PROJECT LAZARUS®

Wilkes LEAD
Wilkes Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion

PLAYBOOK

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NCDHHS



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Purpose

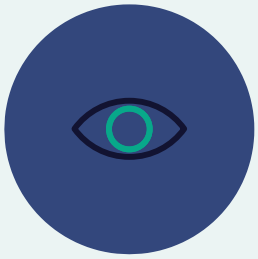
This playbook translates the approved NCDHHS grant narrative into clear, operational guidance that supports day-to-day implementation while laying the groundwork for long-term system change. It is designed to help Wilkes County and its partners move confidently from award to execution, maintain compliance with NCDHHS expectations, and build practices that are sustainable beyond the grant period. We will cover the "Who" "What" "When" and by "Whom" of the entire grant.



Wilkes LEAD is based on an evidence-based model designed to enhance public safety and community health by establishing a community-based alternative to jail and prosecution for individuals whose unlawful behavior is driven by unmet needs related to substance use, mental health challenges, and/or poverty. The program diverts non-violent offenders into non-punitive, collaborative systems of care and response. This playbook operationalizes that purpose by showing how within the framework of the LEAD Model, each partner's daily work connects to shared outcomes such as reduced overdoses and harm, fosters stabilization and recovery, reduces crime, and improves public safety.

A central theme of this playbook is the crosswalk. Just as a real crosswalk safely connects one side of the street to the other, the crosswalk in this playbook connects the work partners already do every day, the documentation systems already in use, and the performance measures required by NCDHHS. By clearly marking where and how this connection happens, the playbook ensures that frontline efforts are accurately reflected in reporting, evaluation, and sustainability decisions. This playbook focuses on aligning existing efforts, clarifying roles of all partners, and strengthening coordination so that collective work produces measurable, defensible, and lasting impact.

Primary audiences for this playbook include the Case Manager and Peer Support Specialists, justice system partners, including Referral Coordinators at the Wilkes County Sheriff's Office, N. Wilkesboro Police Department, and the Wilkesboro Police Department. Each section is written for practical use by partners involved while remaining centered in the mission of cross-system collaboration and evidence-based response to substance use disorder and justice-involvement.



The focus of Wilkes LEAD is to divert individuals caught in a cycle of justice involvement or who have frequent low-level encounters with law enforcement into case management, community-based services, recovery support, and treatment (instead of incarceration), supporting them in reducing justice system involvement, stabilizing their lives, and addressing the underlying factors contributing to homelessness and repeated system contact.

Program Foundations

CORE STRATEGIES (THE WHAT)

1. Reduce repeated justice system involvement by addressing underlying needs.
2. Improve community safety and individual stability through collaborative response.

PROGRAM DESIGN FOUNDATIONS (THE HOW)

1. Collaborative arrest diversion referral and enrollment, with participant accountability (low barrier access and voluntary engagement)
2. Case management and wrap-around supportive services
3. Cross sector governance and shared decision making
4. Robust data collection and reporting

Government & Management Structure



LEAD AGENCY

Project Lazarus (the "who")

PROGRAM DIRECTOR-FRED WELLS BRASON II

Role: Central hub for strategy, compliance, coordination and reporting.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Convene and manage all partners
- Central Information Source
- Oversees timeline, budget and deliverables
- Manage NCDHHS performance reporting
- Coordinate with TTA assigned to Wilkes County
- Creates/Maintains Grant Toolkit

PARTNERSHIPS

ORGANIZATION	PRIMARY ROLE	NAME	EMAIL
Project Lazarus	Lead Agency; Peer Support Services; Case Management; Reentry	Fred Wells Brason II	fbrason@projectlazarus.org
North Wilkesboro Police Department	Referral Coordination	Officer Ryan Hayes	rhayes@northwilkesboropd.com
Wilkesboro Police Department	Referral Coordination	Courtney Johnson	cjohnson@wilkesboropd.com
Wilkes County Sheriff's Office	Referral Coordination	Kim Staley	kstaley@wilkescounty.net
District Attorney	Ultimate Decision Maker for Conditions of Arrest Diversion Eligibility	Assistant District Attorney Kenneth Issacs	kenneth.d.issacs@nccourts.org
Recovery Revolution Cameron Ridge Treatment	Intensive Outpatient Services	Jeff Walker	jwalker@recoveryrevolutionNC.com
Wilkes County Courthouse	Advisor	Honorable Chief District Court Judge Robert Crumpton	Robert.J.Crumpton@nccourts.org
Wilkes Community Corrections Department	Case Management Collaborator; Referral Coordination	Chief Probation Parole Officer Anna Knapp	Anna.Knapp@dac.nc.gov

