



A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems

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Starter Kit

3a: Developing a System Map

Appendix 2: Sample Handout for Participants

System Mapping: A Brief Overview for System Mapping Participants

Introduction

One of the most fundamental ways to develop an understanding of a jurisdiction's justice system is to develop a "system map." Similar to an architectural diagram, a system map depicts the steps in the criminal justice process (i.e., processing of a case and the activities related to this), beginning with police contact and ending with the point in time when the case terminates. In addition to reflecting the key decision points in the system, the map reflects the decision makers at each key point and the amount of time it takes a case to move from one point to the next. It is also possible and desirable to document the volume of cases that flow through each process step and decision point. This may be accomplished first by noting estimated numbers, and later by gathering data on a specified period of time to more precisely determine the flow and volume of cases and activities.

In the EBDM initiative, the system map will be the first step in developing a detailed understanding of each justice system decision point and the evidence that informs these key decisions. Following the completion of the system map, a process to "dig deeper" into these decision points will be carried out. This more in-depth analysis will include an examination of the following as they relate to each decision point:

- written policies;
- the application of those policies to practice, as well as to other operational practices that are not formally articulated in policy;
- the various types of data and information collected at each decision point;
- the ways in which this data and information informs decisions;
- the ways in which information is stored and shared; and
- other factors related to using data, information, and evidence in the most efficacious ways.

Purpose

Mapping serves a variety of purposes:

- It increases awareness of the ways in which the entire system "works" and how different parts of the system interact with one another. (Most people understand quite well their

own “part” of the system but have a less detailed understanding of the other parts of the system.)

- It brings together policymakers and agency staff to articulate the decisions they make, how they arrive at those decisions, and when (i.e., at what point in the process) decisions are made.
- It surfaces areas of interest for further inquiry.
- It can sometimes lead to recognition of quick solutions to bottlenecks or inefficiencies.

The Mapping Process

At each mapping work group session, participants will engage in an interactive process designed to articulate a complete “picture” of how critical decisions are made at each decision point in the system:

1. arrest
2. pretrial status
3. charging/plea
4. sentencing
5. local institutional intervention(s)/local institutional release
6. community intervention(s)
7. violation response
8. discharge from supervision

Discussions during the mapping work group sessions will revolve around issues raised by the following kinds of questions:

1. Who is involved in decision making at this decision point?
2. What are the major decision options at this point?
3. What formal procedures or policies are followed?
4. What information is needed to make decisions?
5. What other factors are considered, including unspoken or implicit norms?
6. How long does it take to make a decision?
7. How effective is the decision making process? How do we know?
8. What are the challenges and/or barriers to effective and efficient decision making?