



# Color in the Court: Assessing Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) in Treatment Courts

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# Agenda

Introductions

Research related to Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) in  
Treatment Court

A Snapshot of the RED Tool

Results from Ohio & Implications for Criminal Justice Reform



# Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components

(National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 2004)

1. Drug courts integrate alcohol and other drug treatment services with the justice system case processing
2. Using a nonadversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights
3. Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in the drug court program
4. Drug courts provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, and other related treatment and rehabilitation services
5. Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing

# Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components

(National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 2004)



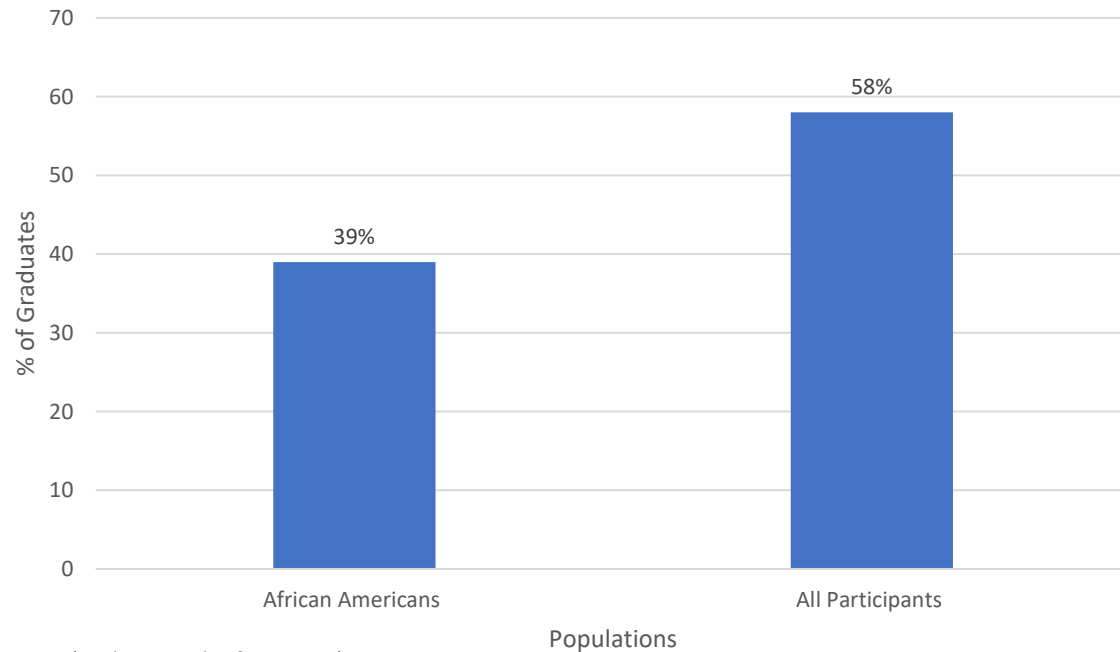
6. A coordinated strategy governs drug court responses to participants' compliance
7. Ongoing judicial interaction with each drug court participant is essential
8. Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness
9. Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective drug court planning, implementation, and operation
10. Forging partnerships among drug courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances drug court program effectiveness

## Evidence of RED in Treatment Court Outcomes

- Drug courts appear to effectively **reduce criminal recidivism** (Gallagher et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2015); however, some studies suggest that **racial disparities exist** in drug court outcomes (Gallagher, 2013a; Gallagher, 2013b).
- Gallagher (2013a) analyzed records of 376 drug court participants in urban Texas and found that **65%** of white participants graduated compared to **52%** of Hispanic and only **45%** of African American participants.
- Dannerbeck et al. (2006) analyzed data from 10 Missouri drug courts. They extracted data from the records of 657 participants from 10 courts to test hypotheses related to racial disparities in drug court outcomes. They found a significant difference in drug court outcomes; specifically, **55%** of white participants and only **28%** of African Americans graduated the program.