#1 Wilkes LEAD Operational Model

Program Components

Objective: Reduce repeated interaction with law enforcement by meeting participants' basic needs through diversion and case management.

Staffing Model:

- 1 full-time Case Manager (Project Lazarus)
- 3 full-time NC Certified Peer Support Specialists (Project Lazarus)
- 1 full-time Referral Coordinator (Wilkes Co. Sheriff's Office)
- 2 half-time Referral Coordinators (Wilkesboro PD & N. Wilkesboro PD)

Operational Flow:

1. **Law Enforcement Encounter:** Officer encounters an individual during a low-level, non-violent law enforcement interaction (arrest eligible offense, pre-arrest contact, or frequent contact).
2. **Eligibility Screening:** Officer conducts a brief, on-scene eligibility assessment based on Wilkes LEAD criteria (offense type, risk level, unmet needs, and public safety considerations).
3. **Officer Discretion and Diversion Decision:** Using discretionary authority, the officer elect's diversion in lieu of arrest or citation when appropriate.
4. **Referral, Enrollment, & Warm Hand-off:** Officer initiates LEAD referral through designated Referral Coordinator. Referral Coordinator then connects the participant with LEAD Case Manager or Peer Support Specialist in real time, or a defined timeframe.
5. **Initial Engagement & Intake:** LEAD staff complete intake, assess immediate needs, explain program expectations, and obtain participant consent for service coordination and data sharing.
6. **Individualized Case Management:** Case manager develops a participant-driven service plan focused on stabilization, risk reduction, and long-term goals.
7. **Connection to Wrap-around Services:** Participant is linked to community-based supports (substance use treatment, mental health care, housing assistance, employment, etc.)
8. **Ongoing Coordination & Monitoring:** Case managers maintain regular contact with participants and coordinate with law enforcement and partners as appropriate. Participant accountability is measured by continued engagement and progress towards goals, not by sanctions or arrest for unmet goals.

9. **Data Entry & Reporting:** Referrals, services engagement, and outcomes are documented via designated database (HIPAA compliant SMART Software) for monitoring and reporting to funders.

10. **Case Review & System Coordination:** Cross-sector partners participate in regular case review and policy meetings to address barriers, improve coordination, and ensure model fidelity.

11. **Stabilization, Transition, & Program Exit:** Participants transition to lower intensity supports, exit after stabilization, or remain engaged as needed based on individual circumstances.

Key Outcomes:

- Recidivism rate of LEAD participants.
- How many participants abstained from substance use and maintained recovery/employment long-term (1 year).
- Rate of simple-drug possession arrests in Wilkes, NC.
- Number of referrals per month/type of referral (arrest diversion or social referral)

NOTE: While many program participants will be referred to Wilkes LEAD in lieu of arrest and incarceration (arrest diversion), it is anticipated that many referrals will also be social referrals. Social referrals will allow law enforcement officers to make referrals for individuals to enroll and participate in Wilkes LEAD if they have a history of repeated interactions with law enforcement and/or meet the criteria for LEAD participation but aren't necessarily committing an offence at the time of referral.

Risks/Mitigation

- Hiring delays for Key Staff
- Role Confusion
- Community Stigma

#2 Golden Rules of LEAD

1. **Golden Rule #1:** No one participating can be worse off because of choosing to participate in LEAD. Participants may not be subjected to additional scrutiny or subjected to arbitrary requirements of the court or law enforcement because they are participating in LEAD, or because of information shared between case managers and law enforcement, such as return to use.

2. **Golden Rule #2:** Every LEAD partner should do what they believe is most likely to support positive behavioral change in the specific circumstances of the participant (within their zone of authority).

