



PROBLEM-SOLVING JUSTICE

# USING DATA TO BUILD YOUR PROGRAM

*“Research gave us a powerful instrument to galvanize people behind this approach; it was a systematic scientific inquiry into the nature of the problem. ... [Having solid numbers] was helpful in terms of marshaling people ... resources and energy.”*

—Jim Jordan, former director of the Office of Strategic Planning for the Boston Police Department

This fact sheet is one in a series to support the development of problem-solving justice initiatives. For other documents in the series, please visit [courtinnovation.org](http://courtinnovation.org).

Because problem-solving justice initiatives are designed to build stronger connections between citizens and the justice system, performing a community needs assessment is usually a top priority for any new problem-solving program. Both quantitative data (rates of arrest, most common criminal charges, etc.) and qualitative data (results from focus groups, surveys measuring community perceptions of safety, etc.) can be useful to planners. Only when a community’s problems, strengths, and resources have been clearly defined can planners start generating solutions. Consulting with as many relevant stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, local police, and clergy) as possible right from the start can also help build support for new approaches.

## SIX STEPS TO ASSESS YOUR COMMUNITY’S NEEDS

### 1 Gather Quantitative Data

Planners need quantitative data to sharpen their understanding of community problems. Relevant numbers are available from an array of sources, including the United States Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>), state administering agencies (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/saa/>), state and local court systems, police departments, district attorneys’ offices, correction agencies, welfare agencies, departments of education, health and social services, housing authorities, and other government agencies. When California’s Orange County Superior Court was planning its community court, planners reached out beyond the court system to collect numbers, like calls for police service, arrest data, and information about persons under supervision of local community corrections agencies. This provided planners with the ability to analyze community problems “by the numbers,” and compare how these figures squared with the community’s perceptions of public safety issues.



no. 02

This fact sheet was produced as part of the Community-Based Problem-Solving Criminal Justice Initiative, a project of the Bureau of Justice Assistance that aims to broaden the scope of problem-solving courts by testing their approach to wider defendant populations and applying key problem-solving principles outside of the specialized court context. The Bureau of Justice Assistance supports law enforcement, courts, corrections, treatment, victim services, technology, and prevention initiatives that strengthen the nation’s criminal justice system. The Center for Court Innovation is a non-profit think tank that works with criminal justice practitioners, community-based organizations, and ordinary citizens to develop creative responses to public safety problems, aid victims, reduce crime, and improve public confidence in justice.



## ONLINE SURVEY TOOLS

Seattle Community Court staff use a low-cost online survey tool, <http://www.surveymonkey.com>, to assess the community's relationship with the court. Survey participants go to a website to complete the survey. Questions include:

- Over the past year, how would you rate the quality of life in Seattle? [Very Bad, Bad, Neutral, Good, Very Good, Don't have enough information]
- In the past year do you think the quality of life has: [Improved, Stayed the same, Declined, Other]?
- Are you aware of Seattle's Community Court?
- Do you believe the application of the Community Court's key principles [listed elsewhere in survey] can improve livability and safety in the downtown core?
- Has Community Court made a difference?

### 2 Observe Court Processes

Some data isn't readily available. In that case, planners might be able to gather the raw data themselves. Planners can also collect valuable information by:

- Observing court proceedings and recording dispositions over a week or two weeks to understand how judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys respond to particular cases.
- Polling defendants to find out what kinds of problems they have—drug use, homelessness, and any other issues.
- Talking to system insiders who might be able to accurately estimate numbers that are otherwise unavailable, or who can explain how things operate and the logic behind current approaches.

### 3 Interview Stakeholders

Stakeholder interviews are structured interviews designed to get feedback on a set of questions. These interviews help planners to gain an understanding of how a neighborhood works, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, assets, and concerns. Interview subjects can include, for example: elected officials, local police, clergy, school officials, block association representatives, social service providers, merchants, and social and civic groups. Planners from the Superior Court of the District of Columbia's East of the River Community Court conducted interviews with 27 stakeholders in an effort to better understand the community's strengths and the challenges facing it. Interview questions covered community strengths and needs, public safety issues, other concerns or problems facing the community, and the community court concept in general.

