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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Six Strategies to Fill Community Service Gaps





The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges® (NCJFCJ) provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging technical assistance, and research to help the nation's courts, judges, and staff in their important work. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, the NCJFCJ has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families.

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Introduction

In municipalities across the country, there are gaps in the available resources to treat the needs of people living with opioid and other substance use disorders. This guide is a companion to the [Targeted Resource Mapping Toolkit](#) and is designed to help you and your stakeholders fill gaps in services in your own community. Prior to using this guide, you and your stakeholders should complete the Targeted Resource Mapping Process and complete the action plan to outline goals that target service gaps. The strategies outlined in this guide can help implement the goals your team created at the end of the mapping process.

These tools and strategies were developed to address the needs of people with opioid use disorder and substance use disorders (OUD and SUDs), but they can be used to address any resource gaps identified in a community. Once a gap is identified, it is important to define the target population, resource, mission, and goals of the service needed to fill the gap. These six strategies were designed to help any court professional, but particularly judicially-led teams, to begin to fill those gaps. Depending on where you live and the gap you are trying to fill, some of these strategies may be more applicable or easier to implement than others.

Key Definitions and Distinctions

Judicial leadership in the community is an important factor to ensure sufficient resources to serve children and families. In its various resources and resolutions, the NCJFCJ encourages judges to continually assess the availability of and advocate for effective and culturally responsive resources and services. This judicial leadership involves strong and effective collaborative relationships and action among diverse stakeholders.

After completing the [Targeted Resource Mapping](#) process, you may notice more than one gap in resources and services. Some gaps in services are easier to remedy while others are impacted by disparities and barriers that are more challenging to address. Before beginning to fill the gaps it is important to prioritize which gaps to address first. You can prioritize by assessing which gaps will have the highest impact and the fewest challenges to implementation. Once you have identified and defined the gaps in services in your community, you can utilize the following strategies to get started.

Six-Step Mapping Process

● Step 1.

○ Build Relationships

○ One of the most important things you can do to improve services for the people in your community is to develop new relationships with stakeholders and community partners. It is important to think about the many stakeholders who work outside of the court system. For example, representatives from the medical community can share details about programs they administer such as inpatient treatment for mothers and substance-exposed infants that allow mothers and infants to remain together. Building relationships among people who do not typically work together allows for greater insight into community resources, new ideas to solve entrenched issues, and new funding sources. Judicial convening power can be used to bring together people from diverse sectors of the community.

To build new relationships, consider the following activities:

- Identify local and regional organizations that can bring new insight.
- Identify existing community needs assessments in health and behavioral health and treatment.
- Enlist culturally-specific experts and organizations for communities represented in your jurisdiction such as LGBTQIA+, English as a second language, Native American culture, etc., to address barriers to care for specific populations or identify services that already exist in your community.
- Engage local hospital systems and community medical clinics to gain a better understanding of any programs or interventions they may offer.
- Partner with local university programs such as social work, public health, and counseling to help develop program documentation and possibly plan for a program evaluation to sustain programs and interventions.

- Invite directly impacted people into your work. For guidance on authentically engaging people with lived experience, along with additional resources and services to address your gap, review [Strategies for Engaging Youth and Families with Lived Experiences](#).
- Identify and engage local institutions that might provide adequate and appropriate space to host a program or intervention.
- Connect with corporate social responsibility teams from local businesses to identify alignment between your team's goals and the economic and community development goals of the businesses.
- Build rapport and relationships with new partners by inviting them to existing meetings and workgroups.
- Inquire about workgroups and efforts that your new partners are a part of that you can contribute to, such as health department task forces.





● Step 2.

