

ADULT DRUG COURT PLANNING INITIATIVE A GUIDE TO CREATING A PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

The purpose of a participant handbook is to provide consumers with a clear understanding of the requirements and expectations of the program. The information contained in the handbook should be organized and easy to understand. It is recommended that the handbook be written at a seventh grade reading level so that the material can be comprehended by participants of varying educational degrees. To ensure reading comprehension levels, Flesch-Kincaid scores should be used and can be determined in Microsoft Word under “readability statistics.” In addition, the document should be visually appealing; paying close attention to spacing and the availability of white space on each page. The handbook should be written and designed in a manner so that clients will fully understand the operations of the program without feeling overwhelmed with material.

The participant handbook should have a cover that identifies the name of the program and the date of its last update. The first page of the manual should be the table of contents followed by a welcome letter written by whoever is responsible for the administration of the program. The remainder of the manual should consist of the following content:

The Adult Drug Court Team

It is important that participants know who is associated with your drug court and will most likely be working with them throughout the course of program. The members of your core drug court team should be clearly identified in the handbook by name and title. In addition, a telephone number for each member should be provided.

Mission Statement

The mission statement lets your consumers know the intended purpose of the program. By providing this information, participants will have a clear understanding of why the program exists.

Eligibility Requirements

A brief description of the criteria participant’s must meet in order to be considered eligible for the program should be provided. Information should include things such as criminal class, residency requirements and clinical criteria.

Program Requirements

Participants should be provided a clear understanding as to what is required of them while taking part in the drug court program. The minimum and maximum time spent in the program should be identified. In addition, general reporting requirements, employment expectations, frequency of treatment and court appearances should be listed.

Attendance and Absence Policy

The drug court's attendance and absentee policy should be clearly stated. Participants should be advised of the importance of timely arrival and the program's point of contact in the event of a necessary absence.

Court Sessions

The date, time and location of drug court sessions should be clearly identified in the handbook.

Drug Testing Protocol

The program's drug testing policy should be clearly stated. The expected method and frequency of testing and location of sample collection sites should be included. The process of identifying how to find out if a random sample deposit is required on any given day should be described.

Supervision Protocol

The type of supervision utilized by the drug court should be identified. Participants should be given a clear understanding as to the organization responsible for supervision and the frequency of reporting. The address and telephone number of supervising entity should be provided.

Prescription Medication Policy

The drug court's policy on prescription medication should be included in the handbook. Participants should be advised of whom to contact in the event they are prescribed medication while in the program. In addition, the type of acceptable documentation for prescription medication should be identified.

Incentives and Sanctions

The purpose of imposing sanctions and incentives should be explained. Furthermore, a short list of potential rewards and punishments should be included to give participants an idea of what to expect.

Fees

The drug court's fee policy should be explained. The reason for the cost, frequency of payment and the location of the cashier should be identified.

Transportation

The program's transportation policy should be explained. Resources as to where to seek transportation assistance services should be noted.

Graduation

Guidelines on how to successfully exit the program should be provided. Information pertaining to treatment, criminal record and clean time requirements should be clearly stated.

Termination

The program's policy and terms for unsuccessful discharge from the drug court should be provided.

General Rules

The basic rules and guidelines of the program should be clearly defined. Participants should be advised of the program's policy on matters such as drug/alcohol use, enabling, acceptable behaviors, dress code, pairing off and electronic device usage.

Infection Control Policy

It is recommended that participant's be advised of the drug court's policy on infectious disease control. It should be explained that program staff exercise universal precautions and are obligated to report instances of infectious disease that pose a threat to the general public to the local health department.

Program Phases

The drug court phase system of the program should be clearly identified. Clients should be made aware of the average duration of each phase and the milestones that must be met to advance to the next stage of the program.

Treatment

The treatment levels of care and type of treatment model utilized by the program should be identified and explained. Information pertaining to the frequency of care, days and time of service delivery and location of the treatment provider should be clearly indicated.

Releases of Information & Confidentiality

The program's policy on participant confidentiality and the need for releases of information should be clearly explained. Participants should be assured that their information is protected and will only be utilized for the intended purpose of the drug court program.

Complaints and Grievances

The program's procedures for filing complaints and grievances should be included. Participants should be made aware of their right to express opinions, recommendations and grievances in addition to their right to request and receive responses via a procedure of due process. The process for filing a complaint without fear of negative repercussions should be explained. Furthermore, the waiting period for an initial response to the grievance should be noted.

Frequently Asked Questions

It is a recommended that a frequently asked questions section be included at the end of the handbook. This section should be compiled of questions that are most often posed to veteran treatment court staff and team members.

Contractual Agreement

The final page of the handbook should be the participant contractual agreement. This one-page document serves as a checklist of all requirements discussed in the handbook. It should also contain a check-box indicating that the client has received a copy of the participant handbook and understands the requirements and expectations of the program. The participant should sign the contractual agreement and the program coordinator should also sign as a witness to the participant's signature. The participant should be provided a photocopy of the contract and the original should be stored in the participant's file.

Updates to Participant Manual

The participant handbook should be updated immediately following any changes in the program's policies and procedures. Contact information for drug court team members should be updated any time there is a change in program staff or team members. In addition, the handbook should be reviewed annually to identify and address any needed programmatic adjustments.