### 4 Convene Focus Groups

Focus groups are facilitated discussions around a pre-determined set of questions. Planners should convene focus groups to get input from community members who are part of underrepresented groups or members of important constituent groups. Planners from the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in Melbourne, Australia, held six different focus groups—comprised of younger residents, mid-age residents, older residents, Vietnamese residents, younger residents from other cultures, and members of the business community—in which participants discussed their experiences of the justice system and their suggestions for improvement.

### 5 Administer Surveys

Community surveys can give planners a detailed picture of a community's priorities, expectations, and self-image. A well designed survey gathers information from hundreds and potentially thousands of stakeholders and crystallizes information into quantifiable data. The Red Hook Community Justice Center conducted surveys as part of its planning process, with AmeriCorps volunteers going door to door to ask about residents' perceptions of neighborhood public safety, existing community resources, and the criminal justice system.

### 6 Use Data to Identify Key Problems

Once planners have gathered data in these various ways, they need to sit down and synthesize the information to define the key problems facing the community and pinpoint the community's assets. By this stage, many good ideas for solutions have probably

## CONVENING A FOCUS GROUP

- Get suggestions from key stakeholders on whom to include, or use local stakeholders to help you convene focus groups.
- Assemble groups of about 10 people each and meet with them for an hour or two.
- Secure an appropriate space that participants will likely come to.
- Ask an independent facilitator to run the group if you don't feel comfortable doing so.
- Provide food.
- Use space that is both easy to access and neutral.

already surfaced; others can be harvested by talking to local members of the criminal justice system, and by turning to other jurisdictions that are handling similar problems in creative ways. Questions to ask include:

- What are the problems in this community?
- What is currently being done to address these problems?
- What resources are available to help solve these problems?
- How could these problems be better addressed?



## FURTHER READING

### *Action Research: Using Information to Improve Your Drug Court*

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/action-research-using-information-improve-your-drug-court>

### *Defining the Problem: Using Data to Plan a Community Justice Project*

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/defining-problem-using-data-plan-community-justice-project>



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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# ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

A Guide for Community Justice Planners



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
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Greg Berman is director of the Center for Court Innovation. David Anderson, who died in 2005, was a widely-published writer in criminal justice. He worked for the Ford Foundation and the *New York Times*.

*about this report*

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*about the cover*

The cover features a photo of Emma Broughton, a community leader in Red Hook, Brooklyn, who died in 2010. This paper is dedicated to her memory.

# ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY JUSTICE PLANNERS

## INTRODUCTION

“You have to go in with open ears and an open heart,” says Greg Berman of the Center for Court Innovation, who managed early planning for the Red Hook Community Justice Center. “And you have to recognize that each community is different. One of the very first things that we did in Red Hook was convene a series of focus groups with neighborhood residents to identify community needs and community resources. We held separate discussions with community leaders, social service providers, young people, and single moms. The conversations were extremely lively. Once people started talking, it was difficult to get them to stop.”

This document is a guide for community justice planners seeking to build stronger links with individual communities. Community justice, boiled down to its essence, is about two things: partnerships and problem-solving. No criminal justice agency—not police, not courts, not prosecutors, not probation, not parole, not the defense bar—can hope to build partnerships or solve neighborhood problems without investing significant time and energy in engaging the community. This paper outlines how community justice planners might begin this process, starting with the earliest stages of program development. It highlights basic tools that have worked in the past as well as some of the potential stumbling blocks that planners must confront as they reach out to residents, merchants, service providers, and others.

## EARLY PLANNING

Community justice initiatives are designed to build stronger connections between citizens and the justice system; community outreach is therefore a crucial component of any planning effort. Engaging the community should be the top priority in a project’s early stages—above staffing, fundraising, even program planning. There are three principal reasons for this. The first, perhaps, is obvious. If justice agencies seek to work in partnership

with community members to solve local problems and strengthen a neighborhood, that partnership needs to start early. People who live and work in the neighborhood should be involved in identifying issues, setting priorities and crafting solutions. And planners must earn the trust of skeptical communities by listening attentively and demonstrating that they are there for the long haul.

A second reason for beginning the conversation with local players is that community justice initiatives, whether they originate with courts, police, prosecutors, or other agencies, are designed to address the unique needs and concerns of their target neighborhoods. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Different communities have different problems. And different problems merit different responses.