3. **Golden Rule #3:** Risk Reduction and Trauma-Informed Approaches: Participants cannot be punished or removed from the program if they use substances (return to use) again while enrolled in LEAD. Project Lazarus' staff understands that recovery is not a straight line but a winding road. Case managers and Peer Support Specialists will encourage harm reduction practices to ensure the safety of participants, such as providing each participant and their family (if involved) with naloxone and fentanyl/xylazine testing kits. Training will also be provided to new hires and law enforcement partners on how to conduct a LEAD model from a harm reduction lens and provide trauma-informed approaches to interacting with participants.

#3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Eligibility criteria can vary between each LEAD program, and many common charges can make someone eligible for LEAD. Examples of **inclusion** criteria are:

- Petty theft (shoplifting, etc.)
- Property crimes
- Trespassing
- Prostitution
- Drug possession (in quantities determined to be for personal use)
- Drug paraphernalia possession
- Over the age of 18
- Open to engaging in LEAD in lieu of arrest
- No violent priors or current offenses
- No prior or current exploitation of minors

Some examples of **exclusion** criteria common for LEAD programs are:

- Under the age of 18
- Individual does not appear amenable to the program (violent upon initial contact, in psychotic distress, or a threat to themselves or others)
- The quantity of drugs involved exceeds what would be considered for personal use or reaches trafficking thresholds
- The individual has been convicted of or appears to exploit minors
- The individual has a disqualifying criminal history such related to violent crime or any attempt to conduct violent crime

Questions Law Enforcement should consider when evaluating eligibility:

- Is this person disqualified from community-based diversion due to particular criminal history, exploitation of others, or dealing for profit (not subsistence income)?
- Is the offense the person is alleged to have committed, an eligible offense for LEAD referral?
- Does the person have any medical conditions at the time of arrest that require immediate medical treatment, detoxification or referral to a hospital?
- Is the person unable to provide informed consent and/or does the person pose a risk to self or others due to mental illness?
- Does the person have an existing no contact order, temporary restraining order, or anti-harassment order prohibiting contact with a current LEAD participant?
- Does the person display any interest in being offered services through a community-based diversion program rather than being taken to and booked into jail, or do the person's words and actions indicate it would be futile to attempt a diversion strategy?

NOTE: Final approval of exclusion/inclusion criteria is at the discretion of the District Attorney.

IF DIVERTED:

In the case of arrest diversion, there is a 24-hour non-return request. Individuals who are diverted from arrest are asked by the LEAD team not to return to the location where they had a law enforcement encounter for at least 24 hours after their release. The 24-hour non-return request is to reduce neighborhood frustration with the decision to divert, and it's an important gesture toward the officer who made the choice to call case managers instead of taking someone to jail. If someone does head right back to that location, officers could make a jail booking decision. If the diverted person has a pressing need to return to the area, the case manager will coordinate with the arresting officer or sergeant to share that information.

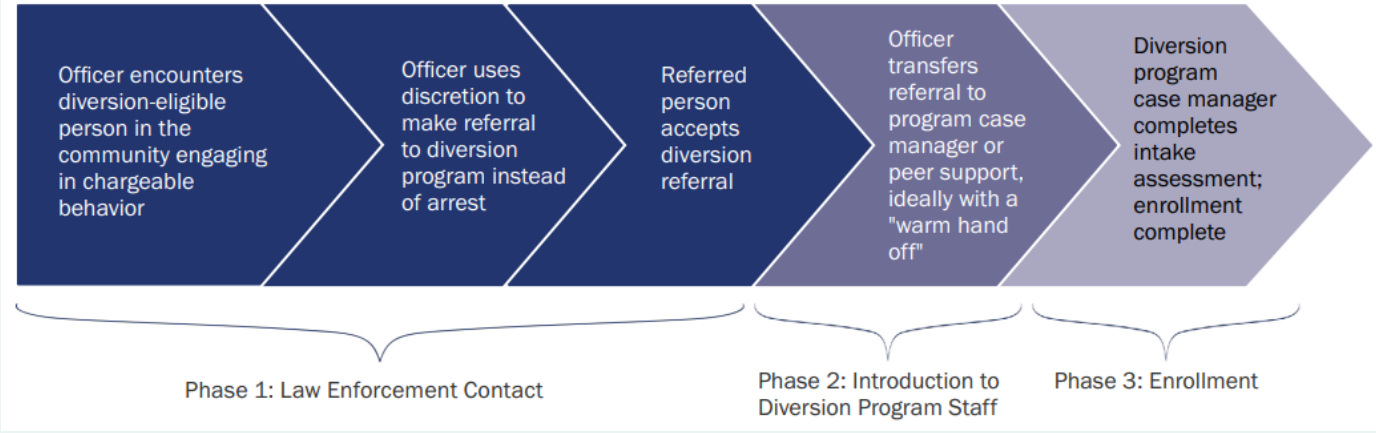
Role of the District Attorney:

