A Guide to Conducting Effective Training Evaluation
Recommendations, Strategies, and Tools for Dependency Court Improvement Programs

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Each year millions of federal, state, and foundation dollars fund local training initiatives designed to make a difference in the lives of children and families. Practitioners concerned with the delivery of small- and large-scale training initiatives devote countless hours of their time to the nuts and bolts of program delivery. Practitioners provide direct services to participants, facilitate discussions with program partners, identify faculty members, and address unanticipated training-related issues as they arise. Meanwhile, uneasy thoughts often lurk somewhere in the back of their minds – Are training goals being achieved? How will that be known? How will evaluation occur? The evaluation of training programs can seem daunting. Conducting a training program evaluation is often viewed as a waste of precious time, energy, and other resources when resources are scarce. And yet, inevitably, evaluation questions start surfacing – Are the participants benefiting from the training? How can the training program be improved and strengthened? How can this training program demonstrate that it should be re-funded? Is there an impact on policies, programs, and increased knowledge, which ultimately affects the outcomes of children, parents, and families? Is training making a difference?

Developing and implementing effective dependency court training programs is challenging. With the expanding role of the court in dependency cases, there is an increasing need for training programs that: effectively convey changes in federal and state law; explain and reinforce foundational court best practices and the expanding role of the judiciary, both on- and off-the-bench; and present emerging knowledge in a wide range of disciplinary areas while tying that knowledge to the role of the judge, the practice of the court, and the child and family outcomes achieved. Given increasingly complex training topics, the diverse faculty needed to teach in these areas, and the emerging variety of teaching tools, more attention needs to be paid to how we measure the success and outcome of all types of training programs.
Why do we need to conduct more effective (or informative?) evaluations of training programs?

We need to better evaluate training programs to learn how to better target, deliver, and design trainings. Having evaluation data makes a better argument for ongoing training resources. Without access to evaluation data, dependency court training will never be able to move beyond standard training programs to address complex issues, roles, practices, and theories. We need training evaluations designed to focus on individual practice improvement, system improvement, and ultimately, better outcomes for children and families.

The Guide to Conducting Effective Training Evaluations

With funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, the Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), in collaboration with the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law (ABA) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), developed A Guide to Conducting Effective Training Evaluations: Recommendations, Strategies and Tools for Dependency Court Improvement Programs (Guide). The partners (NCJFCJ, ABA, and NCSC) recognized a need to help training coordinators better evaluate their training programs, including assessing training outcomes, and explaining how to use evaluation data to better target, design, and deliver trainings.

The Guide is designed to provide strategies and evaluation tools to training coordinators about how to identify training needs, develop training methodologies, assess training outcomes, and develop and implement training evaluation tools. This Guide does not provide “standard” training evaluation forms or a “standard” model to apply to training programs. The goal of the Guide is not to suggest a “cookie-cutter,” or “one-method-fits-all” approach to training evaluation. While template evaluation questions are offered, the intent is for training managers to use those templates as a jumping-off point for the development of their own training evaluation designs and instrumentation. Also, the Guide is not meant to be a comprehensive primer on curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation research methods. Rather, the Guide provides an overview of the key steps in designing and implementing an effective training evaluation, and offers recommendations and strategies for determining if your training program successfully met its objectives and resulted in desired outcomes.

The information and tools contained in the Guide have been gathered from a comprehensive review of literature on effective strategies for adult education and training programs, an extensive review of evaluation resource materials, including existing evaluations of dependency court trainings, as well as interviews with judicial educators and Court Improvement Project (CIP) Directors. We examined options for training design and mode of delivery, and obtained perspectives on the state of training evaluation generally and for dependency court systems specifically – what could and should be improved and how? An Advisory Committee of CIP Directors, judicial educators, and evaluation experts was convened to give recommendations on the Guide's
approach and content. In addition, a number of state CIPs participated in field-tests of the strategies, guidance, and template evaluation tools offered in the Guide. Feedback and lessons learned from these field-tests were used to enhance the Guide’s final materials and recommendations.