The third reason for engaging the community is more pragmatic. The basic job of a planner is to organize financial, political, and material resources on behalf of his or her project. This means building support among funders, social service providers, elected officials, community leaders, and the media. The only way to develop these kinds of partnerships is to be an active and visible presence in the neighborhood—attending public meetings, interviewing local stakeholders, and convening discussion groups.

Although community justice seeks to create safer, stronger, and healthier neighborhoods, planners dare not take their community's support for granted—particularly in an era of “not-in-my-backyard” activism. Some local residents may oppose the project. Others may simply be apathetic; the challenge is to get their attention. Residents of many communities, particularly poor ones, are often deeply alienated from government and skeptical of promises made by agency bureaucrats, however sincere they seem.

Even where people are receptive, the idea of community justice is unfamiliar and will require a great deal of careful explaining. The process is unavoidably labor-intensive and time-consuming. Community relations are not built in a day and they certainly are not built by sitting in downtown office complexes. Planners should expect to spend from six months to a year building trust, making sure that they understand the community, are reflecting local concerns, and that the community endorses their efforts.

In the initial stages, planners should spend time with individual residents and community groups in order to explain their ideas and hear the responses. The education is mutual: planners learn about the neighborhood—who lives there, the problems they face, what they expect from the criminal justice system, how those expectations are and are not being met, and what resources the neighborhood could provide to support a new experiment. The community learns how community justice differs from traditional approaches and how it could enhance local efforts to improve the quality of life.

As it progresses, this process can help mold priorities, determining which neighborhood issues—juvenile delinquency? landlord-tenant disputes? low-level drug dealing?—need attention first. It can also lay the foundation for partnerships with community leaders, neighborhood organizations, and other public agencies already at work in the area.

Not least, the initial outreach process serves to publicize the planning effort: meetings with community groups spread the word that the project is underway. The goal is to understand the neighborhood's problems, build an agenda endorsed by local residents, and mobilize community resources well before the project actually begins.



## STAKEHOLDERS

“I learned a couple of important things from the focus groups,” Berman continues. “The first was that despite Red Hook’s reputation for drugs and serious violence, the way that local residents talked about their community was not markedly different from the way that residents of Midtown Manhattan talked about their neighborhood before the creation of the Midtown Community Court. Red Hook and Midtown are about as different as two neighborhoods can be. Midtown is the tourist and cultural center of Manhattan, the home of Broadway and Times Square. Red Hook is dominated by one of New York’s oldest public housing developments and is so isolated that I sometimes doubt whether any tourist has ever set foot in the neighborhood. Still, the same quality-of-life conditions—graffiti, littering, noise violations, loitering—weighed heavily on the minds of both Midtown and Red Hook residents. I remember one participant in the Red Hook focus groups saying, ‘Violations do not receive any priority... we need a [better] quality of life.’”

Once it was called a “key person” survey; the modern term is “stakeholder.” The basic point is the same: what groups have an interest in the welfare of the community, and who speaks for them? The list of possibilities is long: local politicians, churches, schools, students and their parents, merchants, tenant and block organizations, fraternal orders, ethnic societies and other social or civic clubs, sports teams, youth groups, precinct-based police, health care clinics, drug treatment groups, literacy programs, other social service providers. There is also the less visible community—young people who aren’t in school, older people who are unemployed, welfare mothers, the elderly who stay at home. Even defendants can be included as stakeholders.

In the first phase of community engagement, planners should identify all such groups and craft strategies for reaching them. The goal is to get answers to some fairly basic questions: What do local residents think about the quality of life in their neighborhood? What are the community’s strengths? What issues are chronic problems? How do people feel about the criminal justice system? And what do they expect from it? Too often, planners presume that they understand what is going wrong in a neighborhood without asking the people who really know—the citizens who live and work there.

Community justice begins and ends with neighborhoods. Identifying and prioritizing local strengths and weaknesses is a job best left to the community. A variety of tools can be used to engage community stakeholders in this process. What follows are several strategies that have proven successful for community justice planners in the past.

## INTERVIEWS

In order to gain a full understanding of a community’s problems, there is no substitute for simple communication. Talking with a broad spectrum of local voices—the store owner, the senior citizen on the park bench, the teacher at school—is crucial. Planners should pay special attention to neighborhood leaders—the

school principal, the block association president, the tenant organizer and the like. There may also be others with special knowledge of the community and its history: a newspaper reporter who has covered the area or a researcher at a local college. The approach to these stakeholders should be straightforward and humble: planners should emphasize that they are engaging in this process to learn about the community. This approach can go a long way towards disarming skeptical residents, who may be unaccustomed to government officials taking a deferential tone.