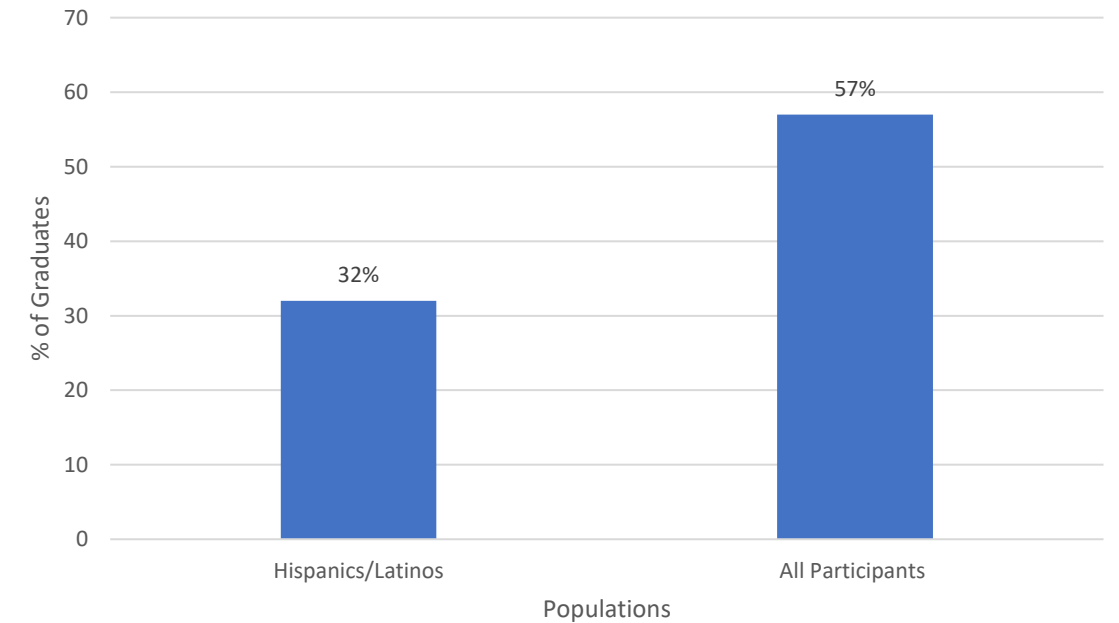
# Further Evidence of RED in Treatment Court Outcomes

Graduation Rates for African Americans vs. All Participants



Source: (Marlowe, Hardin, & Fox, 2016)

Graduation Rates for Hispanics/Latinos vs. All Participants



Source: (Marlowe, Hardin, & Fox, 2016)

# Three Key RED Outcomes (Gallagher, 2019)



- **Access to Treatment Court**

- (1) Subjective eligibility criteria, such as criminal history (particularly prior felony convictions) or even more subjective criteria, such as suspected gang involvement, ability to pay program fees, or perceived level of motivation; (2) “word of mouth”; and (3) implicit bias are factors that may inadvertently exclude some racial and ethnic minorities from treatment court.


- **Completion Rates**

- (1) The underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in some treatment courts; (2) dissatisfaction with the quality of substance use and mental health disorder treatment; and (3) being mandated to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), or other 12-Step meetings were associated with lower completion rates for some racial and ethnic minorities.

- **Criminal Recidivism Outcomes**


- (1) A lack of sustainable, career-oriented employment; (2) less education than white counterparts; and (3) environmental and neighborhood risk factors seem to be associated with higher criminal recidivism rates for some racial and ethnic minorities.

# Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards (Equity and Inclusion)



**ADULT DRUG COURT**  
**BEST PRACTICE STANDARDS**

This groundbreaking set of **EVIDENCE-BASED STANDARDS** is your blueprint to dramatically improve outcomes for individuals involved in the justice system due to substance use disorders and mental health conditions. Representing 25 years of **EMPIRICAL STUDY** on addiction, pharmacology, behavioral health, and criminal justice, these Standards are the foundation upon which all adult drug courts should operate. They hold the keys to transform how the justice system responds to people in crisis. Whether you are a researcher, subject matter expert, drug court practitioner, state or federal policymaker, or concerned citizen, the NADCP *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards* are vital to your understanding of effective **JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM**.



