

THE 10 KEY COMPONENTS OF DRUG COURT

In the formation stage of drug courts, the Office of Justice Drug Courts Program developed ten key components to which each drug court follows to be eligible for federal funding. The ten key components provide an outline of drug court philosophy and requirements. The St. Louis Drug Courts have adopted the ten key components.

1. Drug Court integrates alcohol and other drug treatment services with justice system case processing.

Drug court promotes recovery through a coordinated response to offenders dependent on alcohol and other drugs. Realization of these goals requires a team approach including cooperation and collaboration among judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, probation authorities, law enforcement, treatment providers and other community agencies.

2. Using a non-adversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights.

To facilitate an individual's progress in treatment, the prosecutor and defense counsel must shed their traditional adversarial courtroom relationship and work together as a team. Once a defendant is accepted into drug court, the team's focus is on the participant's recovery and law-abiding behavior, not on the merits of the underlying criminal offense.

3. Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in drug court.

An arrest can be a traumatic event in a person's life. It creates an immediate crisis and can force substance-abusing behavior into the open, making denial difficult. The period immediately after an arrest provides a critical window of opportunity for intervention and introduces the value of substance abuse treatment. Judicial action, taken immediately after the arrest, capitalizes on the crisis nature of both the arrest and the booking process.

4. Drug court provides access to a continuum of alcohol, drug and other related treatment and rehabilitation services.

In drug court, the process begins in the courtroom and continues throughout the participant's drug court involvement. While primarily concerned with criminal activity and substance abuse, the drug court team also needs to address other issues such as mental illness, medical problems, homelessness, educational deficits, and unemployment. If these issues are ignored, they could impact the participant's program compliance and success in treatment. Research has demonstrated that coerced treatment is effective.

5. Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing, including evenings and weekends.

Frequent and random court-ordered drug testing is an essential tool for the participant to remain clean and sober. An accurate testing system is the most objective and efficient way to establish a framework for accountability and to gauge each

participant's progress. Drug testing makes the participant an active and involved part of the treatment process rather than a passive recipient of services.

6. A coordinated strategy governs drug court responses to participant's compliance.

Many participants exhibit a pattern of positive urine tests within the first months following admission. When this occurs, immediate sanctions are applied. Because addiction takes a long time to develop and many factors contribute to chemical dependency, it is rare that an individual stops using when treatment begins. Although drug court professionals recognize that relapse may be part of recovery, continued use is not condoned and a coordinated strategy, including a continuum of responses to each relapse or other issues of non-compliance is essential. Drug court must reward cooperation as well as response to non-compliance. Small rewards, such as praise from the Drug Court Commissioner, increased privileges, and lessened restrictions, have an important effect on a participant's sense of purpose and accomplishment.

7. Ongoing judicial interaction with each drug court participant is essential.

The Drug Court Commissioner is a member of the drug court team. Drug Court Commissioners conduct drug court sessions and staffing, monitors and reviews the participant's progress in drug court, encourages and rewards appropriate behavior, and discourages and sanctions inappropriate behavior. Ongoing judicial supervision communicates to participants, often for the first time, that someone in authority cares about their progress and program success.

8. Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of drug court goals and gauge effectiveness.

Coordinated management, monitoring, and evaluation systems are fundamental to the effective operation of a drug court. Drug courts strive to demonstrate tangible outcomes and cost-effectiveness; thus there are systems in place to monitor daily activities, evaluating the quality and effectiveness of provided service, and producing longitudinal evaluations.

9. Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective drug court planning, implementation, and operations.

Interdisciplinary education exposes criminal justice professionals to treatment issues and treatment professionals to criminal justice issues. It also develops a shared understanding of the values, goals and operating procedures of both the criminal justice and treatment components.

10. Forging partnerships among drug court, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances drug court effectiveness.

Because of its unique position in the criminal justice system, drug court is well suited to develop coalitions among community-based service organizations, public criminal justice agencies and treatment delivery systems. Drug court is a partnership among organizations dedicated to a coordinated and cooperative approach to the drug addicted offender.