandated programs as well as violations of Orders of Protection). ⁶					
If appropriate for your community, third-party providers (i.e., Batterer Intervention Program staff, probation and parole, mental health professionals, etc.) are on-site at the domestic violence court/during compliance reviews.					
Third-party providers provide updates to the Resource Coordinator or the Judge on the defendant's/respondent's compliance with court orders.					
The court uses, or third-party providers use, an assessment tool to determine appropriate referrals/mandates for the defendant/respondent.					
The court and personnel serving the court are properly trained in mandatory restrictions on firearms possession by defendants/respondents, both on a state and federal level.					
The court issues all mandatory restrictions of firearms under both state and federal law.					

<i>Orders of Protection</i>					
	Yes, Fully In Place	In Progress	Needs Improvement	Don't Know	N/A
The court obtains affidavits of service for temporary and final orders of protection.					
When issuing orders of protection, the court considers including provisions for the temporary custody, visitation, and/or support of the minor child(ren) of the parties.					
The court considers entering injunctions against specified behaviors.					
The court considers entering provisions for the temporary use of property or restraints on the use of property.					
The court considers removing firearms and suspending or revoking firearms licenses. ⁷					
The court accepts, without fee, out-of-state orders of protection for registration and enforcement (i.e., full faith and credit).					
Orders of Protection are entered into the National Crime Information Center Protection Order File within 24 hours.					

What goals or milestones will you meet in the next twelve months for items that are indicated as a work in progress or that need improvement?

<i>Stakeholders in the Courtroom</i>				
Identify which of the following stakeholders are:	Permanently assigned	Periodically assigned	Rarely present	N/A
Judge				
Resource Coordinator				
Prosecutor/District Attorney				
Court-Based Advocate				
Community-Based Advocate				
Defense bar or assigned counsel				
Attorney for the Child (civil cases only)				
Third-Party Provider (i.e., Batterer Intervention Program representative, probation/parole, etc.).				
Interpreter(s)				
Other (please specify): _____				

<i>Trainings</i>				
Which court staff/partners have been trained regarding domestic violence dynamics, cases, protocols, and security?	Yes	No	Don't Know	N/A
Judge(s)				
Clerks(s)				
Court Officer(s)				
Resource Coordinator(s)				
Attorney(s)				
Interpreter(s)				
Other (specify)				
How often do such trainings occur? (a) regularly (b) one-time (c) no training currently provided (d) other, please specify: _____				
What was the date of the most recent training for court staff/partners?				
What topic(s) would you like to see addressed in a future training?				

What goals or milestones will you meet in the next twelve months for items that are indicated as a work in progress or that need improvement?

<i>Technology⁹</i>					
	Yes, fully in place	In Progress	Needs Improvement	Don't Know	N/A
The court has identified which court applications/databases, if any, have special identifiers for domestic violence cases (in order to assist in the transfer of cases to a specialized domestic violence court).					
The court has identified relevant statewide databases/registries for orders of protection.					
Court staff search relevant databases and provide information to the court for decision-making.					
The domestic violence court has a protocol for entering information about local orders of protection into a relevant database/registry, and has identified how this information overlaps with any relevant statewide database/registry.					
Data is promptly entered into relevant court databases for domestic violence cases.					

What goals or milestones will you meet in the next 12 months for items that are indicated as a work in progress or that need improvement?

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Notes

1. Creating a Domestic Violence Court: Adapting the Model to Your Community (A Planning Toolkit), pages 15 – 19. The toolkit can be obtained through contacting the Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Team. Please visit <http://www.courtinnovation.org/topic/domestic-violence> or email Liberty Aldrich at: aldrichl@courtinnovation.org for more information.
2. See “What Makes a Domestic Violence Court Work? Key Principles” by Liberty Aldrich and Robyn Mazur, accessible at <http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/what-makes-domestic-violence-court-work-key-principles>.
3. For more information on the Illinois or New York self-assessments, visit <http://www.ifvcc.org/domesticviolence/SelfAssessment.pdf>, or contact the Center for Court Innovation Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Team.
4. For more sample questions on local, state, and federal order of protection registries, see the sections on Orders of Protection and Technology.
5. For sample reporting forms or monitoring scripts for judges, please contact the Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Team.
6. For a list of possible sanctions, please contact the Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Team.
7. For further sample questions on firearms, see the section on Accountability.
8. For additional information on stakeholder involvement with a domestic violence court, see “Creating a Domestic Violence Court: Adapting the Model to Your Community (A Planning Toolkit),” page 25. The toolkit can be obtained through contacting the Domestic Violence Technical Assistance Team.
9. For more information on the technology system developed for domestic violence courts in New York State, see “An Informed Response: An Overview of the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link,” by Pamela Young, available at <http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/informed-response-overview-domestic-violence-court-technology-application-and-resource-link>.

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