



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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# Tools for Planning and Improving Your Juvenile Drug Court's Referral and Acceptance Process

## Overview

All Juvenile Drug Courts (JDCs) need a process for determining how youth will get referred for consideration as participants and which youth will ultimately be accepted into the JDC program. There is no set of right or wrong procedures, decision points, or decision-making professionals for this process. Rather, the process, documentation, and the professionals involved in the decisions may vary from one court to another, depending on resources, personnel, program eligibility criteria, referral sources, and screening and assessment instruments available or in use. However, every JDC should have a process that answers the following key questions:

- Who can or should make referrals
- Who can or should receive referrals
- What information and documentation needs to be included in the referral material, especially with respect to screening instruments (and scores) and assessment instruments (and scores)
- Who provides the referral documentation and permissions for sharing or access
- Who screens referral material to ensure that the youth meets eligibility criteria regarding
  - Legal requirements
  - Clinical requirements
  - Suitability/social requirements
- What time frame governs the processing of a referral
- Who is responsible for interacting with eligible youth and their families and informing them of their option to participate in the JDC
- At what point in time does the interaction with the eligible youth and family take place
- Who is responsible for advising eligible youth and their families of any legal consequences of participation/nonparticipation and at what point is this advice provided
- Who assists with cultural or language considerations to ensure that the decisions about referral, screening, assessment and admissions are unbiased and that access to the program is not limited for youth from any racial or ethnic group, gender or identity
- After a referral is made, what time frame governs acceptance
- Who makes an acceptance recommendation
- Who makes the acceptance decision
- Who informs the youth and family of the program's acceptance decision
- What steps are involved in assisting the youth and caregivers to decide whether to participate in the JDC
- What time frame governs the youth and family's participation decision
- What formal or legal documentation is needed to establish that a youth is a participant in the JDC
- Does the program have an "Opt Out" option for youth after acceptance and how is this handled
- What time frame governs the "Opt Out" option

Once a JDC determines its referral and acceptance process (and answers the questions above), the process should be

set forth in writing in a program's policies and procedures manual, be known and understood by team members, stakeholders, as well as the families and youth who are eligible to become JDC program participants, and be verbally reviewed and explained whenever there is a transition in team membership or a transition in a referral source.

## **Referral and Acceptance Process Mapping Exercise Kit**

The ***Referral and Acceptance Process Mapping Exercise Kit*** assists JDCs with creating a visual depiction of the process. Step-by-step instructions for doing the mapping exercise are included in the kit. Team members should use the materials in the kit –pre-labeled index cards, blank index cards (to add steps not otherwise noted on a pre-labeled index card), arrows, worksheets, and a sample map –to lay out the various steps in the process and identify who takes the steps and the information they use.

## **Benefits of Doing the Process Mapping Exercise**

Juvenile Drug Court Teams that have used this kit to produce a “map” of their referral and acceptance decision process have found the exercise helpful for team building, training, quality control, policies and procedures improvement, and action planning. Comments on their experience follow:

### **As a team building activity**

*My team enjoyed the activity, it was good to get everyone up and moving; team members that don't speak up were able to participate.*

*The greatest benefit of the activity was that the team was able to work well together and respected one another's views and opinions.*

*The exercise helped with team building; recognizing an established process; recognizing the need for collaboration and understanding of each team members needs and desires for a successful juvenile drug court.*

*This is a good exercise for drug courts because it is a good starting point to get everyone on the same page. It's a low stress exercise and gets everyone to work together and form an early bond that can continue to be built on.*

*This is an exercise that would be useful in resolving any issue that teams may have.*

### **For training, exchanging perspectives, and increasing awareness**

*It was helpful for the team to see how many different steps there are and gave us a brief idea of what the families have to go through.*

*It was very beneficial in opening the discussions regarding our process and creating an environment where team members could express their lack of knowledge about the overall process without judgment.*

*It was useful for each team member to explain where his or her job fit in and then for other team members to visually see how it fits together.*

*It allowed me to see that our team had varied degrees of understanding about the process. If we don't know how we get to a decision, how will our participants and families understand?*

### **For quality control for fidelity, to identify gaps or problems, and improve policies and procedures**

*The exercise helped us to identify that the system needs to be simplified for the youth and their families.*

*It made the team realize how many gaps there were in the process and we documented how and when they would be resolved.*

*This is a good exercise for the team to do periodically because 1) team members change and new ideas can be gathered from new members; 2) the process strengthens the collaboration between team members, and 3), it can be used to modify the admission criteria if needed, based on results of (participant) exit interviews.*

*The processes we mapped in the exercise are now part of the policy and procedures manual.*

### **For action planning to change or improve current aspects of the referral and acceptance process**

*It helped the team identify appropriate referral sources.*

*Several changes have been made and implemented to enhance the process for referrals as a result of the mapping exercise. We implemented an orientation phase once the youth has been accepted, we use a point person to contact treatment agencies, and create an ICP with the family, just to highlight a few of the changes we have initiated due to the mapping exercise*

*It is a great tool for understanding and improving the referral process. It highlights all the steps and helps the team members to see the entire process, beginning to end, which was extremely valuable.*

## Referral and Acceptance Process Mapping Exercise Kit Materials

The ***Referral and Acceptance Process Mapping Exercise Kit*** includes the following materials:

- ✓ Instructions for Mapping the Referral and Acceptance Process of Your Juvenile Drug Court Exercise
- ✓ Juvenile Drug Court Eligibility Worksheet
- ✓ Juvenile Drug Court Screening and Assessment Instrument(s) Worksheets
- ✓ Sample Referral and Acceptance Process Map
- ✓ Action Plan Template
- ✓ Pre-Labeled Index Cards for Decision Points and Steps
- ✓ Blank Index Cards
- ✓ Arrows

## Additional Resources

Additional resources to assist Juvenile Drug Court Teams with determining or revising their referral and acceptance process can be found at:

***Starting a Juvenile Drug Court: A Planning Guide***, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. <http://www.ncjfcj.org/resource-library/publications/starting-juvenile-drug-court-planning-guide>

***Practical Tips to Help Juvenile Drug Court Teams Implement the 16 Strategies In Practice***. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. <http://www.ncjfcj.org/resource-library/publications/practical-tips-help-juvenile-drug-court-teams-implement-16-strategies>

***Understanding and Using Brief Interventions in the Juvenile Justice System***. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. <http://www.ncjfcj.org/resource-library/publications/understanding-and-using-brief-interventions-juvenile-justice-system>

***The Right Youth for Your Juvenile Drug Court***. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (in process now)

***Juvenile Drug Court Team Roles and Responsibilities***. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (in process now)

National Drug Court Online Learning System <http://www.ncjfcj.org/resource-library/publications/national-drug-court-online-learning-system>

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