Possible questions include:

- What do you think of your neighborhood? Is this a good place to live? To do business? To own property?
- What are the main sources of aggravation, of fear, of crime? Are there street conditions—rowdiness, noise, prostitution, drug dealing—that seem to be out of control? What do you think is causing them?
- Do the people involved in crime live in the neighborhood, or do they come here from somewhere else? How do you think these problems might be curbed?
- What’s it like for children and teenagers here? What do you think of the schools? Are too many children and teenagers on the street when they should be in school? Are there things for kids to do after school and on weekends? Is there a problem with gangs?
- What resources exist in the neighborhood already? What are the community’s strengths? Which churches, social service providers and community groups are the most respected?
- What do people in the neighborhood think about the way the police patrol the community? About the way defendants are prosecuted? About how probation and parole work? About the way the court system handles crime, family matters, and housing disputes?

These questions get the conversation going; more specific ones depend on what planners may already know or suspect about community life. Planners should try not to bring too many preconceived notions to the conversations, however. Be open to surprises. In one case, community prosecution organizers went into a neighborhood armed with reams of statistics about drugs, violence, and other serious crime, only to be told by community members that stray dogs were their most vexing problem. Taking these issues seriously and devising strategies to address them will do much to win community support.

In addition to helping planners identify neighborhood concerns and priorities, individual interviews can be an effective tool for gauging local politics. Ask interviewees who else should be consulted in the same way. At this stage it should be possible to learn who plays the most important leadership roles in the community: who is respected, who is pursuing what hidden agenda, what factions have formed and what issues divide them.

## FOCUS GROUPS

“Red Hook residents had problems that took them to Family Court and Civil Court as well as Criminal Court,” Berman says. “These included disputes with landlords and domestic violence cases.

Several participants lamented the jurisdictional boundaries of New York's court system. One person said, 'You can't divide a person up. You have to have a comprehensive look at the whole person. The community court could do that.'

The idea here is to get input from people who are not necessarily leaders: people who reside or work in the community, who raise children there, own or rent property, use its streets, its schools, its parks. Why is this important? While community justice planners must respect the authority, experience and knowledge of the "official" leaders of their community (ministers, politicians, tenant leaders), they must also make sure that this leadership accurately reflects the opinions and concerns of their constituents. To do this, planners should assemble several groups of about 10 people each (fewer than that may not yield many different views; more may become unwieldy to manage) and meet with them for an hour or two.

Some sessions can be easily organized through formal channels: ask a local minister to invite a dozen parishioners to a conversation at the church or the head of the P.T.A. to assemble a group of school parents. Planners can also try to organize some discussions less formally. Does someone have a friend of a friend who lives in the neighborhood? Ask her to invite several neighbors over for an evening of conversation. Does the man who runs the corner store seem especially interested in talking about the community when you stop in? Ask him to invite a number of merchants from around the neighborhood to come in and talk on a Sunday afternoon.

Like the individual interviews, these focus groups or discussion sessions begin with a basic explanation of the project and questions about the neighborhood. Again, the approach is to ask for help: How do neighbors feel about community problems? What are the neighborhood's strengths and weaknesses? Has the neighborhood gotten better or worse in recent years? Do they have confidence in local law enforcement and the courts?

Successful meetings of this sort require careful preparation. It's important to choose the right setting and to create a relaxed atmosphere—serving simple refreshments goes a long way towards helping people feel welcome and comfortable. Planners also need to think about how to keep the meeting under control. Group dynamics can be tricky: given an audience, some people may be tempted to make speeches or engage in personal attacks. Planners lacking experience with the process should consider hiring a professional facilitator.

## NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

"Red Hook is a neighborhood with a deep skepticism about government initiatives," Berman observes, "a skepticism that is rooted in a history of government neglect and unwanted intervention. This attitude would prove to be our largest obstacle. We got off to a good start in overcoming it with the focus groups. Almost by accident, we had sent a powerful message to Red Hook residents by convening the focus groups. And that message was: your voice counts. The focus groups were a visible sign that we intended to consult the community at each step of the process. This was not lost on participants."