**DOWNLOAD: [NADCP.ORG/STANDARDS](https://www.nadcp.org/standards)**



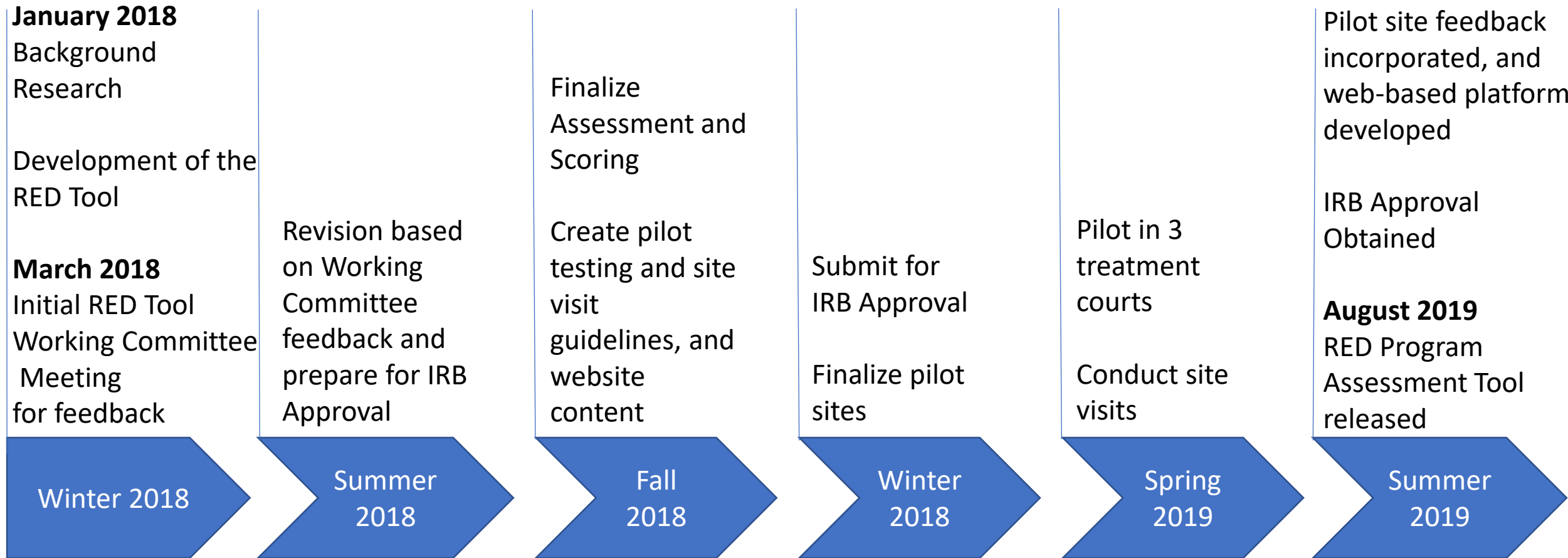
# RED Assessment Working Committee

- **Julie Baldwin**, Ph.D., American University
- **Evan Elkin**, Ph.D., Reclaiming Futures
- **Zephi Francis**, M.S., American University
- **John Gallagher**, Ph.D., Morgan State University
- **Preeti P. Menon**, M.A., American University
- **Darryl Turpin**, M.P.A., Heat Time





# RED Program Assessment Tool Timeline



## July 2020

Multiple states begin to work with AU & CCI and ask for treatment courts take the assessment on a volunteer basis



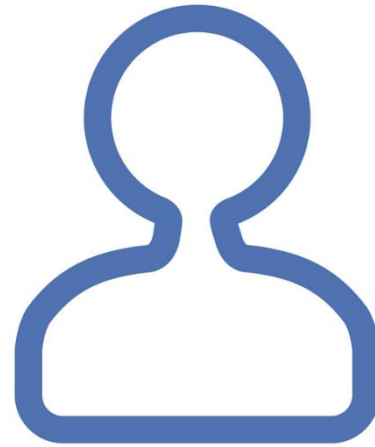
# The RED Program Assessment Tool

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Program Assessment tool is designed to capture information about treatment courts' **operations and procedures**, with an emphasis on examining areas where **racial and ethnic disparities** may exist.

# Goals of RED Tool



Raise awareness about RED in treatment courts.



Assist users identify RED in their system and processes.



Offer recommendations on alleviating racial/ethnic inequities in programs.



# Home Page – redtool.org

Treatment Courts

## About RED Program Assessment Tool

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Program Assessment Tool was designed to capture information about treatment courts' operations and procedures, with an emphasis on examining areas where racial and ethnic disparities may exist in their courts. The underlying goals of the RED tool are:

1. Raising awareness about RED in treatment courts;
2. Assisting courts identify RED in their systems and processes; and
3. Offering recommendations on alleviating racial/ethnic disparities.

## Testimonials



"The RED Program Assessment Tool proved helpful for our court in taking a purposeful and in-depth look at our operations, ensuring we are intentional in addressing race and ethnic disparities."

