

IOWA PROBLEM SOLVING COURTS

In 2018, the State Court Administrator contracted with the National Center for State Courts to conduct a needs assessment of the problem-solving courts in Iowa. Their recommendations highlighted the need for state coordination of existing courts, consistent practices across judicial districts, and a strategic approach to long-term sustainability and expansion. The following table provides a high-level overview of the recommendations and their implementation status.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Status Update</i>
<i>Create a position for a statewide coordinator for problem-solving courts within state court administration.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Coordinator position created January 2, 2020.
<i>Strengthen judicial branch coordination of problem-solving court programs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State Coordinator is presently conducting a survey with the existing problem-solving courts. The survey includes program location, primary coordinator/contact information, year the program began, who presides over most regularly scheduled appearances, types of persons accepted into program, type of treatment program, types of cases or charges accepted in the program, stage at which participants enter the program, and 2020 caseload demographic information. • The State Coordinator also applied for National Drug Court Institute (NDCI) operational tune-ups for Adult Drug Courts. Three Adult Drug Courts completed this process in 2020 and three more courts have been approved and will complete the process in 2021. The Operational Tune-Ups are designed to assist courts in achieving the best possible outcomes and confirm the courts are targeting the right population.
<i>Foster collaboration among state agencies.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State Coordinator is collaborating with the Department of Corrections, the Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy, Iowa Department of Public Health, the Department of Health and Human Services, Iowa State Bar Association, County Attorney’s Association, Public Defender’s Association, and the Legislative Branch.
<i>Develop annual problem-solving court training programs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A state-wide Problem Solving Court Summit was held in August of 2020. • Problem-Solving Court team members attended the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) virtual conference. • Consideration is being given to holding a statewide summit on “Iowa’s Court Response to Mental Illness”.

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<p><i>Develop state standards for adult criminal drug courts, OWI and hybrid courts, juvenile, veterans, and mental health courts.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “Blueprint for Iowa’s problem-solving courts” has been developed. This is a work plan and general procedures to be followed. • We have begun developing standards for each type of problem-solving court. Our focus is currently on Adult Drug Courts.
<p><i>Identify and implement a statewide data collection system to support statewide problem-solving court operations and the collection of data for performance measures and conduct process and outcome evaluations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A problem-solving court electronic case management system is currently being developed to capture critical data. Referral data, risk level, frequency of drug and alcohol testing, length of sobriety, successful completion or outcomes, and recidivism are some examples of the information that will be collected. We anticipate the application coming online in early 2022.
<p><i>Develop a formal problem-solving court implementation application and approval process.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An application and certification process is being developed. Final drafts of the forms should be available by March 1, 2021. Any county considering development of a problem-solving court will need to complete this process. Some of the steps the county will need to take are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Review statistical data and information to identify a target population and determination of need. (2) Establish program goals and objectives. (3) Develop eligibility and exclusionary criteria. (4) Determine capacity and type of problem-solving court. (5) Identify resources for staffing and treatment. (6) Create a timeline for implementation. (7) Observe other problem-solving court. (8) Complete and execute memorandums of understanding MOU(s) among the team members’ offices or organizations.

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<p><i>Consider strategies to increase access to problem-solving courts in rural communities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The certification process will be implemented to assist in identifying which counties have a need for a problem-solving court. Expansion will be dependent on the availability of necessary resources to successfully implement a program.
<p><i>Establish or review MOUs between justice partners and community agencies to identify roles and responsibilities, expectations around information sharing, and establish processes to review agreements annually.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample memorandums of understanding are in development for each type of problem Solving Court. Each approved and certified court will have a signed MOU in place. The template for the MOUs will be ready by March 15, 2021.
<p><i>Encourage problem-solving courts to implement policies that target the right offenders using validated risk, needs, and clinical assessments.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are different risk and assessment tools currently in use. These tools are being reviewed for the different types of problem-solving courts. A standardized tool will be established for each type of problem-solving court to use in determining whom the program will best serve.
<p><i>Ensure legal and judicial expertise in every program. A judge, county attorney, and defense attorney should be actively involved in every program.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The problem-solving court team will include a judge, a county attorney, a public defender, and additional team members of professionals who are tailored to the specific type of court. Compliance with this requirement will be a component of the certification process and the on-going Continuous Quality Improvement and Review process.
<p><i>Ensure all problem-solving courts have a multidisciplinary team that holds court staffings and hearings frequently and consistently. Ensure attendance at court staffings and court hearings by all team members.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice standards and research indicate weekly, but no less frequently than bi-weekly, "staffings" and hearings lead to successful outcomes. The State Coordinator is working with problem-solving court teams to ensure they are meeting at this frequency and all team members are attending. Compliance will be monitored through the certification and on-going Continuous Quality Improvement and Review process.

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<p><i>Review problem-solving court funding streams and court resources to identify funding priorities and service gaps.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State Coordinator is working to determine what resources and funding are needed to fully implement each type of problem-solving court. A draft layout of the needed components will be available March 1, 2021. • The State Coordinator is a member of a national coordinators group and monitors federal funding opportunities that may assist in further development of problem-solving courts.
<p><i>Create problem-solving court coordinators within state court administration to support problem-solving court operations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each problem-solving court should have a coordinator who will manage the daily implementation of the program and will gather the data needed for evaluation. With the exception of Family Treatment Courts, there currently are no coordinators. The cost for these coordinators will be included in the assessment of the funding and resources needed to implement problem-solving courts.
<p><i>Support the creation of a state drug court professionals association.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State Coordinator in reaching out to other states to learn more about their professional associations and how the associations were established. A recommendation will be made on the best approach for Iowa. Recommendations should be available July 1, 2021.

Adult Drug Courts (12) - Cerro Gordo, Webster, Lee, Pottawattamie, Dubuque & Delaware County, Black Hawk, Ottumwa, Polk, Marshall, Plymouth, Scott & Woodbury

Juvenile Drug Courts (6) - Cerro Gordo, Plymouth, Clay, Woodbury, Polk, & Des Moines

Veterans Treatment Courts (1) Woodbury

Family Treatment Courts (12)- Cerro Gordo, Linn, Johnson, Buena Vista, Webster, Black Hawk, Warren, Cass & Audubon, Clinton, Woodbury & Wapello

OWI/Drug Courts Hybrid (4) - Warren, Plymouth and Woodbury

Mental Health Courts (4) - Wapello, Scott, Pottawattamie and Woodbury County

Total Number of Problem-Solving Courts – 39