



The In-Practice Tip Sheets are resources for juvenile drug court teams and are meant to provide operational steps to implementing the *16 Strategies in Practice*. This is not an exhaustive list of practice tips. Juvenile drug court teams are encouraged to use these Tip Sheets as a starting point as they strive to make program enhancements or operationalize the *16 Strategies*.

## Clearly Defined Target Population and Eligibility Criteria

**CASE STUDY:** Lee County Juvenile Drug Court has been operational since 2004. During this time the team has experienced a lot of turnover. Currently there is only one team member, the coordinator, who was part of the original planning team. The coordinator takes the lead on many of the program's procedures and expectations. The team trusts her abilities and allows her the freedom to do what's right for the program, mostly because everyone is too busy with their own responsibilities outside of drug court. Recently the judge read a publication that challenged the effectiveness of a juvenile drug court, compared to traditional juvenile probation. The judge also wanted to know why there were only six participants in the program, even though the program's capacity is set at 25. He asked the coordinator to provide the team with the success rate over the past nine years and an explanation as to why there were so few participants. The findings were eye-opening and alarming. Two areas of concern were identified, first, the team's success rate was less than 20% and secondly, referrals were down 60%.

### Solution-focused Tips to help teams define their target population and eligibility criteria:

- 1 Tip No. 1:** The JDC team should collect and analyze juvenile justice and social indicator data to determine need.
  - Collecting and reviewing data is the key to success – collect data that the team will use to inform target population and eligibility criteria.
  - Ask the question: does the data collected indicate a need to implement a juvenile drug court – is there a portion of the population who meet the criminogenic risk and the substance abuse/use treatment need?
  - Draft (or revisit) a mission statement with the JDC team which states who the program will serve.
  - Regularly analyze data to monitor for shifts in culture of substance abuse/use by youth – codify this process in the policy and procedure manual (i.e., data review takes place annually at the close of the fiscal year).
    - Keep community partners, JDC stakeholders, and the JDC team informed of any changes and/or recommendations derived from yearly analysis.
  - Keep in mind that the data may simply indicate that there is not a need for a juvenile drug court.
- 2 Tip No. 2:** The JDC team should utilize validated screening and assessment tools to make well informed decisions about program acceptance.
  - JDC teams (planning or operating) are cautioned not to widen the net, by taking low-risk offenders to “boost” numbers. Let the data drive the need for the program!
  - Use timely screening/intake forms to filter youth, with the goal being to place youth into the right program the first time.
  - Develop a matrix with triggers or indicators that move the appropriate youth closer to the response needed for their particular need, for example:
    - First trigger – youth between 14-17 years old
    - Second trigger – youth meets legal status requirement
    - Third trigger – moderate-high or high risk level from validated pre-screen
    - Fourth trigger – specific questions selected on validated pre-screen:
      - Currently using alcohol
      - Alcohol contributes to criminal behavior
      - Currently using drugs



## CLEARLY DEFINED TARGET POPULATION AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Drugs contributes to criminal behavior
- Each trigger will further filter youth from the total pool of youth coming in contact with the juvenile justice system to the youth appropriate for juvenile drug court, for example:
  - First trigger – 2,524 youth meet the criteria
  - Second trigger – 2,408 youth meet the criteria
  - Third trigger – 414 youth meet the criteria
  - Fourth trigger – 132 youth meet the criteria (youth eligible for JDC review and assessment)

**3 Tip No. 3:** The JDC team’s eligibility criteria should stem from the data collected *and* analyzed.

- Define eligibility criteria based on the population the court is serving (based on an indicated need) – build qualifiers *and* disqualifiers based on age, geographic area, court status, gender, severity of drug-use problem, history of substance-abuse treatment, and previous involvement in juvenile justice system.
- Keep in mind that JDCs should serve youth who are moderate/high in both substance abuse/use need and criminogenic risk.
- Determine if the resources in place, within the community, can address the needs of the target population – conduct a community mapping exercise with the target population in mind.

**4 Tip No. 4:** The JDC team should determine, based on the target population, who can refer potential youth – ask:

- Who can refer potential youth?
  - Natural referral sources can be prosecutors (often the gatekeepers), defense attorneys, or probation/intake officers.
- How will referrals get to the court/team?

- Draft a checklist, based on qualifiers and disqualifiers, for referral sources to use to quickly determine broad eligibility requirements – the checklist should reference specific JDC team members to send referrals to.
- How will the team educate referral sources?
  - Host brown-bag lunches educating referral sources on JDC philosophy, referral procedures, and success rates – codify this education process in the policy and procedure manual (i.e., brown-bag education lunch will be held on a quarterly basis; JDC coordinator facilitates this process).
  - If there is “push-back” from referral sources regarding the program itself (i.e., too punitive or too lenient), invite them to articulate specific perceived issues – it may be something that just needs further clarification and/or consensus building to alleviate any fears.

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** *What steps need to be taken to find a solution for Lee County’s lack of referrals and low success rate?*

**ANSWER:** The judge and the coordinator should hold a strategic planning meeting for the operational team members. The meeting will give the team an opportunity to review juvenile justice and social indicator data. The team is encouraged to take a hard look at the need in their community. If there is a definite need, the next steps would be to adjust capacity and review eligibility criteria, based on data. Eligibility criteria should be defined and codified as a team and include concrete qualifiers and disqualifiers – defining this criteria decreases net-widening. The team should determine available resources – conducting a community resource reality check is a perfect team-building activity, where the team would work together to update their community map. A tip would be to assign reach-out duties to each member of the team, so the process isn’t heaped onto the JDC coordinator. Finally, the team should review their referral process and identify any gaps. If it is simply a matter of educating natural referral sources, the JDC team members should



draft a brown-bag lunch schedule where each team member would participate in educating colleagues in their particular field.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCE(S):**

- NCJFCJ’s Juvenile Drug Court Information Center - <http://www.ncjfcj.org/clearly-defined-target-population-and-eligibility-criteria>
- *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* – Page 17

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