—Joseph T. Johnson II, Equity and Inclusion Specialist/Management Analyst,  
Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services



## Take The RED Assessment

[Forgot Password?](#)

[Log In](#)

[Forgot Court ID?](#)

Don't have a Court ID?  
Please [contact us to register](#)

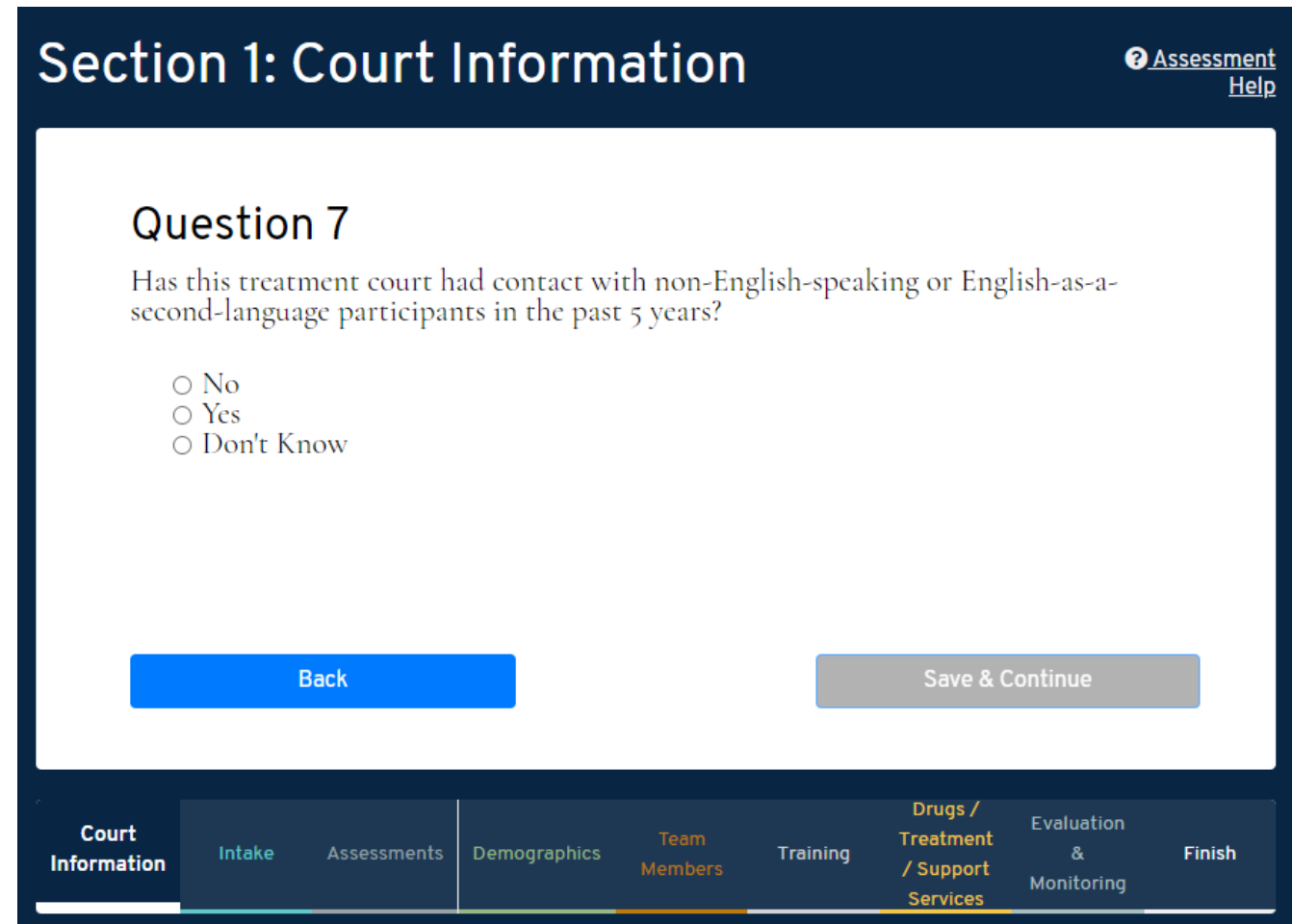
# What's on the Assessment?

- Court Information
- Intake
- Assessments
- Demographics
- Team Members
- Training
- Drugs/Treatment/Support Services
- Evaluation and Monitoring



# Court Information

The **Court Information** section covers the background of the court (e.g., geographical location), policies, procedures, and interactions with non-English-speaking participants.



Section 1: Court Information [Assessment Help](#)

**Question 7**

Has this treatment court had contact with non-English-speaking or English-as-a-second-language participants in the past 5 years?