The District Attorney is the best guardian of the first Golden Rule that "no one can be worse off because they participated in LEAD." They may be the first to notice that, in subtle ways, LEAD participants appear to be subjected to more aggressive prosecution attention or are seeing cases filed against them that would not typically be filed. Should that occur, it is crucial for district attorneys to immediately alert project leaders, so they can bring the dynamic to the attention of LEAD partners for discussion and response. They are also best situated to notice missed opportunities for diversion, that is, diversion-eligible charges that resulted in jail booking and prosecution for no clear reason. Such instances may illuminate opportunities for training and increase awareness of the diversion process.

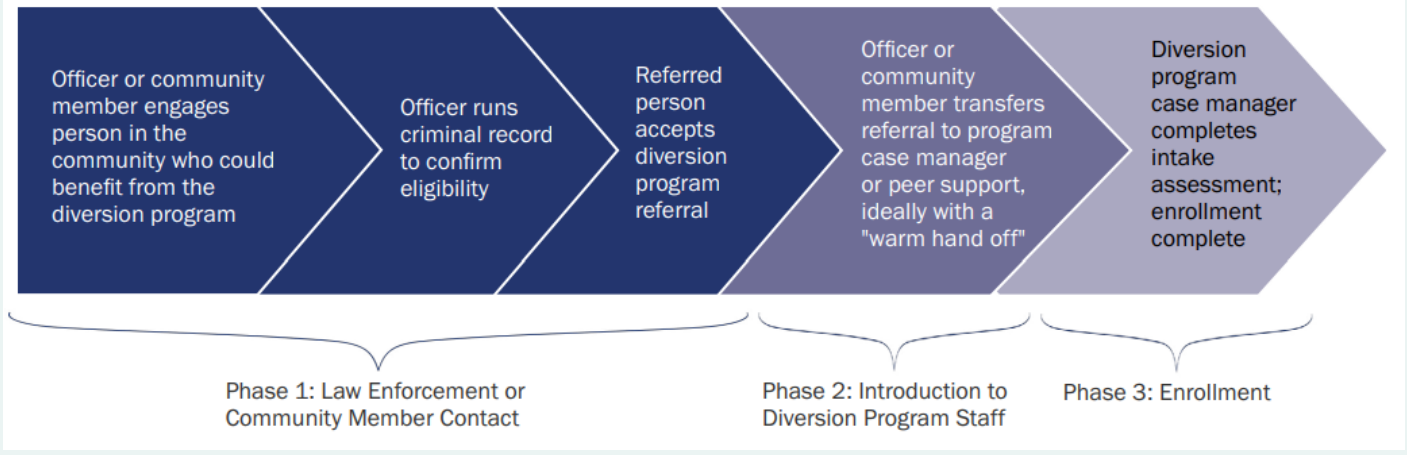
District Attorneys can also help identify patterns in diversion and referral for prosecution such as disparities, geographic gaps in the diversion map, or absence of diversion activity in a particular area. They also can be among the best informed to make referral recommendations.

#4 TWO PRIMARY AVENUES OF LEAD REFERRAL

i. Arrest Diversion



ii. Social Referral



(NC TAC, 2026)

Social referrals differ from arrest diversion in that the individual being referred does not enroll in LEAD in lieu of arrest, since a crime has not been committed. Instead, social referrals serve as a preventative pathway, connecting individuals to LEAD before an arrest diversion situation occurs. This allows individuals who have had prior law enforcement encounters, and who may benefit from supportive services, to engage with the program earlier. Social referrals can be initiated by a law enforcement officer during any interaction with a community member.