In addition to convening their own meetings, planners should respect the existing infrastructure of the neighborhood by appearing at regular sessions of community groups: the P.T.A., the block association, the tenants' organization, the community board. Here the approach needs to be a bit more formal: begin with a five to 10 minute talk about the idea of the community justice initiative, where it came from and who supports it. This introduction could also explain how community justice is working in other places, the problems it has addressed, and the ways that community justice efforts incorporate input from neighborhood residents.

Following the talk, planners should invite questions from the audience and lead a discussion of how the generic concept of community justice should be adapted to this particular neighborhood. Sometimes, the best way to engage an audience in a conversation about justice is to role play. For example, community court planners in New York have asked local residents to play the role of the judge, presenting them with a couple of hypothetical cases drawn from real life. What would they do if they were sitting on the bench and were confronted by a recidivist prostitute with a history of abuse at the hands of her boyfriend/pimp? How would they handle a homeless defendant arrested for trespassing at a local bus terminal? What would be an effective sentence in these cases? The community court planners explained to participants the kinds of information about a defendant that a typical judge would have. They also told them how long a judge would have to render a decision.

For community members to step into a new pair of shoes—whether it be those of a judge, prosecutor, police officer, or probation officer—can be an eye-opening experience. In addition to helping them understand the pressures and demands of working in the criminal justice system, this exercise can also help residents develop a more nuanced response to crime, forcing them to grapple with the types of underlying problems—substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment—that often lead an offender to crime.

## **OUTREACH TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

Talking with residents should not be the end of the conversation, however. Planners should also reach out to government agencies, both those within the justice system and those whose work intersects with the system (welfare, foster care, education, public housing, and others). Neighborhood problems like juvenile delinquency or quality-of-life crime cut across institutional boundaries, involving dozens of government players in one way or another. Any response to these problems should be equally multi-faceted.

When reaching out to government agencies, the questions to ask are slightly different: How is government currently responding to the neighborhood's problems? In a more perfect world, what could the criminal justice system be doing better? The point of these conversations is twofold: to get a clear picture of “business as usual” and to tap into the creative energies of the people who know the system best.

Planners should take pains to understand their audience: it makes sense to emphasize different elements of the project to different listeners. For example, meetings with the local health department might focus on social services, emphasizing the needs of criminal justice populations. Meetings with education officials might center on ways that law enforcement currently handles juveniles as well as on crime and disorder—rowdiness, noise,

drug dealing, theft, mugging of students going to and from school—that disrupt the school day.

Even if community policing already exists in your jurisdiction, don't forget to reach out to the police. Meetings with police might emphasize ways that courts, prosecutors, and probation and parole officers can complement community patrol initiatives. For example, a community court can facilitate the quick sanctioning of offenders arrested in sweeps and providing of social services that remove prostitutes, substance abusers, and the homeless from the streets. The court's community service program might help police by painting over graffiti, reclaiming neglected parks, and refurbishing other run-down locations that attract prostitutes and drug dealers. Police might also be interested in discussing a community court's capacity to provide them with access to court outcomes, something they often do not receive from the traditional court system. Since police are inevitably the criminal justice agency that is most visible and active in the life of a neighborhood, planners should consider paying special attention to its officers at this early stage—accompanying them on patrol, sharing lunch or dinner, hanging out with them after hours in order to get to know them, and learn from their insight into the community and its problems.

The bottom line is partnership. The goal of meeting with police officers, health officials, educators, welfare specialists, and others is to bring them into the fold, engaging their expertise and manpower to solve neighborhood problems. The importance of building personal connections with their representatives cannot be overstated.

Planners often assume that other agencies will want to “do the right thing” and participate in a community justice effort simply because it is a good idea. This is not always the case. Agencies are like people: they do things for a variety of reasons, some altruistic, some not. Planners should be prepared to articulate how their community justice project will benefit other agencies, furthering their mission as well as the project's. In some cases, the payoff for partners may be increased public visibility. In other cases, it may be access to information or the potential for new funding opportunities.

## **EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS**

Interviews, focus groups, and public meetings are valuable tools that can help planners gain a detailed understanding of the community and develop a sense of connection with those who live and work there. Planners may have to go further, however, if they want to build legitimacy.

