



SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

**Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Problem Solving Court Program Office**

**Renewal Program
Accreditation of Adult Drug and DUI Courts**

Released April, 2015

INTRODUCTION

In August, 2011, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court approved the Accreditation Program for Adult Drug and DUI Courts. Accreditation is awarded to programs that adhere to the Ten Key Components of Drug Court and base their operation on evidence based best practices.

Accreditation is a three part process which involves (1) a review of documents developed to guide the operation of the program, (2) verification that team members have met the minimum requirement for training in the problem solving court field and (3) observation of the drug court operation. A report of findings from this review, including recommendations for program improvement, is prepared and provided to the Problem Solving Court Program Administrator (Program Administrator) and the Accreditation Advisory Committee to the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOPC). The Committee's recommendations, along with the findings of the report, are used to develop a recommendation to the Supreme Court regarding accreditation of the applicant court.

The Accreditation Program has exceeded expectations. Not only were the goals of the program attained but added benefits have been realized by both the individual courts and the Problem Solving Court Program Office (PSCPO). Counties have indicated the mere process of putting the application together has led programs to revisit and update the practices, policies and documents used by the problem solving court. A review of the program's operation by an outsider has highlighted opportunities for both improvement and enhancement. The process has given the PSCPO an opportunity to learn of the many innovative practices in the field and share these practices with programs throughout the Commonwealth.

APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL

According to the Accreditation Program Guidelines, initial accreditation is valid for three (3) years. In February, 2015, the Program Administrator brought members of the Accreditation Advisory Committee together to discuss the next phase of the Accreditation Program.¹

After lengthy discussion, it was decided that in lieu of programs participating in a full review process, an Accreditation Renewal Program would be more effective. Programs that earn renewal will retain their accredited status for an additional three (3) years, after

¹ Volume II of *Adult Drug Court Best Practices Standards* was originally scheduled for release in June, 2014. Publication was postponed until January, 2015, at which time another postponement was announced. Given the delays and uncertainty of the final release, it was decided to proceed with the updates.

which the program would make application and go through the full accreditation review procedure in order to retain its status.

Accredited adult drug and DUI courts in good standing may seek renewal by completing the attached application within three (3) months of the original accreditation effective date.² Applications should be directed to the Program Administrator and should include:

- Application signed by the President Judge and Presiding Judge of the problem solving court (see Attachment #1)
- List of team members, including name, role and assignment dates
- Policy and Procedure Manual, last update noted
- Participant Handbook (or equivalent), last update noted
- Memoranda of Understanding, last update noted
- Most recent evaluation, if completed since last review
- Documentation of training

Applications will be acknowledged, via email, by the Program Administrator to the point of contact (POC) listed on the application.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Within three (3) weeks of the Program Administrator's receipt of an Application for Renewal of Accreditation, an AOPC Program Analyst will schedule a conference call with the point of contact (POC) identified on the application to review the recommendations from the original accreditation report and to schedule a site visit.

The site visit will focus on any changes in the program and/or team, as well as any progress made on the recommendations from the initial report. It is not expected that a county will have addressed every recommendation listed. During the site visit, the AOPC representative will, at a minimum, observe the staffing, court session and meet with the presiding judge and court coordinator.

Two significant changes in the problem solving court field have occurred since Pennsylvania's Accreditation Program began.

² The PSCPO has recognized the backlog in accreditation that resulted from the development and implementation of PAJCIS. Programs with accreditation expiring between January and June of 2015 will be grandfathered into the renewal process and may work with the PSCPO to complete the renewal process without losing accredited status. For programs affected by this delay, applications should be received within six months of the release of these program guidelines.

In the 25 years since the first drug court was started in Miami/Dade County, ample research has been completed on the efficacy and impact of drug courts. Fortunately, we have moved beyond the question of “Do drug courts work?” to the question of “What works best in Drug Courts?” *Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components* was published in 1997 as a framework for these programs. These components were revisited in 2008 and research confirmed fidelity to the key components was essential if a program was to realize its best outcomes. In 2013, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) took things a step further and published *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards, Volume I* to assist programs in operationalizing aspects of the Key Components. Standards were developed only when justified by ample, reliable and convincing research.

The research supporting these standards is not new. On the contrary, it has been available to the field for several years. NADCP simply took the body of available research, categorized it, and when justified, consolidated that body of knowledge into a best practice standard. As research in the field of problem solving courts continues to grow, standards will continue to be developed. Drug court professionals should not look at these standards as all encompassing. In managing programs, it is important for teams to consider valid research findings that go beyond what is addressed in these standards as they evaluate the operation of their programs. The PSCPO will use the *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards* as an assessment tool during the accreditation review and renewal process.