The State of Dependency Court Training Evaluation

With respect to CIP and dependency court trainings, the individuals interviewed reported significant challenges and constraints to conducting the kind of training evaluation they felt was truly needed. Many challenges were noted by participants, including lack of funding for evaluation activities, lack of staff to devote to evaluation activities, lack of value placed on evaluation, failure to plan for evaluation from the onset of program planning and design, and significant time constraints. Our review of evaluation materials also found that most dependency court training evaluations conducted have been limited to exit surveys based on a few general questions (typically administered via a questionnaire at the conclusion of a training session or program). These surveys have primarily resulted in evaluation reports of numbers of people trained, professional groups trained, reactions to the training (e.g., content, faculty, venue), and satisfaction with the training experience.

Our review also discovered that the training outcomes of change in behavior and attitude were rarely measured; a finding that interviewees also reiterated. If change in behavior and attitude were measured, they were mostly assessed through self-report (e.g., a question on an exit survey asking participants if they intended to implement what they learned after the training or if the training had changed their thoughts and attitudes about an issue or problem). Beyond behavior and attitude change, training impacts and outcomes were infrequently measured. For example, there were very few training evaluations that incorporated the research designs necessary to begin to associate training programs with specific impacts. This lack of impact or outcome evaluation makes generalizability problematic. Without impact data, we cannot know what specific training modules or components should be applied to specific training issues in order to have desired results. Without knowledge of the impact or outcomes of training, you cannot know if replicating that specific training model in your jurisdiction, or in other jurisdictions, will achieve intended results.

In addition, our review of dependency court training evaluation materials found significant measurement problems, making valid evaluation difficult, if not impossible. For example, there was a lack of specificity about training goals and learning objectives, a lack of specificity about desired training outcomes, a lack of precision in evaluation instrumentation, and low response rates (i.e., few participants actually completed and returned
training evaluation materials). Using multiple data collection methods, such as combining surveys with interviews, behavior and practice observations can provide a more robust examination of whether training goals were met. However, most training evaluations failed to use more than one method for obtaining data, typically focusing on a questionnaire or survey to obtain evaluation findings.

**The Purpose and Goals of the Guide**

This Guide is not meant to serve as a textbook for designing and implementing a training evaluation. Rather, the purpose of this Guide is to serve as a user-friendly resource that will assist State CIPs, NCJFCJ Model Courts, and individuals tasked with the design of dependency court training across the nation to design and implement effective training evaluations – to use methods that allow training coordinators to go beyond reporting the number of training programs held and the number of participants trained; and to assess the impacts and outcomes that can be attributed to the training. The Guide does not prescribe an approach or method for training evaluation, but instead offers template tools and recommends evaluation strategies that are intended to be adapted to specific training programs. Feedback provided by reviewers on earlier drafts of this Guide highlighted the need to focus on training program design, stressing the importance of planning for evaluation at the early stages of training development and implementation.

**The goals of the Guide are to:**

- Provide guidance and strategies for the program planning, design, implementation, and evaluation stages of dependency court training efforts;
- Encourage training coordinators to use the strategies offered in this Guide to support local, state, and national training agendas; and
- Provide template tools that facilitate an assessment not only of satisfaction but also of skill or knowledge acquisition; behavior, practice and attitude change; and training impacts or outcomes.

