

Developing a Mental Health Court: An Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Facilitating the Delivery of the Curriculum

For individuals who are facilitating the curriculum for a group, this section provides advice on preparing for and leading the training, offering suggestions for space and materials and tips for creating an optimal learning environment. For guidance on coordinating use of the curriculum in your jurisdiction, including selecting a facilitator, choosing a delivery schedule, convening the group, and collecting data to inform the group's discussion, please see [Coordinating the Delivery of the Curriculum](#).

Preparing to Facilitate*

Determine the needs of your team

If possible, reach out to all participants directly. This will help establish a good rapport and make each participant feel like an important part of the team. In addition to breaking the ice, these one-on-one interactions provide an opportunity to ask:

- What type of criminal justice and/or mental health training have participants already had?
- Have they participated in any other type of problem-solving court or criminal justice/mental health collaboration?
- What prompted their interest and involvement in this project?
- What are their goals for the training?
- Do they have any concerns about or objections to mental health courts or other forms of diversion or alternatives to incarceration for individuals with mental illnesses?
- Can they help you collect any data in advance of the training?

Consider convening a smaller group of participants beforehand to review the curriculum and brainstorm on how to apply it to their jurisdiction. You'll get some valuable insight into the jurisdiction's challenges, while also starting to build relationships with the team.

Learn about each participant's professional background

This way, you can identify anyone in the group who has relevant prior experience or knowledge on a given subject and consider enlisting him/her as a co-facilitator for that topic. You should also try to learn whether there's any history of partnerships or, alternatively, tension among particular group members. This knowledge will give you a better sense of what topics to cover in detail, questions to ask and "buttons to push," and topics or subjects to avoid.

*For a *Checklist for Facilitators*, please see Resource 1 on page 6.

Meticulously review the curriculum materials

The more familiar you are with the materials, the more spontaneous and interactive you will be in the training sessions. Flag any points that the group might need to spend extra time on or that may raise points of conflict or spark interesting conversation. Review the Activities Guides particularly closely to plan your approach and anticipate questions.

Personalize the curriculum material

Shape the curriculum material to the needs and culture of your jurisdiction. This will make it more relevant, useful, and interesting for participants. Think about stories or examples from past experience that illustrate particular concepts. You may want to create an annotated “facilitator’s agenda” that includes these examples and flags important questions for the group or potential areas of disagreement. You might even design some of your own Activities for the group to complete or assign reading relevant to your community.

Provide a clear written overview of logistics

Identify how much time is needed for the training and provide a schedule so that participants can plan accordingly. Consider giving participants tasks to complete before meeting to prepare them to hit the ground running, but do not make these initial tasks burdensome. Finally, make sure participants have directions to the training location.

Prepare materials and space

The group will require:

- A large room that can comfortably fit up to 15 people and is conducive to group discussion. A conference room with a large table or several tables arranged in a square or circle will work best
- It may also help to have a second room or quiet space in a hallway available for breakout meetings
- White board or a pad of large paper
- Markers
- Tape or an easel (if using paper)
- Extra supplies for participants (e.g., note pads, pens, printouts of curriculum materials)
- If possible, food and water bottles. These sessions can be long, and providing food is a great way to communicate sensitivity to people’s needs and keep people focused and motivated

If the group will be watching the Presentations together, you’ll also need:

- Internet access
- A computer that has Adobe Reader and good speakers
- A projector

While Facilitating

Getting participants interested

It's important to make the training experience as enjoyable as possible for participants, and that participants feel comfortable with you and respect you. Your relationship with the participants will likely go beyond the actual period of training, as you will probably play an ongoing role in the program's operations.*

First and foremost, try to make the experience relevant and engaging for everyone. A key way to do this is to maintain a high level of interaction so that the participants find their way through the training rather than simply following your lead. Allow time for participants to tell their stories and share anecdotes about their work. Avoid lecturing for extended periods. Rather, listen to the group and use your responses to issues they raise as opportunities to provide information. This will help you convey the training information in your own voice.

Help the group members find the questions that will link what they are learning with what they do on a day-to-day basis. You can personalize the material by inserting relevant anecdotes and perspective; you should refrain from inserting opinions that may alienate participants, however. It's also a good idea to vary the delivery method; a combination of discussion, lecturing, and group activities works well. The curriculum provides suggestions for the best ways to deliver specific content.

Striking the right tone is also important. A good facilitator knows the material and can navigate easily through the relevant information. S/he is also an active learner and invites everyone in the group to teach what they know. Training is a collaborative process, and you should make participants feel comfortable and invite them to offer their expertise on a particular subject by leading discussion or presenting on it. Be careful to avoid judgmental or dismissive statements or coming across as authoritarian. Try not to get offended when challenged. Rather, slow the process down and ask the group to explore the contentious issue without judgment. Disagreements are opportunities to demonstrate that mental health court teams contain different and often contradictory perspectives and responsibilities. The group will need to learn how to work through these differences in a respectful way that does not always require reaching consensus.

Reinforcing key themes and goals

It's important to take the necessary time to establish the goals of the training, both at the beginning of the entire experience and at the start of individual sessions. Building a foundation allows you to reiterate key themes of the training. Training goals are identified at the beginning of every module's Presentation and within the Activities Guides. Introducing the goals of each stage of the training will help people stay focused and help you keep the group moving in the right direction.