● Leverage Service Provision Across

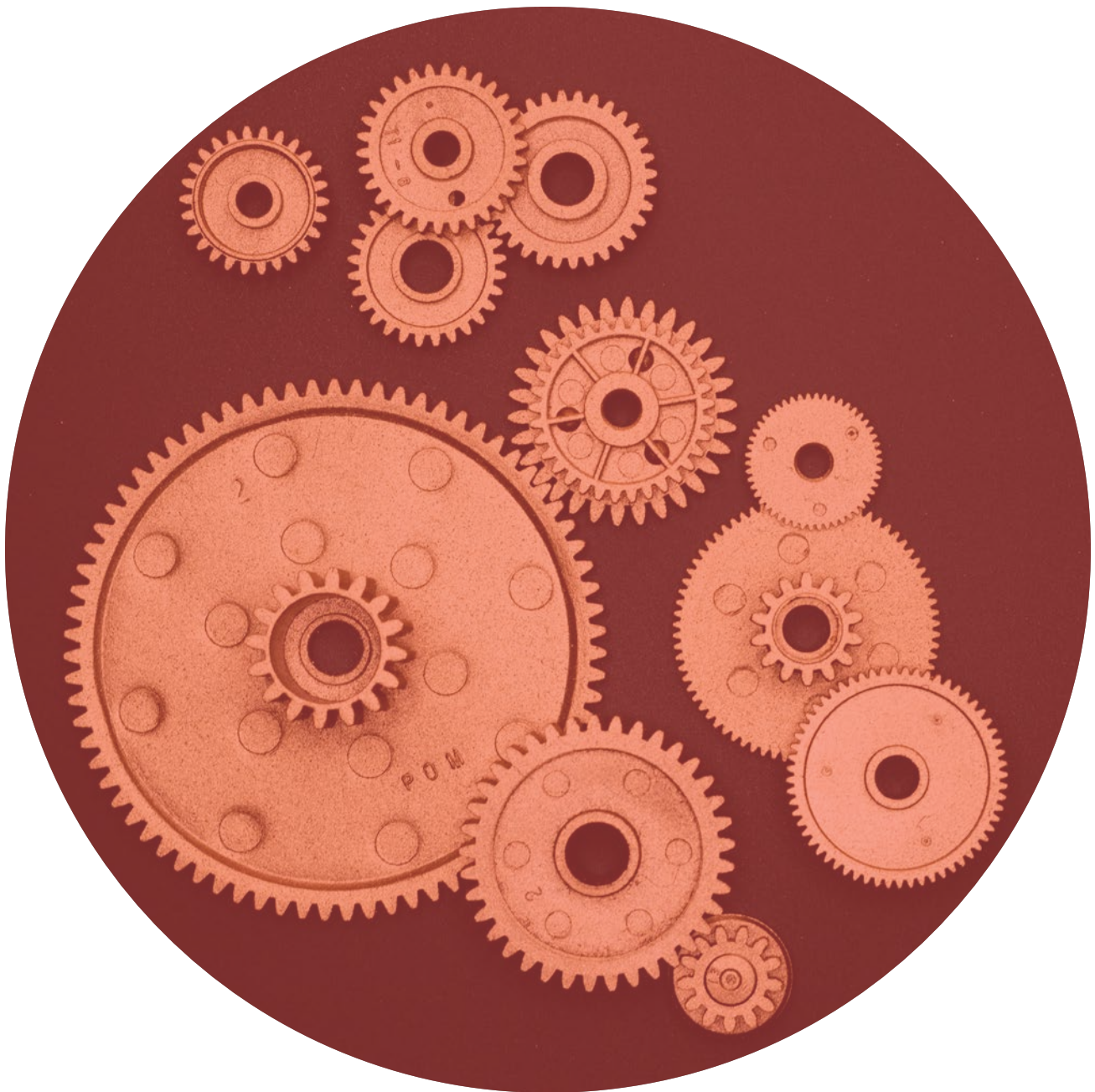
○ Organizations

- Bringing known service providers together can be key to building efficient and cost-effective solutions by bridging the services provided by each unique partner. Collaboratives of stakeholders can do a lot, including building new services, minimizing redundancies, and/or becoming referral networks that allow people to access the full breadth of services. The first step to building a collaborative is bringing together service providers to develop shared goals and values. Plan from the beginning to have benchmarks and performance measures to ensure the collaboration is effective. For a more in-depth discussion of how courts can build strong collaboratives that will address gaps in resources, see the NCJFCJ resource: [Building a Better Collaboration: Facilitating Change in the Court and Child Welfare System](#).

