



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COURT SERVICES AND OFFENDER SUPERVISION AGENCY &
PRETRIAL SERVICES AGENCY
RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE**

RECOMMENDATION STATEMENT

DATE: November 19, 2007

I. RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Principal Researcher: Sharon Banks, Program Analyst; Research, Evaluation and Development (RAD); Pretrial Services Agency

Title: Management Review of Defendants' Opinion of Treatment Services Delivery

Institution: Pretrial Services Agency

Description:

This project will create within PSA a routine procedure to assess and report defendant impressions of PSA's in-house substance abuse treatment programs and services. Information will focus on defendant input on treatment components they believe worked best in helping them remain drug-free during the supervision period. Information sources will include focus groups and individual interviews with defendants who provide written consent to participate.

This request applies only to PSA.

Type of Data and Analysis: This project will employ qualitative methods, mainly focus groups and individual interviews with treatment defendants, to obtain information and evaluate defendant satisfaction with substance abuse treatment programs.

Subjects: Focus Groups and individual interviews will be conducted with defendants who volunteer and are participating in treatment services. Sample size will depend on the level of voluntary participation.

II. RECOMMENDATION

The RRC recommendation for this study:

Support Support with Conditions Do Not Support

The RRC finds that the proposed study amounts to a permanent “program review” and should not be treated as a research project as specified in CSOSA/PSA Research and Evaluation Policy Statement 1201. Specifically, “research projects limited to routine statistical tabulations and program reviews/evaluations undertaken by Agency employees for administrative purposes only are not subject to the procedures appended to this Policy Statement.”¹ As such, this effort to collect information must be pursued as an operations initiative. Therefore, the RRC recommendation is to not support the proposed work as research and to recommend that it be modified and pursued as an operations endeavor – in collaboration with RAD – which does not require RRC review.

III. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

As proposed, this project would create a routine procedure that involves RAD staff regularly conducting focus groups of defendants on an ongoing and indefinite basis. The fact that its purpose is to create a routine procedure is inconsistent with the structure and intent of research projects, which are designed to gather and analyze data and/or information over a specified period of time and to develop specified findings. The purpose of this project is to create a mechanism for regular reporting on the Agency’s two primary outcomes (reduction of rearrest rates and failure-to-appear rates) and four broad secondary (operational) goals; as well as performance measures required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). As such, this procedure could be characterized as part of the treatment and supervision process undertaken in the disposition of defendants’ criminal justice matters; and information gathering would be for the sole purpose of operations program review/evaluation.

In order for this project to be pursued as a program review/evaluation, it must be initiated by Operations, though RAD would be the office that executes the initiative on behalf of Operations. Further, focus group questions must pertain to the specific disposition of the criminal justice matters of the individuals participating in the focus group. These two points have implications for:

- Compliance with the CSOSA/PSA Policy Statement;

¹ CSOSA/PSA Research and Evaluation Policy Statement 1201, p 2.

Research Review Committee (RRC) Submission
D.C. Pretrial Services Agency
Office of Research, Analysis, and Development
June 20, 2007

Name, Agency and Agency component:

Sharon Ann Banks, MSW
Office of Research, Analysis, and Development (RAD)
Pretrial Services Agency
633 Indiana Avenue NW, 11th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20004
202-220-5484

Title of the study:

Management Review of Defendants' Opinion of Drug Treatment Services Delivery

Purpose of the project:

This project will create within the District of Columbia's Pretrial Services Agency (PSA) a routine procedure to assess and report defendant impressions of PSA's in-house substance treatment programs and services. Information will focus on defendant input on treatment components they believed worked best in helping them remain drug-free during the supervision period. Information sources will include focus groups and individual interviews with defendants who provide written consent to participate.

PSA has identified two primary outcomes (reduction of rearrest rates and failure-to-appear rates) and four broad secondary (operational) goals that are most closely related to the Agency's mission and that represent the essential day-to-day activities of the agency. Operational Goal 1, Operation Goal 2 and Operational Goal 4 relate (respectively) to assessments and release recommendations, monitoring and supervision of released defendants and developing and sustaining partnerships. Operational Goal 3 (integrating supervision with treatment), which drives this project, relates to providing for substance abuse, mental health, and/or social services that will assist in ensuring that defendants return to court and do not pose a danger to the community.