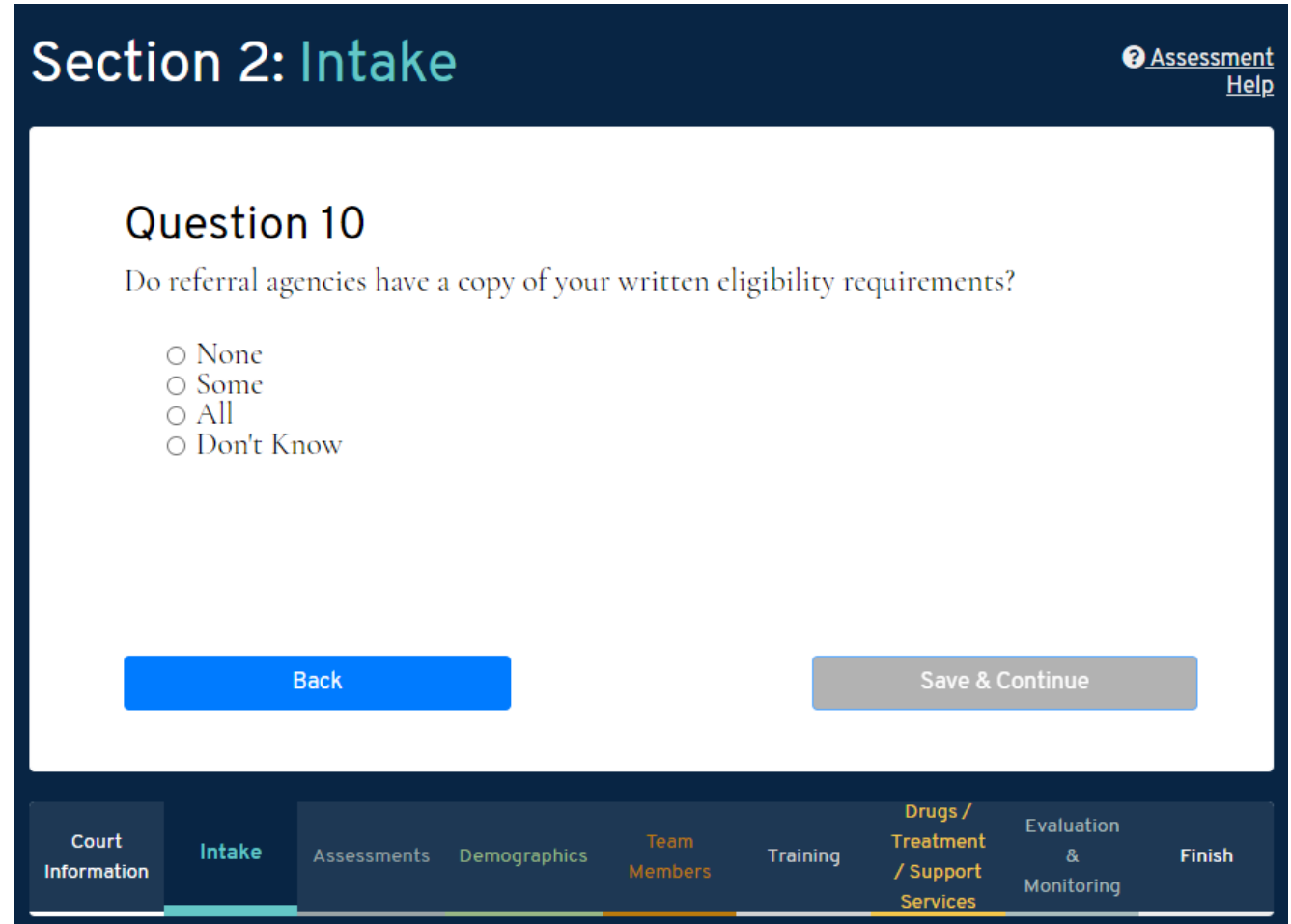
No  
 Yes  
 Don't Know

[Back](#) [Save & Continue](#)

Court Information | Intake | Assessments | Demographics | Team Members | Training | Drugs / Treatment / Support Services | Evaluation & Monitoring | Finish

# Intake

The **Intake** section addresses the referral process and the court's eligibility requirements.



The screenshot shows a web interface for the 'Intake' section. At the top, it says 'Section 2: Intake' and has a 'Help' link. The main content area displays 'Question 10' with the text 'Do referral agencies have a copy of your written eligibility requirements?'. Below the text are four radio button options: 'None', 'Some', 'All', and 'Don't Know'. At the bottom of the question area are two buttons: 'Back' (blue) and 'Save & Continue' (grey). A navigation bar at the very bottom contains several tabs: 'Court Information', 'Intake' (highlighted in teal), 'Assessments', 'Demographics', 'Team Members', 'Training', 'Drugs / Treatment / Support Services', 'Evaluation & Monitoring', and 'Finish'.