Managing time

Watch the clock carefully and make sure the group progresses at the right pace. To help, the Activities Guides provide time estimates for each individual Activity. Be sure to schedule enough time for the group to reflect on and discuss issues—or, if you have limited time, rather than trying to cram in every Activity, pick the most important Activities that you want to make sure the group has time to complete. It's important that the group doesn't feel rushed and has enough time to digest complex issues and materials. At the same time, an effective facilitator helps keep the group focused and on topic, and isn't reluctant to interject when the conversation strays. You should also make sure to schedule enough time for breaks, including lunch.

*The extent of this role will vary; facilitators from within the jurisdiction will almost certainly play an ongoing leadership role on the court team, while a trainer from outside the jurisdiction—for example, a statewide trainer—may not have a role in the program's day-to-day operations, but may be involved in an advisory capacity.

Eliciting the group's participation

Training is most successful when all group members participate, so ensuring full participation is one of your most important tasks. At the same time, some participants will naturally be more active contributors to discussions. Icebreakers are helpful as a way to increase participants' comfort with each other and the training environment.* You should also ask for volunteers and call on everyone at different points in the training. Check in with members of the group regularly to make sure participants are comfortable with the material and overall experience. By spending time before the training learning about individual participants, you will be better prepared to make the material relevant to everyone's unique experiences and perspectives—and able to ask focused and challenging questions. Make an effort to validate opinions and respect individuals' expertise and experience. Be careful not to demonstrate favoritism toward any one participant. That said, you should recognize that the judge is often the team's natural leader so frequently involve the judge to help facilitate discussion.

Creating a positive, upbeat atmosphere

One of your primary responsibilities is to ensure that training participants work together in a collegial and cooperative way. This is particularly important because the training provides the foundation for a long-term collaboration that requires everyone to work well together. To do this, make sure that no one person monopolizes conversations or “bullies” others. If this situation arises, talk to the individual privately in a firm but respectful way. If group discussion ever gets overly animated or hostile, de-escalate the situation. A good technique is to ask the group to take a step back and reflect on why this disagreement exists; self-reflection can prompt deeper discussion and neutralize personal feelings.

You should also be open to feedback from the group and do whatever is possible to make members feel that their views and desires are respected. One effective technique to make group members feel heard and valued is to repeat or paraphrase comments by participants back to the group at various points. Also let them know that you are available to answer questions and provide assistance between training sessions. Do not wait for participants to contact you. Rather, check in with the group members by phone, e-mail, or in person between sessions, acknowledging their contributions to the group process and perhaps following up on a comment they made or question they asked during the prior session. This effort will strengthen rapport and bring a more conversational tone to the training sessions themselves.

Encouraging active engagement

Some of the videos in the Presentations and Activities Guides show the Bonneville County (ID) Mental Health Court team (a Bureau of Justice Assistance Mental Health Court Learning Site) discussing their experiences operating a mental health court; others show the team engaging in simulated team meetings and discussing hypothetical program participants. Convey to participants that the Bonneville program emerged as a result of the priorities and resources in that community, as well as due to the efforts of particular individuals. While there are many impressive aspects to its work, the Bonneville team is not shown as a “model” mental health court team; for example, some may note the absence of a defense attorney at team meetings. Rather, the Bonneville team represents real people facing real challenges in a mental health court setting. Encourage participants to think about which aspects of the Bonneville team's approach they might apply to your community, and what they might do differently.

Making the training “stick”

There are a number of ways to make sure participants take the lessons of the training and apply them in their future work. Tying the training to broader goals—and specifying these goals at the beginning and reiterating them throughout the training—can help. You should also consider assigning homework to reinforce knowledge. (The curriculum provides Quizzes for each instructional module.) Ensure that important agreements and take-away points are documented—ask

*For a guide to icebreakers with ideas for over 80 activities, click [here](#).

for a volunteer note taker or assign someone to the task. Push the group to develop an action plan that will take them from training to being ready to run a functional mental health court.

Send us Feedback

Please take the time to complete this [online survey](#), as your input will help us improve the curriculum and make accompanying materials more responsive to the needs of facilitators like you. It will also help us keep the curriculum accurate, relevant, and up-to-date.

In addition, please ask curriculum participants to take a few minutes to complete it.

Resource 1: Checklist for Facilitators

Preparation

- Determine team needs.** Consider contacting team members to ask about their backgrounds and goals. Ask them if they can help you gather data before the training.
- Learn about participants.** Identify any team members with relevant prior experience or knowledge and consider enlisting them as co-facilitators on particular topics—the judge will likely be a great resource.
- Review curriculum materials.** Flag issues the team will need to spend particular time on. Review the Activities Guides closely to plan your approach and anticipate potential questions. If you have limited time, prioritize the most important Activities for your team to complete.
- Personalize curriculum material.** Think about your past experiences—or those of team members—that illustrate particular concepts. Consider creating an annotated “facilitator’s agenda” that includes these examples and/or creating your own Activities for the group to complete.
- Provide written logistics information.** Identify how much time is needed for the training and provide a schedule so that participants can plan accordingly. Consider giving participants tasks to complete before meeting to prepare them to hit the ground running, but do not make these initial tasks burdensome. Finally, make sure participants have directions to the training location.

Space and Supplies

- Room that can fit up to 15 people (also recommended: second room for breakout meetings)
- White board or a pad of large paper
- Markers
- Tape or an easel (if using paper)
- Supplies for participants, such as notepads, pens, and printouts of curriculum materials
- Food and beverages (always appreciated)
- For group viewing of Presentations:
 - Internet access and Adobe Flash Player
 - Computer with good speakers
 - Projector