As required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), PSA has established performance measures and regularly collects data to track PSA's progress toward achievement of its goals. Measures 2.1 and Measure 3.3, respectively, focus on monitoring and supervision of released defendants and the integration of supervision with treatment. Measure 2.1, focuses specifically on responses to non-compliance and how it's addressed by PSA either through the use of an administrative sanction or through a recommendation for judicial action (a subcomponent of Operational Goal 2). Measure 3.3 focuses *specifically* on defendants' reduction of drug use following placement in a sanction-based treatment program while under pretrial supervision (a subcomponent of Operational Goal 3). At present, the data collected provides information only on the number of defendants with reduced usage of illicit drugs. It does not provide information

on the *components* of the treatment program that contributed most to successful outcomes.

In January 2007, management of the Treatment Branch requested that the Office of Research, Analysis, and Development (RAD) conduct a review of literature on Evidence-Based Practices for effective treatment group services to identify possible improvements to services for the general and dually diagnosed populations. RAD also was asked to establish a routine procedure to gather defendants' impression of PSA's in-house treatment programs and services. Specifically, the Treatment Branch and RAD seek defendants' input on treatment components that defendants believed worked best in helping them remain drug-free during supervision period.

Location of the project:

This project will be conducted at 633 Indiana Avenue, NW. Focus Groups and individual interviews will be conducted with defendants who participate in treatment services.

Duration of the study:

This project will be ongoing.

Methods to be employed:

This project will employ qualitative methods, mainly focus groups and individual interviews with treatment defendants, to obtain information and evaluate defendant satisfaction with drug treatment programs.

Sample size required and/or time frame for sample collection:

Focus Groups and individual interviews will be conducted with defendants who volunteer and are participating in treatment services. Sample size will depend on the level of voluntary participation.

Agency resources needed to support the study and description of the support needs:

Sharon Ann Banks, Program Analyst, RAD will lead focus groups, conduct individual interviews, and collect data. Additional support for distributing, explaining, and collecting Informed Consent forms will be provided by Treatment Branch Staff.

The RAD Analyst, Treatment Branch Manager, and Superior Court Drug Intervention Program, New Directions and Specialized Supervision Unit supervisors will provide project oversight.

Indication of risk or discomfort to subjects as a result of participation:

There is no known risk to participants in this study. Questions will focus on how to improve effectiveness and utility of services only. Participation in the project is voluntary, and participants' identities will not be known to focus group facilitators.

forever?
Is this the procedure?
then is it research?
Also, does not go into the agency?

Anticipated results:

By routinely collecting defendants' opinions of treatment programs and services, this project will allow PSA to assess the effectiveness and delivery of drug treatment services provided through the current system. In addition, any barriers to providing quality drug treatment services will be identified. Ultimately, methods of improving effectiveness, utilization of services, usefulness of services, etc. will be explored and needed changes will be recommended to PSA and Operations Management.

List of deliverables to the Agency:

- A summary of project findings will be provided to PSA executive staff and Office of Operations Managers quarterly.
- Other methods of communicating findings will be implemented following discussion with the PSA Director.

Review of the related literature:

Evaluations examining effectiveness, utilization of and utility of alcohol and drug treatment programs are often behavioral outcome focused only. Although important, this does not explore clients' viewpoint about the success of the treatment program, or the clients' satisfaction with provision of treatment services. Efforts towards understanding clients' satisfaction with services have increased dramatically, to the point that client satisfaction with services has become an important outcome measure.

The D.C. Superior Court Drug Intervention Program (Drug Court), which is administered by PSA, participated in an independent experimental evaluation designed to compare the impact of sanction-based contingency contracts with an intensive drug treatment program (Strategic Plan FY 2005 – FY 2010).¹ Harrell, Cavanagh and Roman (2000),² who conducted an "Evaluation of the D.C. Superior Court Intervention Programs", measured the impact of treatment programs on defendants' social and economic functioning, drug use and criminal activity utilizing court records and self-report data from survey of defendants.

In March 2006, RAD, for strategic planning purposes, conducted interviews with defendants who were referred to PSA's Social Services and Assessment Center (SSAC) to evaluate their satisfaction with the referral process and various social services providers. Unlike, quantitative surveys, the results of these interviews provided the richness of information needed to answer program effectiveness questions posed by PSA's management. It was evident that defendants have very strong feelings about their experiences with PSA's SSAC and the various social services providers.³

¹D.C. Pretrial Services Agency Strategic Plan FY 2005- FY 2010

² Harrell, Adele, Mitchell, Ojmarrh, Merrill, Jeffrey, & Marlowe, Douglas (2000). Evaluation of the D.C. Superior Court Drug Intervention Programs, Research in Brief, National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.