Section 2: Intake [Assessment Help](#)

Question 10

Do referral agencies have a copy of your written eligibility requirements?

None  
 Some  
 All  
 Don't Know

Back Save & Continue

Court Information Intake Assessments Demographics Team Members Training Drugs / Treatment / Support Services Evaluation & Monitoring Finish



# Assessments

The **Assessments** section includes questions on risk and needs, substance use disorder, and mental health assessments.

Section 3: Assessments
Assessment Help

### Question 19

To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

**Risk assessment data is used to place participants in appropriate programming.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not Applicable
- Don't Know

**Staff are trained to administer the risk assessment properly.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not Applicable
- Don't Know

**Staff can transfer the findings from the risk assessment to treatment court practice.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not Applicable
- Don't Know

**Staff can interpret the results of the risk assessment.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not Applicable
- Don't Know

**Staff share the findings from the risk assessment with participants.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not Applicable
- Don't Know

Back

Save & Continue

Court Information
Intake
Assessments
Demographics
Team Members
Training
Drugs / Treatment / Support Services
Evaluation & Monitoring
Finish

# Demographics

The **Demographics** section address the racial/ethnic makeup of program participants.

**Section 4: Demographics** Assessment Help

**Question 34**

Please provide the percent breakdown by race/ethnicity of the total amount of treatment court participants in the **past calendar year**. The total sum should add up to 100%. If you don't know, leave blank.

African American or Black	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
American Indian or Alaska Native	White
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Asian	Biracial
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Hispanic	Other
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Total (=100)
	<input type="text"/>

Court Information | Intake | Assessments | **Demographics** | Team Members | Training | Drugs / Treatment / Support Services | Evaluation & Monitoring | Finish

# Team Members

The **Team Members** section covers the racial/ethnic makeup of the team. In addition, there are several topics such team members' understanding of factors that contribute to racial/ethnic disparities and their understanding of cultural needs among participants.

Section 5: **Team Members** Assessment Help

Question 39  
Thinking about your current team, please indicate the following for each role. If your team does not have a position, please write "0" in the first column.

	# Team	% Minority		# Team	% Minority
Case manager(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Mental health provider(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>
Coordinator(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Probation officer(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>
Community-based outreach specialist(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Program director(s)/manager(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>
Defense attorney(s)/public defender(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Prosecutor(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>
Judge(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Substance use disorder treatment provider(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>
Law enforcement officer(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>	Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist(s)	<input type="text" value="#"/>	<input type="text" value="%"/>

Back
Save & Continue

Court Information
Intake
Assessments
Demographics
Team Members
Training
Drugs / Treatment / Support Services
Evaluation & Monitoring
Finish

# Training

The **Training** section focuses on the court's experience with racial/ethnic disparity and cultural competency training.

## Section 6: Training

Assessment Help  

### Question 49

In the past five years, has your team or have members of your team received cultural competency training?

- No
- Yes
- Don't Know

[Back](#) [Save & Continue](#)

Court Information Intake Assessments Demographics **Team Members** **Training** Drugs / Treatment / Support Services Evaluation & Monitoring Finish



# Drugs/Treatment/Support Services

The **Drugs/Treatment/Support Services** section focuses on the participants' primary drug of choice(s), treatment available, incentives, sanctions, and ancillary services.