To improve service provisions, consider the following activities:

- Join and participate in existing collaboratives that are working collectively to address services.
- If existing collaboratives are not addressing your specific identified gap, convene a new collaborative or start a sub group to address your specific identified gap.
- Conduct an idea generation session to determine what other organizations might be interested in being part of your collaborative.
- Identify who is not at the table who needs to be in order to move your vision forward.
- Engage current service providers to see if they are able to fill identified gaps.
- Develop memorandums of understanding between existing providers to create a referral network that will provide the full continuum of care needed by individuals.

- Within the collaborative, identify any redundancies in services provision and streamline the process of accessing resources; for example, identify one lead organization to provide case management and systems navigation services for the whole collaborative.
- Advocate for the use of performance measures to monitor progress toward advancing the mission and vision of the group.
- Establish a plan for routine evaluations to ensure performance benchmarks are being met (see the call-out box on evaluating collaboratives).





● Step 3.

● Identify Funding Strategies

● In many instances, addressing gaps in services requires identifying possible funding sources for the development and implementation of a new program. Identifying funding sources can be challenging, but engaging local foundations can help. Become familiar with small and large foundations in your area that focus on human services, substance use, mental health, healthy living, and court systems. Similarly, seek out local, state, and federal grant opportunities that might fit your identified program needs. Familiarize yourself with state and local funding streams through juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, and criminal justice agencies. The completed resource map, directory, and action plan will all be useful when applying for grants as they help to outline your community's specific needs.

To identify funding options, consider the following activities:

- Become familiar with the local landscape of philanthropic organizations.
- Become familiar with county and/or state health department's SUD work.
- Sign up for state and federal funding opportunity announcements from mental health, public health, child welfare, and juvenile justice agencies.
- Connect with local and state child welfare contacts to inquire about the use of Families First Prevention Services Act funding.
- Research the national foundations giving money in the sphere of interest, for example, opioid use disorder and criminal justice reform.



● Step 4.

● Seek Creative Solutions

● The importance of thinking outside the box and identifying creative solutions to barriers and gaps in resources cannot be overstated. Often systems, agencies, and communities may rely on the services or contracted providers that have been traditionally utilized or offered. Community stakeholders must find ways to provide access and overcome barriers that expand what currently exists or what has always been done. Generating new ideas and strategies requires you to engage intentionally in the process of solutions gathering. This process will allow you to discover untapped potential in your community.

To engage the community to identify creative solutions, consider the following:

- Bring together your team for an "anything goes" brainstorming session. There are no wrong answers!
- Enlist community organizers, directly impacted people, and other community members who are not typically included in your planning to bring in a bigger perspective than what is available in the professional community.
- Use creative low-cost/no-cost solutions such as saving money by reducing the redundancies in drug testing to fund your gap in services.
- Utilize technology to increase access to services via telehealth or virtual services. This option may require state initiatives to enhance or implement access to broadband services and internet options. Or work with local libraries/community institutions to develop a private/safe place to hold these meetings.
- Look for research-informed solutions that can be quickly and easily implemented in your community with fidelity.
- Start a nonprofit in your community to provide the missing services directly. To guide your initial steps in the process, refer to [7 \(Easy\) Steps to Building a Nonprofit Group to Support Your Juvenile Court](#).
- Start a program with a local college or university.



● Step 5.

● Find Local Champions

● Many of the service gaps that impact people in your courtroom also affect people outside of the courtroom. This means there are likely other people in your community actively working to create change. While you may be interested in asking these organizations to join your collaborative, also consider joining them in theirs. Judges and other court staff can provide valuable input, perspectives, and gravitas to advocacy efforts. Once you know who is leading advocacy in your area, reach out to these leaders to discuss how your skills can fit into the ongoing work. Be clear about the actionable changes you are seeking but be open to the ideas that advocates are suggesting. Joining together with advocacy organizations can improve everyone's efforts to address service gaps and can amplify the message to state and local officials leading to legislative and financial support to make your community stronger, safer, and healthier.