#5 Frequency Asked Questions

1. **How does pre-arrest diversion improve public safety?** Pre-arrest diversion programs help individuals address the challenges in their lives that lead to criminal behavior. Individuals may commit low-level, non-violent crimes to survive in cycles of chaotic drug use and withdrawal. Diversion programs give them the opportunity to engage with social services instead and find the support they need to stabilize their lives. Studies have shown a 50% reduction in new arrests after enrollment in LEAD programs. Diversion programs save law enforcement officers time and allows them to focus on more urgent public safety issues and violence.

2. **What does a handoff entail?** The handoff should include directing the participant to the next step toward intake, conducted by program staff. A “warm handoff” involves directly escorting the participant to program staff in the moment. When warm handoffs are not feasible (such as after business hours), the law enforcement officer should provide program's contact information and instruct the participant to connect with program staff, ideally within 48 hours.

3. **What if the individual agrees to participate in diversion, then does not follow through with intake?** If an individual agrees to participate in diversion but does not complete the required intake within the designated timeframe, the diversion opportunity may be closed. Program staff will notify the referring officer that the intake was not completed. At that point, the officer may choose to proceed with the original charge, including seeking a warrant for the offense. This ensures that diversion remains a voluntary option while maintaining accountability when program participation requirements are not met.

4. **What if the participant incurs another charge while participating in LEAD?** Participants in the diversion program who incur additional criminal charges while enrolled will not necessarily be discharged from the program. Their level of engagement and progress in the diversion program may be considered by the prosecutor or the court when making subsequent decisions related to charging, plea offers, or sentencing.

5. **Should we collect urine drug screens from our participants?** No. Urine drug screening and other types of drug testing are not appropriate in diversion programs. Pre-arrest diversion programs like LEAD and others aim to meet their participants “where they are,” which means understanding that while participants want help, support, and services, and have goals for improving their lives, they may not stop using all drugs. Using drugs or positive drug screens should not be reasons to dismiss someone from the program when the goal is to keep participants engaged in services.

(NC TAC, 2026)

THE 'WHY'

Data Collection & Performance Management



Systems Used

- SMART Solution EHR: Project Lazarus
- Referral Forms: Referral Coordinators
- FileZilla: HIPAA Compliant Submission of Progress Reports to NCDHHS
- Excel: Aggregate deidentified data for data insights.

Data Oversight

- Referrals to Case Manager from law enforcement (weekly).
- Monthly reporting to NCDHHS via FileZilla (data input on excel sheet for transfer).
- Case Manager and Peer Support Specialist input services provided and progress updates into SMART after each interaction.
- Criminogenic Needs Assessment and Recovery Capital Scale reassessed at intake, 90 days, and 6 months, and 1 year.

Performance Reporting

- Monthly Reporting via FileZilla to NCDHHS
- Progress updates of engagement to law enforcement for individuals who were diverted from arrest.
- Results-based accountability through evaluation of performance measures and outcomes.

Performance Crosswalk

Operational Performance "Crosswalks"

The Crosswalk is an operational tool designed specifically for Key Staff roles. They clarify what to document, where it is to be documented and why it matters-without adding additional work.

Why Crosswalks Matter in Daily Operation

- Reduce follow-up data requests
- Protect staff by showing appropriate response and referrals
- Reduces last-minute reporting issues



Wilkes LEAD Performance Crosswalk

Purpose: Ensure consistent documentation and secure handling of Wilkes LEAD participant data, referrals, and measurement outcomes.