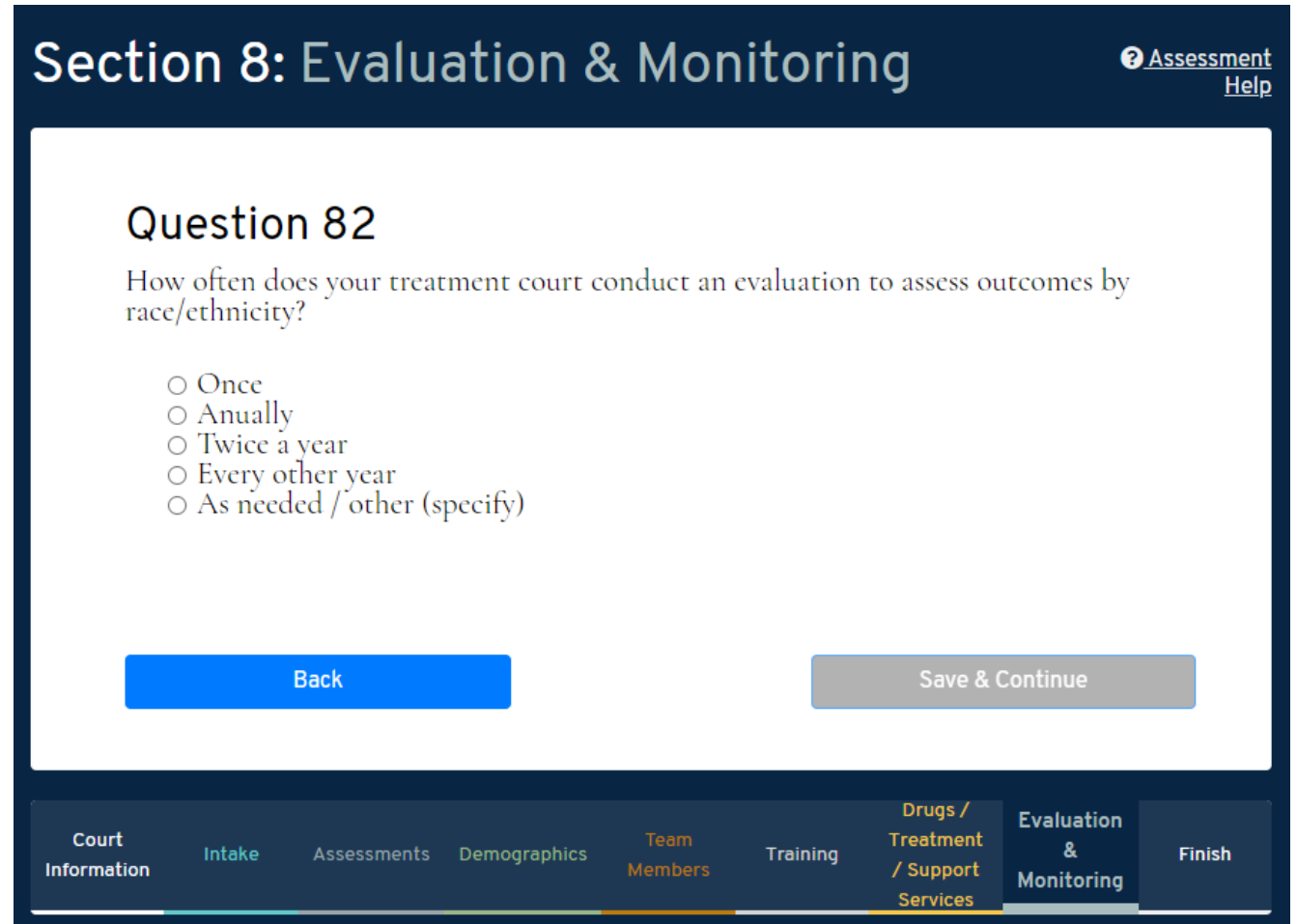
Section 7: **Drugs / Treatment / Support Services** Assessment Help

Question 57  
What are the top 3 drugs for participants in this treatment court?

Court Information | Intake | Assessments | Demographics | Team Members | Training | **Drugs / Treatment / Support Services** | Evaluation & Monitoring | Finish

# Evaluation and Monitoring

The **Evaluation and Monitoring** section addresses the type(s) of evaluations that may have been conducted in the past. Also, several questions on tracking participants' program completion outcomes.



Section 8: Evaluation & Monitoring [Assessment Help](#)

**Question 82**

How often does your treatment court conduct an evaluation to assess outcomes by race/ethnicity?

- Once
- Anually
- Twice a year
- Every other year
- As needed / other (specify)

[Back](#) [Save & Continue](#)

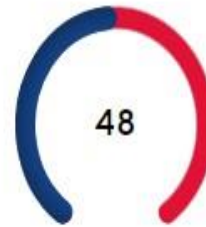
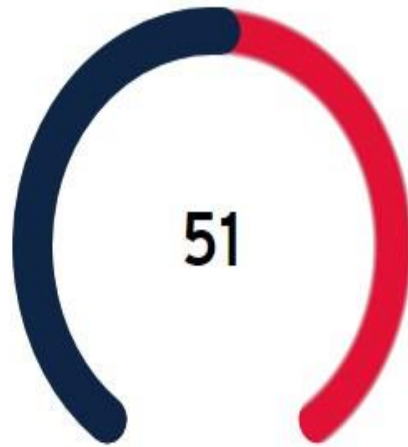
Court Information Intake Assessments Demographics **Team Members** Training **Drugs / Treatment / Support Services** **Evaluation & Monitoring** Finish