³ A copy of the RRC's Recommendation Statement on the SSAC Data Request (2006) is attached as Appendix A

of accen, but not nec of TX -

Can't really measure effectiveness

no effect measurement

contingency groups + defendant anal.

by some level

*Breaking the Cycle of Drugs and Crime: Findings from the Birmingham BTC Demonstration*⁴ and *Evaluation of Breaking the Cycle*⁵ are examples of evaluations where the authors obtained information from focus groups about continued drug use and criminal activity following treatment stays, the participants' perceptions of the fairness of judges, the treatment program, and the criminal process and their views on the certainty and affect of sanctions and incentives.

Research conducted on drug treatment services available to clients under the AR-CARES program relied, in part, on focus group discussions with clients which were audio-taped⁶.

The utilization of focus groups will primarily assist with: (1) discovery of service efficiencies and inefficiencies; and (2) recommendations for corrective actions.

Detailed description of the research method:

On a continuous basis, defendants participating in a sanction-based treatment program will be invited to participate in a focus group to evaluate their satisfaction with treatment services and to describe their experiences with treatment group services and Treatment Branch staff. RAD will explain the project to defendants at a group session prior to the focus group meeting and will review the Informed Consent form with the defendant outlining the protection of their anonymity in the transcription of the audio-recording, written notes from the session and the future reporting of focus groups results. RAD will give each defendant an envelope addressed to the Lead Program Analyst and a copy of the Informed Consent form. The defendant will be instructed to sign the form, and to return the form to the Treatment Branch Program Assistants (PA) in the envelope provided (which should be sealed) if s/he is interested in participating in the project. If the defendant is not interested in participating, s/he will be instructed to return the unsigned form to the PA in the envelope provided (which should be sealed). The Program Analyst will collect informed consent forms and forms will be maintained by the Lead Program Analyst in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office, and will be used only to verify consent. Access to this information will be restricted to RAD project staff only. Defendants who wish to voice their opinion about treatment services but do not want to participate in the focus group setting will be encouraged to go to the 11th floor and arrange with RAD staff an individual interview. As with focus group, consent is obtained and defendants' identities are protected.

phases 1-3?
At the end phase four, defendants who agree to participate in the focus group will be asked a series of questions. RAD will use the transcription from the audio-recording to compare with written notes for accuracy. No identifying information or contact information will be recorded with the responses.

⁴ Harrell, Adele, Mitchell, Ojmarrh, Hirst, Alexa, Marlowe, Douglas, Merrill, Jeffrey (2002). *Breaking the Cycle of Drugs and Crime: Findings from the Birmingham BTC Demonstration*, Criminology & Public Policy 1 (2), 189-216.

⁵ Harrell, Adele, Mitchell, Ojmarrh, Merrill, Jeffrey (2003). *Evaluating Breaking The Cycle*, Urban Institute Research Report.

⁶ Connors, Nicola A., M.Ed. & Franklin, Kathy K. (2000). Using focus groups to evaluate client satisfaction in an alcohol and drug treatment program. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 18, 313-320.

Defendants will also be informed of their right to terminate the interview at any time and to refuse to answer individual questions. Notes and audio tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. This information will be stored separately from the informed consent forms with no way to link the two. Access will be restricted to RAD project staff only.

Focus Groups and individual interviews will be conducted with defendants to solicit information on (1) client expectations prior to entering treatment; (2) client perceptions of treatment benefits; (3) client attitudes about specific programming/service issues; (4) clients comments on the structure and policies of the drug treatment setting; (5) client preferences related to program staff; (6) client feelings about logistic planning in order to attend treatment groups (e.g. daycare, employment, and etc.); (7) recommendations on how to improve the utility of services; and (8) the effect of sanctions and incentives on behavior.

Significance and benefits of anticipated results:

The legislation governing the District of Columbia Pretrial Services Agency stipulates that “the agency shall assist persons released pursuant to subchapter II of this chapter in securing employment or necessary medical or social services” (23-1303 h 4). In addition, 23-1321(c)(1)(B)(x), allows judges to assign conditions of release to “undergo medical, psychological, or psychiatric treatment, including treatment for drug and alcohol dependency, if available, and remain in a specified institution if required for that purpose.” In accordance with this requirement and in keeping with Operational Goal 3, PSA identifies and refers defendants to appropriate treatment resources to address a range of substance abuse and mental health needs, including: outpatient and intensive-outpatient treatment services, medical, educational/vocational services, family services, other social services. Measure 3.3 tracks PSA’s performance in defendants who have a reduction in drug use following placement in a sanction-based treatment program. However, current data efforts are insufficient in determining the effectiveness and utility of services. Also, Measure 2.2 tracks PSA’s ability to provide effective supervision oversight even to those under treatment.

