

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS
FY 2012 Budget Justification
Program Evaluations

Program evaluation is critical to monitoring Court activities, gauging the effectiveness of court programs, and determining future funding requests. Following is information on the Courts' program evaluation activities for FY 2009 and FY 2010.

1. Fathering Re-entry Court: Process Evaluation

With grant funds from the U.S. Department of Justice's Prisoner Reentry Initiative Grant Program, and in partnership with the Federal Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia (CSOSA) and the District's Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Superior Court established a Fathering Re-entry Court (FRC) Program. In November 2007 to provide services to non-custodial male parents with outstanding child support obligations who are returning to the District of Columbia upon their release from incarceration. Specific FRC goals are to enhance the employment skills of program participants and monitor their reentry into the workforce, to contribute to the financial and emotional well being of their children by staying current with their support payments and to increase contact with their children by improving co-parenting relationships with the custodial parent(s) of their children. The voluntary, court supervised and sanctions-based program provides judicial oversight, case management services and employment counseling. Grant funds were used to support a dedicated program manager, contractual services, including case management (to coordinate treatment plans), employment counseling (to advise participants about job-seeking and secure continuous employment) and an independent process evaluation.

Through a competitive bidding and selection process, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) was selected to conduct the six month evaluation. In December 2009, the NCSC completed the evaluation, which documented the development of the FRC Program, assessed how the program was implemented and modified and whether expected services were being delivered. As concluded by the NSCS, the FRC is an innovative program that follows many of the best practices suggested in both the problem-solving and re-entry court fields. FRC addresses important needs of the community, including reintegrating offenders into productive community life and providing participants' children with both financial and parental support.

2. East of the River Community Court

The Superior Court of the District of Columbia established the East of the River Community Court (ERCC) in September 2002 to address the high rates of poverty, crime and disorder experienced in the Sixth and Seventh Police Districts. The ERCC adjudicates non-domestic violence, U.S. misdemeanor offenses, such as drug possession, sexual solicitation, unlawful entry and simple assault. With the support of both federal and local criminal justice agencies, ERCC attempts to identify and re-direct eligible defendants into suitable diversion programs. Through this process, ERCC focuses on individual accountability, individual treatment and repairing damage incurred by the community through punitive measures grounded in restorative justice (e.g., community services).

In 2009, after several years of operations, the Courts selected the ERCC to be the focus of an independent evaluation supported with the Courts' FY 2009 appropriated funds. Through the Courts' standard procurement process, which is modeled after federal procurement practices, the Courts selected the Westat research firm to conduct an impact evaluation of the ERCC. The primary objective of this research, which is currently underway, is to determine whether defendants involved in ERCC diversion programs have a low rate of recidivism than a comparison group of defendants not involved in ERCC diversion programs.

The project has been in operation since November 2009 and is expected to conclude in January 2011. Recent project activities have included the finalizing of a research and study design, determination of essential definitions such as "recidivism," selection of the relevant study and comparison groups of defendants, data collection on these groups and the development of a database suitable for analysis. It is anticipated that preliminary data analysis will commence in August 2010.

3. Study to Examine Reoffending Activity of Post-Disposition Youth in the District of Columbia

Also with FY 2009 appropriated funds, the Courts entered into a contract with the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to conduct a study on the reoffending activity of post-disposition youth in the District of Columbia. This study examines youths who received a *probation* or *commitment* disposition in calendar year 2007 and examines the differences and similarities among each group. The primary goals of the study include determining the effects associated with probation vs. commitment dispositions, developing baseline information for the future assessment of performance measures and assisting in the development of a business model to track youth reoffending in the future.

The research study commenced in January 2010 and has a research and implementation timeline of 24 months. During the initial 12 month period, the NCJJ will assess the relative effects of probation vs. commitment dispositions on youths reoffending behavior and developing baseline information. During months 12-24, the NCJJ will assist the DCSC Information Technology and Social Services Divisions and Family Court Operations with the design and implementation of a business process and information system design through which the Courts will be able to routinely track and report on the future reoffending behavior of youths in the District of Columbia.

Since the commencement of the research, the NCJJ has conducted site visits with principal stakeholders, finalized a research design and data analysis plan, collected data, and begun to merge and structure the dataset in preparation for analysis. Preliminary, summary statistics on probationers and committed youth are expected in January 2010, with the work continuing through FY 2011 until its completion in January 2012.

4. District of Columbia Family Treatment Court (FTC)

The Family Treatment Court (FTC) is a problem solving court administered through the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Since its inception in calendar year 2003, the FTC has had as its goal the establishment of safe and permanent homes for children who have suffered neglect by their substance dependent mothers. The FTC focuses on treating mothers charged with neglect who desire substance abuse treatment in order to address the conditions that led to the alleged abuse or neglect of their child or children.

The FTC has been modeled to include several best practices such as frequent judicial contact and oversight, a 15 month comprehensive substance abuse treatment program, involving both inpatient residential and outpatient community care components, enhanced parental skills training and the capacity to live with up to four of one's minor children under the age of 10 in the treatment facility. Overall, the FTC is an alternative to the costly placement of children in foster care and the continuing potential substance abuse of custodial parents.

In FY 2009, the Courts, with appropriated funds, selected the FTC to be the subject of an independent program evaluation. The Westat research firm was selected through the Courts' competitive bidding process and is under contract to conduct an 18 month study of the FTC. The evaluation is intended to assist the Courts in determining whether the program has been implemented as designed, document any available results, identify any barriers to program participation and recommend remedies and program modifications, as needed. At present, the research firm has completed stakeholder meetings and reviewed program policies and procedures to obtain critical information on the development and operation of the program, has identified the numbers of program referrals and those that have completed the program and is beginning to collect data on each program participant, using a variety of research methods including record review, interviews and focus groups of participants. The research is being conducted on schedule and is expected to conclude by mid-fiscal year 2011.