Action Research: Data Collection and Evaluation Strategies for Healing to Wellness Courts

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“Aaron, can you do a presentation on data?”

The Night Before the Big Meeting Frank Receives a Visit from the PowerPoint Fairy.
Major Themes

- Data helps you **improve** your HTWC.
- Data collection and analysis should be **continuous**.
- You don’t need to be an expert—the entire HTWC team should be involved.
- Data helps generate support from tribal leaders, community, and grant funders.

**What is Data?**

- **Factual information**
  - Something that can be observed/measured
  - Does not require additional analysis

- Can be **quantitative**...
  - # of HTWC participants
  - # of positive drug tests
  - # of days spent in jail

- ...or **qualitative**
  - Types of incentives and sanctions used
  - Type of treatment ordered
  - Employment history

- Can be analyzed to **draw conclusions**
  - Are we serving our target population?
  - Are people getting into treatment quickly?
  - Do we need to provide other services?
Why Collect Data?

Key Component #8

• Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness.
• Improve the HTWC process
• Oversee participant progress
• Inform funders

Ok, So How Do We Do It?

“We have lots of information technology. We just don't have any information.”
We Do It With...

**Action Research**

Provides immediate and useful feedback about everyday program operations and performance.

Evaluates not just whether a HTWC is working, but how it’s working, why it’s working, for whom it’s working, and how it can improve.

**Action Research Questions:**

- Is the HTWC meeting its volume projections?
- What is the profile of HTWC participants?
- What is the course of treatment and recovery?
- What are the core outcomes of our HTWC?
- Which participants succeed?
- How can this information be used to improve our HTWC?
## Developing an Action Research Plan

### 1. Identify program goals

- Why was your HTWC established? What did it set out to do in the first place?
- Examples of program goals:
  - Reduce recidivism
  - Rehabilitate addicted offenders
  - Process cases more efficiently
  - Make courts more therapeutic/less punitive

### 2. Identify program objectives

- More specific than goals (how will goals be achieved?)
- Follow the SMART approach
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Achievable
  - Results-oriented
  - Time-bound

Examples of program objectives:
- Enroll 25 new participants per year
- Move cases from arrest to HTWC enrollment within one week
- Achieve a 50 percent graduation rate
- Reduce recidivism by 20 percent compared with regular case processing
Developing an Action Research Plan

3. Plan to measure the objectives

- What data is needed to measure the objectives?
  - See handout for examples
- Who has the data we need?
- How will this data be collected and by whom?
- Who is responsible for which data reporting tasks?
- How often should reports be updated?

Developing an Action Research Plan

4. Other questions of interest

- What other information would be helpful to know about the HTWC that may not fall neatly under the objectives?
- What data is needed to answer these other questions?
- Examples of other questions:
  - Do certain categories of participants have special needs?
  - How long do participants take to reach key milestones?
  - Which sanctions and rewards are used and how often?
Developing an Action Research Plan

5. Make changes

- Brainstorm examples of practices or policies that you might rethink depending on the results of action research?
- Examples of research leading to changes:
  - Special services for female clients
  - English-as-a-Second Language program
  - Adjusting initial screening procedures
  - Reallocation of staff time/duties

Data Collection 101

Distinguish participants from non-participants

- Acceptance rate
- Reasons for non-entry in HTWC
- Number of people actually served
- Basis for most other data analysis (e.g., retention rate, graduation rate, recidivism)
Data Collection 101

Track current program status of all participants

- Open (still active in program)
- Warranted (absconded/temporarily disappeared)
- Graduated (successfully completed the program)
- Failed (dropped out or was terminated from program)
- Incomplete

Data Collection 101

Record key dates

- Arrest date/probation violation date
- Intake date
- Participation date (or ineligibility date)
- Exit date
- Warrant dates
Key Performance Measures

Volume
- Is our HTWC screening and enrolling enough participants?
- If not, diagnose the reasons why:
  - Low referrals (arrests are down, judges not sending people, lack of formal referrals procedures)
  - Low acceptance rate (defendant refusals, ineligibility)

Initial case processing time
- Immediacy is critically important
- Goal should be to get participants into treatment as quickly as possible
- Minimize early failure (e.g., create “pre-placement” groups while participants wait for treatment beds)
Key Performance Measures

Retention and graduation rates

- Longer retention in treatment leads to less long-term drug use and criminal re-offending
- Cheap and easy indicator of program success
- Aim to retain participants for at least 12 months
- National average is around 60% one-year retention

Time to graduation

- Can indicate whether the HTWC’s graduation requirement are too easy or too hard
- National study found that graduates spend about 15 months in the program
Key Performance Measures

Participant profile

- Demographics, drug use, criminal history, co-occurring disorders
- Not really a “performance” indicator, but very useful
- Identify need for additional services
- Compare with other HTWCs
- Determine whether participants match target population

Other questions

- How common are relapses and other types of noncompliance?
- How frequently are participants sanctioned and what kinds of sanctions are most often imposed?
- Are certain categories of participants more likely to fail?
- Are there critical warning signs of failure?
Use of Surveys

Action research isn’t just about “hard” data.

- Survey participants
- Feedback about treatment programs
- Understanding consequences of graduation or failure
- Meeting civil legal needs
- Survey case managers
- Need for additional services
- Quality of existing services

Whew! Glad That’s Done.

But not so fast...let’s talk about technology.
Goals of Data Management

Data Management Goals

- Enhance case processing
- Make better-informed decisions
- Improve accountability
- Promote collaboration
- Make improvements
- Generate support for the HTWC

Enhance Case Processing

Assessment, Mandate Recording & Compliance Tracking Model

1. Assessment
2. Mandate Recommendation
3. Record Detailed Mandate
4. Program Selection
5. Program Enrollment
6. Compliance Events
7. Mandate Status
8. Mandate Closed

Conventional Case Management System Stands Alone
Enhance Case Processing
Step 1: Assessment Interview: Substance Abuse/Treatment History

Screen Shot: New York State Justice Center Application (JCA) (web-based example)

Enhance Case Processing
Step 1: Assessment Interview: Mental Health History

Screen Shot: Buffalo, New York Drug Court MIS (MS Access example)
Informed Decision-Making
Step 1: Assessment Interview: LSI-R Criminal History

Screen Shot: LSI-R Standardized Assessment Interview in New York State Universal Treatment Application (UTA)

Enhance Case Processing
Steps 2 and 3: Recording Court Mandate Details

Screen Shot: New York State Justice Center Application (JCA)
Step 6: Litigant Compliance: Reviewing Drug Test History

Litigant Accountability

Promoting Collaboration

Treatment Provider Enters Drug Test Results via Web MIS
Litigant Accountability
Comprehensive Progress Report

Drug Court Progress Report

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Tracking Results
Front-End Reporting Tools for Management, Grant Reporting, and Long-Term Evaluation Needs

Primary Drug

Screen Shot: Buffalo, New York Drug Court MIS (MS Access)
Technical Considerations

“Forget your leader! Where’s your information systems manager?”

Major Themes

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- Data helps generate support from tribal leaders, community, and grant funders.
Training and Technical Assistance

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