**Overview of the Guide’s Sections and Tools and Resources**

**Chapter One: Training Program Planning and Evaluation.** This Chapter of the Guide focuses on the critical program planning tasks, which support effective trainings, including the need to plan for evaluation from the onset of training program design. Chapter One sections cover training evaluation basics; the four levels of evaluation measurement; using internal or external evaluators; training program design considerations, including preparing adults to learn; developing measurable objectives; and using logic models as a tool for evaluation as they help articulate the training theory and expected outcomes. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) training program planning tools; 2) worksheets to help in planning evaluations; 3) tools for designing instructional methods; 4) strategies for conducting effective training needs assessments; 5) tools for designing measurable objectives; and 6) logic modeling worksheets.
Chapter Two: Training Satisfaction and Reaction Measurement. This Chapter of the Guide provides recommendations and sample strategies for ensuring that the measurement of training participants' satisfaction is precise, valid, and provides useful information to training organizers. Chapter Two sections include the survey process; good questionnaire construction; designing measurement or response categories; increasing response rates; and the use of online measures. These topics are relevant and foundational to each of the methodologically-focused Sections of the Guide (see below) and should be referred to again when considering learning acquisition, behavior change, and outcome assessment. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) sample satisfaction measurement questions; 2) sample satisfaction and reaction evaluation forms; 3) interview and focus group protocols; 4) strategies for designing response categories; and 5) considerations when using online or web-based surveys. In addition, a Question Bank is provided with the Tools and Resources materials, which includes sample training satisfaction and reaction measurement questions, and response formats for the reader to adapt to their own training evaluation needs and context.

Chapter Three: Measuring Learning Acquisition. This Chapter of the Guide focuses on measuring learning. Chapter Three sections cover the primary types of learning that can occur during training programs and the methodologies evaluators can use to properly measure learning acquisition. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) templates for measuring learning; 2) pre- and post- training learning assessment forms; 3) sample protocol for testing learning acquisition; and 4) creative approaches to measuring learning. The Question Bank provided with the Tools and Resources materials includes sample questions designed to tap learning acquisition.

Chapter Four: The Assessment of Behavior and Practice Change. An important goal of training is to ensure that behavior or practice changes occur as a result of the training – that training participants apply what they learned at the training. This Chapter provides guidance regarding how to assess whether trainees applied their newly acquired knowledge or skills, or modified their attitudes and behaviors, in the performance of their role, job, or duties. Chapter Four sections cover the importance of instructional designs that support behavior and practice change, evaluation designs and methods for assessing behavior and practice changes, and guidelines for developing and implementing training evaluations to assess behavior and practice change. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) a sample behavioral self-assessment form; 2) sample observational tools to measure behavior and practice change, including court observation and supervisor/mentor behavioral assessment tools; and 3) information on using secondary sources to assess behavior and practice change such as case file or document review. The Question Bank included with the Tools and Resources also provides sample questions designed to measure self-report of behavior and practice change.

Chapter Five: The Assessment of Training Outcomes. This Chapter of the Guide reviews approaches to determining the outcomes associated with a training program. Chapter Five sections build upon the principles and guidance offered in each of the previous Chapters, including defining outcome measurement and
associated terminology; planning for outcome evaluation at the training design phase; defining relevant outcomes; major models for outcome evaluation; and data collection methods for measuring outcomes. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) key steps to implement an outcome-focused training evaluation; 2) examples of outcomes, indicators, and data sources for outcome measurement; and 3) strategies for identifying outcomes.

**Chapter Six: Analyzing, Interpreting, and Reporting Training Evaluation Data.** The final Chapter of the Guide provides suggestions for analyzing, reporting, and using your training evaluation data so that all of the hard work put into the evaluation will be meaningful for training program improvement. Chapter Six sections cover analytic models or frameworks to apply to understand your evaluation findings and how to report findings in ways that are easily understood. The Tools and Resources accompanying this Chapter includes: 1) additional analytic tip sheets; and 2) sample report outlines.

As mentioned above, a series of companion documents to this Guide are the **Tools and Resources.** The Tools and Resources provide sample checklists, worksheets, template evaluation tools, and other resources and recommendations to assist in the design and implementation of effective training evaluations. Look for the measuring tape symbol through the text of this Guide for relevant tools contained in the Tools and Resources for that Chapter.
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DEDICATION

This guide is dedicated to the late Dr. Shirley Dobbin, who along with Dr. Sophia Gatowski, her dear friend and intellectual partner, wrote this guide. Dr. Dobbin spent her career making training meaningful for judges across the United States. Her boundless contributions to the field will positively impact the lives of children and families for many years to come.