

Treatment Court Staffing Framework

Developing a consistent, structured, and informed decision-making process

Introduction

A coordinated strategy and structured decision-making process to apply behavioral responses ensures collaboration, care, and forethought, considering all relevant factors and leveraging staff expertise. The treatment court team reviews each participant's progress or regression and determines appropriate responses to achievements and infractions during precourt staff meetings.

Identifying and delivering effective responses to participant behavior requires precourt staff meetings that are grounded in a clear decision-making framework. The treatment court staffing framework was developed to help teams establish clear procedures ensuring greater consistency, advance notice, procedural fairness, and that team actions align with each participant's individual risk level, needs, and progress.

The set of questions on the next page should guide precourt staff meetings, encourage collaboration, and promote team-based decision making. The staffing framework is used in conjunction with the following complementary resources:

- [Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards](#)
 - The Incentives, Sanctions, and Service Adjustments standard lays the foundation for evidence-based, effective, lasting behavior modification. Treatment court teams require a clear and working understanding of this standard to develop policies and procedures that effectively support behavior change and align with the core principles of behavior modification.
- [Standards Reference Guide: Incentives, Sanctions, and Service Adjustments](#)
 - The reference guide provides teams with examples of incentives, sanctions, and service adjustments. Incentive and sanction examples are categorized as low-, moderate-, or high-magnitude responses to help treatment courts develop practical, affordable, and creative responses to participant performance. It is recommended that teams review and adapt the list based on the availability of resources and services within their community.



Treatment Court Staffing Framework

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1. Who are they in terms of risk and need?

To accurately understand a participant's criminogenic risk and clinical needs, teams must rely on the results of validated criminogenic risk assessments and validated clinical assessments. These tools are essential; they provide the foundation for determining realistic proximal and distal goals and ensure that responses are tailored to what is achievable and appropriate for each individual.

2. Where are they in the program (i.e., phase)?

The treatment court operations manual and participant handbook should describe the purpose and focus of each phase. An individual's case plan and treatment plan goals are incorporated into their unique phase requirements, based on their assessed needs, and will influence the determination of realistic proximal and distal goals.

3. Why did this happen (i.e., circumstances)?

Understanding the circumstances surrounding the behavior is equally critical. For example, consider the difference between Client A, who experiences a major life stressor such as a death, and reaches out for help but ultimately drinks alcohol, versus Client B, who voluntarily travels to Las Vegas, drinks heavily all weekend, and is only discovered through a urinalysis. Although both individuals may be high-risk/high-need and in the same program phase, the context and intent behind their behaviors warrant entirely different responses.

4. Which behaviors are we responding to?

Teams must respond to each required or expected behavior. Certainty is a core principle of effective behavior modification; this means examining each behavior individually and applying a response that aligns with whether the behavior represents a proximal, distal, or managed goal.

5. What is the response choice/magnitude?

Once behaviors are clearly identified, teams determine both the appropriate magnitude of the response and the specific response option that best fits the participant. Programs should rely on a well-developed, structured menu of incentives, sanctions, and service adjustments.

6. How do we deliver and explain the response(s)?

One essential component is preparing the judge to deliver the response effectively. Each team member brings unique expertise and is responsible for providing the judge with the information needed to communicate the response in a clear, meaningful, and impactful way for the participant. This not only ensures consistency but also enhances the likelihood that the response will support learning and behavior change.