In 2013, Pennsylvania’s Problem Solving Adult and Juvenile Court Information System (PAJCIS) was launched. PAJCIS provides programs with a unified, automated case management system. The analytical component of the system uses the case management data to generate performance information for individual programs as well as for the PSCPO. At any time, study groups can easily be created in PAJCIS to analyze data specific to the needs of the program or the AOPC. This is the essence of Key Component #8. The data available through PAJCIS will also make outcome or impact evaluations much more affordable for counties. Programs must be fully utilizing PAJCIS to retain their accredited status.

Document Review

As during initial accreditation, a review of the Policy and Procedures Manual, the Participant Handbook (or equivalent) and Memoranda of Understanding between participating agencies will be conducted. The most recent update of these documents will be considered, noting any changes to the documents since accreditation. Particular attention will be paid to action taken on any recommendations from the last review.

Training Requirement

Key Component #9 stresses the importance of continuing interdisciplinary education. In order for accredited status to be renewed, each team member must earn at

least six (6) hours of continuing education credits annually in the problem solving court field.³ Although team membership may vary slightly from program to program, at a minimum team members required to provide documentation of training include the judge, defense bar, prosecutor, probation and treatment provider. In many districts, the probation officer fills the coordinator's role. If someone other than probation fills the coordinator's role, that individual will also be required to document training.

Written verification of this training, such as a certificate or letter confirming attendance, is required for credits earned.

Recommendation:

A report of the findings from this review process will be provided to the Program Administrator. If renewal of the accredited status of the applicant court requires further consideration, the report will be forwarded to the Accreditation Advisory Committee for review by committee members.

The President Judge and the Presiding Judge of the problem solving court will be notified, in writing, of the outcome of the renewal application.

CONCLUSION

Professionals in the drug court field strive for the best possible outcomes for offenders diverted into these programs. Adherence to the best practices known to the field provides some assurance that these best outcomes will be realized. Pennsylvania's Accreditation Program, which includes this renewal process was developed, in part, to assist in this effort.

³ It should be noted, this is an increase from the original requirement.

REFERENCES

----- (2011) Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, *Accreditation Program Adult Drug and DUI Courts*

----- (2013) National Association of Drug Court Professionals, *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards, Vol. I*

Carey, S. et al (2009) *Best Practices in Adult Drug Courts: Reduce Recidivism and Costs*. Powerpoint.

Marlowe, D. (2009) *Best Practices in Drug Court*. Powerpoint.

United States Department of Justice. (1997) Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance. *"Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components."*



APPLICATION
for
RENEWAL
SUPREME COURT ACCREDITATION

Adult Drug/DUI Court Program

Signature of President Judge

Signature of Presiding Judge

Name of Court

Date of Application



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
Adult Drug Court Program

Renewal Application
Supreme Court Accreditation

Date of Application: _____ Date of Accreditation: _____

Name of Program: _____

Type of Drug Court: _____
(hybrid, post-plea, Drug, DUI, VOP, etc. Indicate all that apply)

Has anything significant changed regarding the structure of your program? If so, briefly describe: _____

Point of Contact: _____ (name)
_____ (position)
_____ (email)
_____ (phone)

Presiding Judge: _____
Assignment Date: _____

Coordinator: _____
Assignment Date: _____

Attachments Required:

- (1) Policy and Procedures Manual
- (2) Participant Handbook
- (3) List of drug court team members include date assigned to problem solving court
- (4) Any evaluation since Accreditation
- (5) Memoranda of Understanding
- (6) Documentation of training requirement

Instructions:

- Applications must be signed by the President Judge and Presiding Judge over the Problem Solving Court.
- Any triggering events may result in an interim review of the program status. Triggering events might include but are not limited to a change in stakeholders (judge, district attorney, defense bar), loss of participation of stakeholders, change in treatment facility licensing, or a change in presiding judge.
- Applications, with attachments, should be forwarded to:

Problem Solving Courts Program Office
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
1515 Market Street, Suite 1414
Philadelphia, PA 19102
- Receipt of your application will be directed to the point of contact listed on the application. Any questions that may arise during the review process will also be directed to this point of contact.
- An electronic version of this application is available from the Problem Solving Court Program Office.