What Happens on Scene	Who does it	What to Document	Where it is Documented	Why it Matters
1. Law Enforcement Encounter	Law Enforcement Officer/Patrol Officer/Deputy	Nature of contact; location; call type; safety concerns	Law Enforcement Documents	Establishes point of diversion and confirms public safety was addressed first
2. Eligibility Screening	Law Enforcement Officer (w/LEAD Criteria guidance; supervisor consult if needed)	Eligibility factors considered; exclusion checks; willingness to participate in an alternative program	Law Enforcement Documents; LEAD Screening Form	Ensure consistent, equitable application of LEAD, program fidelity, and public safety
3. Officer Discretion & Diversion Decision	Law Enforcement Officer (supervisor consult if needed)	Diversion decision	Law Enforcement Documents; Referral Form	Protects officer discretion while documenting accountability decision making
4. Referral, Enrollment, & Warm Hand-off	Law Enforcement Referral Coordinator	Referral date/time; method of warm hand-off; staff contacted	Referral Form	Warm hand-offs increase engagement, trust, and follow-through of participants
5. Initial Engagement & Intake	LEAD Case Manager; Peer Support Specialist	Consent Forms; intake demographics; immediate needs; intake assessments	SMART Software	Establishes voluntary participation and needs of the participant; Help to develop Case Plan.
6. Individualized Case Management	LEAD Case Manager; Peer Support Specialist	Case plan; SMART goals; strengths; barriers; needs; timeline	SMART Software	Ensures that services provided are tailored, realistic, and responsive to individual needs.
7. Connection to Wrap-around Services	Peer Support Specialists; Community Service Partners	Referrals made for needs; appointments scheduled **Cameron Ridge Treatment Referral: 336-818-1909**	SMART Software	Address the root causes of repeated justice involvement to reduce likelihood of recidivism and promote holistic recovery
8. Ongoing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting	LEAD Key Personnel	Contacts; progress notes; missed appointments; barriers; successes of the participant	SMART Software; Excel; FileZilla for NCDHHS Reporting	Supports retention in the program, program fidelity, and success of the program long-term.
9. Case Review & Service Coordination	LEAD Key Personnel; District Attorney; Law Enforcement	Case reviews of notes; action steps; plan updates; consideration of arrest when individual does not want to participate (District Attorney & Law Enforcement discretion)	Peer Support Specialist & Case Manager review notes; action steps; case plan updates; report to Law Enforcement if no follow through.	Promotes accountability for everyone, collaboration, and continuous improvement of program outcomes.
10. Stabilization, Transition, & Program Exit	LEAD Case Manager; Participant	Exit reason; outcomes; referrals at exit;	SMART Software	Measures program impact and success overtime.

Timeline Overview

This grant is designed to build something that will last, not merely something that will implement activities for a few years. The timeline reflects the commitment to building a model program to make a lasting impact, not just a short term "project."

PHASE 1: LAUNCH/ALIGNMENT (MONTH 1)

- Hire key personnel and designate roles
- Draft policy and Standard Operating Procedures, finalize referral forms.
- Train key personnel and community partners (law enforcement)
- Data Systems and reporting workflows are confirmed

This phase concentrates on alignment-ensuring everyone understands their role and how all the pieces fit together.

PHASE 2: FULL IMPLEMENTATION & LEARNING (MONTHS 2-3)

- First individuals referred
- Testing of system flows and follow-up
- Program becomes fully operational
- Data collection is ongoing and reliable

During this stage, the focus is not only on implementation but also on learning from practice and assessing how well the program's operational systems and workflows function.

PHASE 3: REFINEMENT & SYSTEM STRENGTHENING (MONTHS 4-12)

- Workflows are refined based on what is working and what is not
- Stronger coordination across partners.
- Evaluation findings start informing decisions

This is where the program matures and grows into a strong system.

PHASE 4: INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY (YEARS 2+)

- Peer roles become embedded in Wilkes LEAD
- LEAD Operates as a standard practice in Wilkes, NC.
- Data and evaluation findings support funding and policy decisions
- The County and Key Personnel Organizations seek to leverage other sustainability avenues

By the time the grant concludes (this isn't a 'grant' project) it is engrained in the services of Wilkes County.

For more information on LEAD Programs:

National LEAD Support Bureau:
https://leadbureau.org/

NC Technical Assistance Center (NC TAC):
https://www.med.unc.edu/fammed/nctac/resources-2/diversion-lead/

NC Harm Reduction Coalition:
https://www.nchrc.org/programs/lead/

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