The simplest way to develop credibility is to deliver something tangible to the neighborhood. Promises often ring hollow when they are not backed by action. So the quicker that planners can make good on some of the ideas that have emerged during the course of their meetings, the better. In many cases, this may mean that planners have to launch an activity related to public safety before their project itself is ready to open its doors.

Have residents identified a local park as a hot spot for criminal activity? Perhaps planners could organize a “take back our park” night of speeches and resident patrols. Are local kids idle during the summer months? Perhaps a baseball league is the answer. Is low-level youth crime on the rise? Perhaps a peer court could be created to address the problem.

It almost does not matter what the early achievement is, so long as it is real and responds directly to neighborhood concerns.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Community justice initiatives raise provocative questions about the roles and responsibilities of communities and criminal justice agencies in combatting crime, addressing quality-of-life issues and strengthening neighborhoods.

Beyond identifying and setting local priorities, what role should community members play in program development? What are the pitfalls when communities and criminal justice agencies work in tandem to implement the program?

As is often the case in community justice, different projects offer different answers. Some define the community's role quite narrowly, while others engage neighborhood partners at every step of the way. There's no right or wrong answer, but community justice planners must decide early on what their approach will be.

In many cases, planners feel tremendous pressure to create a community advisory board for their projects. Sometimes this pressure is internal: planners think that an advisory board will help them manage community relations. In other cases, the pressure comes from the community itself, which demands a formal acknowledgment of its role in the process. Whether driven by internal or external forces, an advisory board makes good sense. By convening one, planners send a strong message that they intend to hold themselves accountable to the neighborhood.

The primary issue with advisory boards is not whether to have one, but when. The timing of a community advisory board must be weighed very carefully. In many cases, a community advisory board may make more sense after a project is operational, when there are actual accomplishments to review and report. No matter what stage an advisory board is assembled, one thing is certain: its role must be clearly defined. In what areas do planners seek community input? What elements of the program are not up for debate? Try to be as honest as possible. Very few community residents will expect to run the show. Most will respect boundaries as long as they are rational and clearly articulated.

Advisory boards are just one mechanism to guarantee community involvement over the long haul. Whether it's community impact panels at San Diego's Beach Area Community Court, or Reparative Probation Boards in Vermont, or ACTION (All Coming Together in Our Neighborhood) Teams in Dallas, which bring together community members and representatives of police, fire, parole and other government agencies once a month to address a problem in a targeted neighborhood, the point is the same: to engage the institutional strengths of a community—schools, churches, families—in addressing local needs. Community justice, in other words, seeks to test the extent to which government and communities can work together to build safer, stronger neighborhoods.

## CONCEPT PAPER

At the end of the community outreach process, planners should draft a report that summarizes what they have learned from their meetings in the community. It might include a general description of the neighborhood followed by the relevant problems that residents have identified. It would then discuss ways the criminal justice system might respond in cooperation with other local institutions.

The concept paper should be both a planning document that summarizes work to date and a fundraising tool that can be used to approach foundations, corporations, elected officials, and other potential funders. In drafting the document, planners should take pains to underline community “buy-in.” Has a local city councilman publicly endorsed the project? Is there a letter of support from the police department? Has the local newspaper written a favorable editorial piece? All of these indicators of support should be incorporated into the concept paper. The idea here is to let readers know that the project will be accepted as a valued addition to community life rather than the local outpost of an alien criminal justice process.

## CONCLUSION

“What I learned from all of these encounters was that there is no substitute for face time,” Berman concludes. “As the months passed, I found my connections with community leaders deepening. I met their children, attended their church services, and shared meals with them. I saw them in good times and bad, at public gatherings and in more intimate settings. These ties would serve the community court well when it was necessary to mobilize neighborhood support for a grant proposal, a newspaper article, or a public meeting.”

Engaging the community requires time and energy; it also requires tact and imagination. Introducing a new initiative into any political and social environment requires a deep understanding of that environment and an ability to adapt to it in constructive ways. Planners have to understand how the community works—who enjoys power and respect, how factions form, who can bring them together—and how to maintain neutrality. No community justice project can be identified as “belonging” to one group or another. This may not be easy: a neighborhood is smaller than a city, but its politics are not necessarily less complex. A failure to understand them early on could put the whole plan at risk. Each project and each community have to work out their own relationship. The earlier planners start, the better it will be.

