

Processing Requests for Technical Assistance to the BJA MHCP Learning Sites

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has identified five Mental Health Court (MHC) Learning Sites to provide a peer support network for local and state officials interested in planning a new—or improving upon an existing —MHC. In this capacity, learning sites will provide technical assistance by hosting site visits and responding to telephone and email inquiries from the field.

This document provides information on requesting technical assistance, managing site visit logistics, and ensuring the quality of learning site interactions.

A. Additional Information and Forms

Parties interested in technical assistance from learning sites can find summary information about the project, and short and long descriptions of each learning site at <http://consensusproject.org/mhcp>. Additionally, learning sites have identified a two-day time period each month when visitors will be welcome to attend hearings and MHC personnel will be available to interact with visitors and guide them through relevant facilities. This calendar along with an observation tool designed to guide site visit participants is also posted at <http://consensusproject.org/mhcp>.

Individuals or groups can arrange a visit to, or request telephone/email technical assistance from, learning sites in two ways:

1. By contacting a learning site directly
2. By contacting the Council of State Governments (CSG)¹ and asking to be matched with a learning site.

B. Requesting Technical Assistance

1. Requests submitted directly to learning sites

Parties who wish to arrange a site visit or to receive technical assistance via telephone/email can contact a learning site directly by visiting the MHCP Web site and locating the contact information of learning site staff. Learning site staff will determine whether to respond to such requests on their own, ask CSG to facilitate a response, or refer the interested party to another learning site. For example, learning site staff might field questions about a particular aspect of their court's operations or arrange a site visit, but might ask CSG to help facilitate site visit logistics (see scenarios below).

- *Scenario 1*: A jurisdiction has just started a MHC, and is having difficulty establishing an efficient screening process. The jurisdiction contacts a learning site. After receiving a call from the jurisdiction, the learning site provides written materials about their screening procedures, including their screening form, and the jurisdiction uses these materials to revise their screening protocols.

¹ Requests to BJA will be forwarded to the CSG contact person. As such, requests to BJA are treated as requests to CSG.

- *Scenario 2:* A jurisdiction is exploring the possibility of establishing a MHC and wants to become acquainted with the daily operations of such courts, and is particularly interested in how judges can employ sanctions and incentives from the bench. The jurisdiction contacts a learning site to arrange a site visit, and the learning site in turn contacts CSG to determine if they are the best site for the jurisdiction to visit.
- *Scenario 3:* A jurisdiction is exploring the possibility of establishing a MHC and wants to become acquainted with the daily operations of such courts, and is particularly interested in how probation officers interact with the MHC team. The jurisdiction contacts a learning site to arrange a site visit, but the learning site realizes that another site has expertise working with probation officers and makes a referral to another learning site.
- *Scenario 4:* A jurisdiction is exploring the possibility of establishing a MHC. They contact a learning site to arrange a visit, the learning site refers the interested jurisdiction to CSG for advice on the proper content of the technical assistance and the appropriate learning site to provide that assistance.

If a requester would like to schedule a visit for dates not appearing on the calendar it will be up to each site to decide whether they can be available on dates not noted in the pre-established calendar.

2. Requests submitted directly to BJA/CSG

Parties who wish to arrange a site visit or telephone/email technical assistance can contact CSG directly. CSG will suggest whether the technical assistance request can be best addressed by telephone/email technical assistance or a site visit. CSG will also suggest the learning site best suited to provide assistance and connect the requester with this jurisdiction.

C. Site Visit Logistics

For those jurisdictions that will be visiting a learning site, the learning site will provide an agenda or schedule of events for the site visit. Jurisdictions can discuss with learning sites the content of that agenda to reach an agreement over the most appropriate people and places to visit.

There is no reimbursement available for parties visiting a learning site. All transportation and hotel costs that may be associated with the visit must be borne by the visitor. A sheet of nearby hotels and airports will be provided by each learning site.

D. Ensuring the Quality of Learning Site Interactions

It is important that mechanisms exist to ensure that visitors are matched to the learning site most able to respond to the visitors' needs, that individuals contacting the learning sites consider the experience helpful, and that the learning sites continue to operate in a manner consistent with their designation as a learning site.

To this end, people who visit learning sites will be asked to complete brief exit surveys to evaluate their visits.