To identify and engage with local champions, consider these activities:

- Learn more about what judges can and cannot do in advocacy by reviewing NCJFCJ's resource: [Can I or Can't I? Extra-judicial Activity and Judicial Leadership](#).
- Learn the policies and guidelines of your employer regarding advocacy as a private citizen and/or representative of your organization.
- Join individuals and groups advocating for the resources in your community to provide your expertise, skills, and gravitas to the issue at hand.
- Work with your colleagues to educate your fellow court professionals on issues facing the community.
- Create and reserve space in your advocacy for the people you serve to speak directly about their experiences.
- Identify who is working in your local and state government to provide additional resources and services to address your gap.
- Connect with local officials to share your viewpoints and expertise on how these issues are impacting the community.



● Step 6.

○ Partner with Neighboring Communities

○ Despite the lines and boundaries on maps, our cities and communities are deeply interconnected. When filling gaps, it can be helpful to look to neighboring communities and states to see what resources and services are available. Through connecting with service providers in neighboring communities you can learn what services are effective in other communities that could be replicated in your community, or you can develop a plan to allow people in your community to access the services in your neighboring communities. Partnering with neighboring communities can be mutually beneficial by filling gaps on both sides of the boundary and building strong reciprocal relationships between communities.

To engage other communities, consider the following activities:

- Ask community partners and community leaders what resources they know of in other communities.
- Reach out to colleagues in neighboring communities to learn what solutions are working well for them, as well as what resources and services they need.
- Review how transportation barriers are being addressed collectively across the region.
- Work with neighboring communities to find mechanisms to navigate transportation barriers reliably between communities.
- Connect families to technology and other digital services that are low cost or no cost to ensure they can access resources.
- Create reciprocal relationships between neighboring organizations to provide training and services.
- Ensure that families are not overburdened with services that are not easily accessible.

Evaluating Your Efforts



Whether you are working in a collaborative or implementing a new program, it is important to have clear goals. Early discussions should include how to determine if the new program is meeting its goals and has an impact on clients. Developing performance measures based on the program's goals and activities that will help you build evidence that the program is working as it was designed to and having a positive impact will need to be collected.

Performance measures can help answer important questions such as:

- How many clients were served?
- What activities did the clients participate in?
- Are the clients better off after completing the program? And in what way?
- How often did the collaborative meet? How regularly did partners attend?

If you are not meeting your benchmarks, take a moment to assess who is not in the room, who should be, and what resources you need to realize your goal. Don't be afraid to change up your approach if you find you aren't meeting expected milestones.

Develop an Action Plan



With these strategies in hand you can begin the process of developing an action plan to address your gap. Bring together your team and work through the following six questions:

1. Why is this work important to you and your community?
2. What strategies are we planning to implement?
3. How are we going to implement the strategies?
4. Who needs to be involved in the implementation of the strategies?
5. When will this be completed?
6. How will we know that we have been successful?

Use the action plan at the end of this guide to get started!

Conclusion

Gaps in programs and services, including barriers to accessing existing services, are common in our communities. However, it is crucial that juvenile and family courts work with court professionals and community partners to attempt to fill gaps and reduce barriers to access for the children and families that they serve. Juvenile and family court judges, court professionals, and community partners all have a vested interest in fulfilling service gaps to ensure children and families have access to services that meet their needs, empower them to make healthy choices, and result in healthy and thriving individuals and communities. The power of collaboration and relationship building across agencies and institutions, along with the other strategies presented here, can help fill service gaps and create a robust continuum of services for court-involved children and families.

Additional Resources

- [Targeted Resource Mapping Action Plan](#)
- [Strategies for Engaging Youth and Families with Lived Experiences](#)
- [Building a Better Collaboration: Facilitating Change in the Court and Child Welfare System](#)
- [7 Series - 7 Articles with 7 Easy Steps to Improving Your Juvenile Drug Court](#)
- [Can I or Can't I? Extra-judicial Activity and Judicial Leadership](#)

Strategies to fill the Gaps in the Opioid Use Continuum of Care

Action Planning Worksheet

Jurisdiction: _____

Why is this work important to you and your community? _____

Step 1. List any new strategies you may be interested in implementing.	Step 2. How are you going to implement the strategy? (What would be your first three steps to implement this practice?)	Step 3. Who here and who else would you need to involve in these efforts?	Step 4. Target date for completion.	Step 5. How will you know you have been successful? (Think of how you can measure this practice.)