### **Center for Court Innovation**

The winner of the Peter F. Drucker Award for Non-profit Innovation, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how the justice system can solve difficult problems like addiction, quality-of-life crime, domestic violence, and child neglect. The Center functions as the New York State court system's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's problem-solving courts include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, mental health courts, reentry courts and others.

Nationally, the Center disseminates the lessons learned from its experiments in New York, helping court reformers across the country launch their own problem-solving innovations. The Center contributes to the national conversation about justice through original research, books, monographs, and roundtable conversations that bring together leading academics and practitioners. The Center also provides hands-on technical assistance, advising innovators across the country and around the world about program and technology design.

**For more information, call 646.386.3100 or e-mail [info@courtinnovation.org](mailto:info@courtinnovation.org).**





PROBLEM-SOLVING JUSTICE

# MAPPING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Community mapping is the process of identifying and documenting assets, such as civic associations, social service agencies, schools, and faith organizations, that can serve as potential resources or partners in a problem-solving justice initiative.

This practitioner tool is one in a series to support the development of problem-solving justice initiatives. For other documents in the series, please visit [www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org).

## MAPPING TIPS

- Usually, you do not need to start from scratch. See who has compiled lists already—talk to people, do web searches, look at organizations like the United Way or your local social service agency—and then build on and update what’s already there.
- Use the checklist below to begin to make your list of the key community “asset” categories your mapping should actively discover. Brainstorm about the kinds of resources your clients need, and tailor your list to those needs. As much as possible, meet with programs you plan on referring clients to so you can be sure of their quality and agree on protocols, including reporting progress.
- Make sure that you are culturally sensitive as you assemble your lists, and include resources that address the needs of the cultural groups your program is serving. Consult with various groups to find out how they feel they could be better served.
- Use the sample format on pages 2 and 3 to create a Rolodex of partners to draw upon to link defendants and others with community-based services. You can photocopy (or recreate in Word or Excel) the sample format. Enter a category on each page—e.g., Drug Treatment, Youth Services, Employment Services, etc.—and then fill in the information for each service provider under each category.
- Good practice suggests that you enter into a linkage agreement or memorandum of understanding with programs you’d use most frequently. Institutional relationships need to be developed to avoid interruptions when inevitable changes in personnel occur.

## CHECKLIST: HAVE YOU INCLUDED...

- Arts Programs
- Businesses and Chambers of Commerce
- Benefits Assistance
- Community Foundations

no. 07



This practitioner tool was produced as part of the Community-Based Problem-Solving Criminal Justice Initiative, a project of the Bureau of Justice Assistance that aims to broaden the scope of problem-solving courts by testing their approach to wider defendant populations and applying key problem-solving principles outside of the specialized court context. The Bureau of Justice Assistance supports law enforcement, courts, corrections, treatment, victim services, technology, and prevention initiatives that strengthen the nation’s criminal justice system. The Center for Court Innovation is a non-profit think tank that works with criminal justice practitioners, community-based organizations, and ordinary citizens to develop creative responses to public safety problems, aid victims, reduce crime, and improve public confidence in justice.

- Block Associations
- Defense Bar and Other Legal Assistance
- Domestic Violence Services
- Drug/Alcohol Treatment
- Employment/Job Training
- Faith Community
- Family Therapy
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Sexual-Oriented Services
- Government Agencies/Officials
- Health Education
- HIV (AIDS) Resources
- Hospitals (including clinics)
- Housing (including DV shelters, homeless shelters, etc.)
- Immigration Resources
- Judiciary/Court Management
- Law Enforcement/Probation
- Libraries and Literacy Programs
- Mental Health Services
- Mentoring Programs
- Parenting Classes
- Prosecutor's Offices (City, County, and U.S. Attorney)
- Reentry Programs
- Schools/Colleges/Universities
- Support/Self Help Groups
- Tenants Groups
- Victims Services Agencies
- Youth Programs

**CATEGORY** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	
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<b>CONTACT:</b>	
<b>PHONE:</b>	<b>EMAIL:</b>
<b>ALTERNATE CONTACT:</b>	
<b>PHONE:</b>	<b>EMAIL:</b>
<b>SERVICES PROVIDED/ POPULATION SERVED:</b>	
<b>COST:</b>	
<b>COMMENTS:</b>	

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