As stipulated in the 2005 – 2010 Strategic Plan, PSA is required and committed to conducting formal assessments of programs and processes in order to support a data-driven-decision making process. This project is expected to provide greater detail on PSA’s delivery of effective drug treatment services to defendants and on the barriers that exist to providing such services. As a result, PSA will have a greater understanding of what, if any, changes are needed in the current sanction-based treatment programs. PSA will be better able to address defendant needs (as required by the enabling legislation) and to provide enhanced services to defendants participating in a sanction-based treatment program.

Specific resources required from the Agency:

Please refer to above summary statement regarding agency resources needed.

Description of all possible risks, discomforts and benefits to individual subjects:

Please refer to above summary statement under indication of risk or discomfort.

Description of steps taken to minimize risk or discomfort:

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. All participants will be informed that they can terminate the interview at any point or can refuse to answer to specific questions without penalty.

Description of physical and/or administrative procedures to be followed:

Please refer to section on research method.

Description of any anticipated effects of the research project on Agency programs and operations:

Please refer to section on anticipated results and significance and benefits of anticipated results.

Statement indicated that copies of deliverables will be provided to PSA:

Copies of deliverables (as listed in list of deliverables) will be provided to PSA.

Statement that copies of datasets will be provided to PSA:

N/A

**Pretrial Services Agency
Office of Research, Analysis, and Development (RAD)**

INFORMED CONSENT

**Management Review: Defendants' Opinion of Drug Treatment Services
Delivery**

DESCRIPTION: We are asking you to help us with a project looking at how to improve effectiveness and delivery of drug treatment services.

If you agree to talk to us, we will meet with you in a focus group setting or meet with you in person within two weeks of you completing *Phase 4* of your treatment program.

We'll ask questions about:

- your expectations prior to entering into treatment;
- your perceptions of treatment benefits;
- your attitude about specific programming/service issues;
- your comments on the structure and policies of the drug treatment setting;
- your opinion of program staff (e.g. professionalism, effective group leader, case manager);
- what you have to do to get to treatment group meetings on time (e.g. daycare, employment, and etc);
- your recommendations on how to improve the utility of services;
- the effect of sanctions and incentives on your behavior.

TIME: The focus group meeting or individual interview will take about 30 minutes to 1-hour to answer.

RISKS: We will only be asking for your opinion and about your personal experience. We will not tell your PSO or anybody else who you are. The only person who will know that you agreed to answer the questions is the person who talks to you in the focus group meeting or individual interview and the person who keeps these forms. We'll audio record and write your answers down but your name will not be written on the notes nor will any other information that could tie you to those answers. We'll use the transcription from the audio recording to compare with written notes for accuracy. When we write our report, all of the answers given to us will be grouped together. Your decision whether or not to talk to us will not affect the services that you get from the other agency nor will they affect your pretrial status here at PSA.

BENEFITS: You will not get any benefits from this project. However, your answers will help us to gain better insight on PSAs delivery of effective drug treatment services and on the barriers that exist to providing such services to defendants.

CONFIDENTIALITY: What you tell us will be kept confidential. Copies of this form will be kept in a locked filing cabinet so only we will know what you said. We will keep

this form separate from your answers to the questions. No information that can be used to tell who you are will be attached to your answers. Your answers will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and the only people who will see them are the person who talks to you, and the person who puts all of the answers together. We will not tell anybody that you talked to us.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions at any time about this project, talk to Sharon Ann Banks at 633 Indiana Avenue, 11th floor and or call her at 202-220-5484.

YOUR RIGHTS: If you have read this and agree to participate in the focus group meeting or individual interview, you can change your mind or you can decide to answer some questions but not all of them. Nothing bad will happen to you if you change your mind. Your name or any information that could tie you to the answers will not be used in any reports.

If you do not have a telephone but would like to answer the questions in person, go to the 11th floor of this building today and ask to talk to Sharon Banks or Michael Kainu. We'll set up a time for an individual interview.

INSTRUCTIONS: If you are willing to participate in the focus group meeting or individual interview, please sign this form. If you prefer to conduct an individual interview, give us a telephone number where we can call you. Tell us when would be the best time to call (morning, noon, night). Put this form in the envelope provided, close it, and give it to the person at the front desk when you leave.

CONSENT:

I have read this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's name: _____ Telephone # _____

Best time to call: (individual interview):

Participant's signature: _____ Date _____