

Veterans Treatment Court Enhancement Initiative Phase II Application Guide for Pilot Courts

Project Overview

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and Justice Programs Office (JPO), a center within the School of Public Affairs at American University, have partnered for Phase II of the Veterans Treatment Court Enhancement Initiative (“the initiative”) to add up to four pilot sites in implementing the first set of tools designed specifically for veterans treatment courts (VTCs). Phase II of the initiative focuses on the development and administration of robust education, training, and technical assistance to pilot sites to ensure the following VTC-specific tools are implemented with fidelity.

- 1. Short Screener (Pre-Adjudication):** A short screening tool will identify veterans as they enter the justice system and measure their risk of re-offending. This tool will help justice system officials identify suitable candidates for Veterans Treatment Court and refer them for a full assessment.
- 2. Comprehensive Assessment:** A comprehensive risk-need assessment tool will enable Veterans Treatment Court staff to learn more about individuals’ criminogenic risks and needs. This information will help Veterans Treatment Courts confirm participant eligibility and understand each participant’s risk-need profile for case planning purposes.
- 3. Case Planning Protocol:** A set of case planning guidelines will help Veterans Treatment Courts develop individualized supervision and case plans for each participant based on their risk-need profiles.

During Phase II, up to four VTCs will be selected to receive comprehensive training and technical assistance (TTA) and utilize the tools in 2019. Phase II sites will be selected based on criteria outlined in this application. JPO and NIC will invite all operational VTCs in the United States to apply.

Tentative Project Timeline

Solicitation release date: October 10, 2018

Application due date: November 9, 2018

Announcement of successful applicants: December 5, 2018

Initial planning conference calls: January-February 2019

Initial site visit: March 2019

Length of pilot phase: 8 months (January-August 2019)

Initiative Background

Research has established that clinical interventions are most effective when based on risk-need-responsivity (RNR) principles. These principles hold that the type and intensity of services (treatment and supervision) should correspond to the individual's risk of re-offending and target specific criminogenic needs. However, VTCs have been operating in the absence of evidence-based tools specifically designed for their programs and target population. Therefore, Phase I of the initiative utilized the latest research on trauma, substance use disorders, and other issues affecting veterans to develop the first set of tools designed to meet the unique needs of veterans in the criminal justice system and provide them with the evidence-based resources needed to serve veterans as effectively as possible.

In Phase I, The Center for Court Innovation (CCI) in collaboration with NIC and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) developed a VTC-specific screening tool, comprehensive assessment, and case planning protocol (see page 1). CCI identified and worked with three pilot sites to finalize the automated tools: two test sites in Tampa, Florida and Billings, Montana along with one site under technical assistance in King County, Seattle, Washington.

Phase II of the initiative focuses on implementation fidelity. JPO has partnered with NIC to develop, administer, and evaluate a comprehensive evidence-based TTA program. The TTA is a robust effort to educate, train, and provide technical assistance to ensure implementation fidelity of the tools developed during Phase I. In Phase II, up to four VTCs will be selected as pilot sites to receive virtual and in-person TTA to implement the first set of VTC-specific tools with fidelity.

Phase II Pilot Courts

JPO, in collaboration with the NIC, will select up to four pilot sites for TTA and implementation. The selected VTCs will implement the tools with JPO's assistance. JPO staff will provide TTA on RNR and the use of the tools and work with the pilot sites to collaboratively determine the appropriate stage of case processing at which to apply the tools and how to do so within their current budgets and operations. Pilot courts will be expected to use the tools in accordance with the training and will have access to ongoing technical assistance throughout the project period. JPO will also provide performance measures and data collection procedures to enable the pilot courts to track key indicators related to screening, assessment, and case planning.

The short screener will identify potential VTC participants and be implemented at an early stage, such as arraignment or at the first appearance after arraignment. VTCs will then utilize the comprehensive assessment to identify participants' criminogenic and non-criminogenic risk factors and needs. The comprehensive assessment will produce a risk score and a list of treatment needs for each participant. Finally, the case planning protocol will guide VTC staff in translating a participant's risk and need profile into an individualized case plan.

Benefits of Becoming a Pilot Site

There are approximately 23 million veterans living in the United States. Due to recent and ongoing conflicts around the world, the United States is facing a growing number of veterans who return home and struggle with mental illness related to their military service, along with substance abuse and other challenges, which can place them at risk for justice system involvement. VTCs offer an innovative holistic approach to addressing veterans' needs and reducing future involvement with the criminal justice system. However, there is a need for evidence-based tools that identify the criminogenic risks and clinical needs of court-involved veterans. Research has consistently shown that clinical interventions are most effective when they are based on RNR principles, which hold that the type and intensity of treatment and supervision services should align with an offender's risk of re-offending and target their specific criminogenic needs.

Although pilot sites will not receive direct financial assistance, selected courts will be among the first to have access to the only specialized screening, assessment, and case planning tools for VTCs and will be the first to access their TTA. Following the pilot phase, participating VTCs may continue to use the tools. When used correctly following the TTA, these tools enhance courts' ability to accurately assess risk and needs and develop appropriate case plans for VTC participants. JPO will provide on-site and virtual TTA to court teams on RNR theory and on proper administration of the VTC-specific tools within their existing budgets.

Responsibilities of Pilot Sites

Sites must be in a position to make all relevant staff members available for three consecutive business days in spring 2019 for the purpose of initial on-site training by JPO staff. Following the initial site visit, sites can expect regularly scheduled check-ins by phone, and further on-site and virtual assistance from JPO staff if required.

Pilot sites will be expected to implement the short screener (anticipated length: 15-20 minutes per interview) with each defendant who is arraigned on an eligible charge; the comprehensive assessment (anticipated length: 30-60 minutes per interview) with each participant who enters or is being considered for admission into the VTC; and the case planning protocol with each participant who is accepted into the VTC. Pilot sites will also be expected to provide the JPO with all relevant data and feedback collected during the TTA and tool application through a secure website. The JPO will work with each site on data security protocol and data sharing agreements and ensure compliance with existing court policies.

Sites will be asked to commit to participating in the pilot project for eight months (January-August 2018) and will be expected to use the tools in accordance with the TTA during Phase II participation. Following the pilot phase, participating VTCs may continue to use the tools.

Application Process

VTCs interested in applying must complete the attached application form. In addition, applicants must include a Letter of Interest not exceeding two pages, double spaced, using 12-point Times Roman font with 1-inch margins.

Completed applications must be emailed to JPO at justice@american.edu with a subject, “VTC Enhancement Initiative Application.”

A complete application must include:

- Letter of Interest
 - States the court’s intention to be considered as a pilot site
 - Explains why the court wishes to participate in this initiative
 - Describes any obstacles to implementation that the court anticipates
- Letters of Commitment or a Memorandum of Understanding from Key Stakeholders
- Completed Application Form

Submission Deadline

Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. EST on November 9, 2018.

Selection Process

Applications will be evaluated through a two-tiered process. Submitted applications will first be reviewed and scored by JPO staff. The JPO and NIC has comprised a multi-disciplinary committee of subject matter experts that will conduct an in-depth review of the highest ranked projects and select up to four pilot sites. Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Length of operation (VTC must be operational for at least two years)
2. Enrollment and referral numbers
3. Operations and protocols
4. Internal data collection capacity and willingness to securely share case-level data with JPO following data and security protocols
5. Commitment from all stakeholders
6. Adherence to the ten key components of a Veterans Treatment Court (see attached)

Questions

For questions about this application process, please email Preeti Menon at pmenon@american.edu or call Justice Programs Office at 202-885-2875.