# Scoring and Recommendations

Results:

[Assessment Help](#)

RED Program Assessment Tool  
Total Score



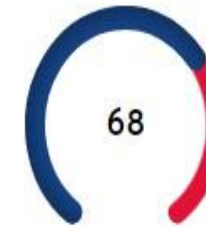
Section 1:  
Court Information

[View Answers](#)



Section 2:  
Intake

[View Answers](#)



Section 3:  
Assessments

[View Answers](#)

(Not Scored)

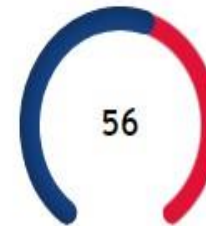
Section 4:  
Demographics

[View Answers](#)



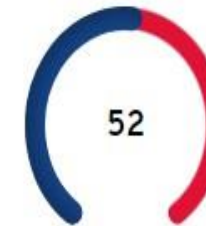
Section 5:  
Team Members

[View Answers](#)



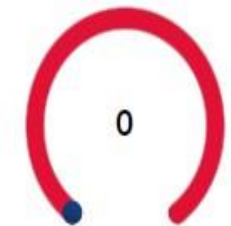
Section 6:  
Training

[View Answers](#)



Section 7:  
Drugs / Treatment / Support  
Services

[View Answers](#)



Section 8:  
Evaluation & Monitoring

[View Answers](#)

# Recommendations

## Section 1: Court Information

- Create an information sheet that discusses racial/ethnic equity.
- Create a website that discusses racial/ethnic equity.
- Create a written participant handbook that discusses racial/ethnic equity.
- Consider implementing policies to assess for racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes.
- Consider implementing policies to employ a diverse staff that is representative of the treatment court's population.
- Consider implementing policies to support staff in providing culturally responsive interventions.
- To ensure participants understand the legal implications of participation in the treatment court, consider employing a community-based outreach specialist (e.g., cultural broker, community liaison, client outreach, peer-support).
- Continue assessing your court's policies and procedures in this category to further reduce racial and ethnic disparity.

## Section 2: Intake

- Provide all referral agencies with a copy of the treatment court's eligibility requirements to ensure they have concrete guidance on prospective participants who can be referred to the program.
- Eliminating barriers like having access to transportation make programs more accessible to participants who may be from lower socioeconomic groups.
- Continue assessing your court's policies and procedures in this category to further reduce racial and ethnic disparity.



## Section 3: Assessments

- Validating the risk assessment is vital to assess its ability to predict future re-offenses for each racial/ethnic group in your treatment court.
- Train staff members on using the risk assessment.
- Ensure that staff are able to interpret and understand results from the risk assessment.
- Consider validating your mental health assessment for different racial/ethnic groups your treatment court serves.
- Consider having a procedure in place to train staff on how to administer the mental health assessment with specific racial/ethnic groups.
- Train staff members on using the mental health assessment.

## Section 5: Team Members

- Increase the number of staff members from racial/ethnic backgrounds of the treatment court participants.
- Continue assessing your court's policies and procedures in this category to further reduce racial and ethnic disparity.

## Section 6: Training

- Including staff members in trainings to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in treatment court allows for staff to implement strategies to reduce racial/ethnic disparities.
- Feedback from the training on reducing racial and ethnic disparities should be turned into possible solutions to implement in the treatment court.
- Implement trainings to learn about cultural competency.

## Section 7: Drugs / Treatment / Support Services

- Implement effective and appropriate treatment services in order to have an impact on substance use reduction.
- Implement effective and appropriate treatment services in order to have an impact on substance use reduction.
- Implement effective and appropriate treatment services in order to have an impact on substance use reduction.
- Develop a system that utilizes culturally sensitive case management.
- Provide evidence-based practices in treatment.
- Tailor treatment to specific populations (minorities).
- Develop a plan to increase program satisfaction of minority participants.
- Actively address racial and ethnic disparities in counseling.
- Have counselors use culturally-informed practices.

## Section 8: Evaluation & Monitoring

- Track treatment court graduates' outcomes post-program.
- Regularly examine graduation and/or termination data to determine the rates of retention of participants of different races/ethnicities.
- Assess the quality of the program using an evaluation.
- Continue assessing your court's policies and procedures in this category to further reduce racial and ethnic disparity.

# Data Security

- Data stored on AU's secure server.
- No individual level data collected.
- Data will only be reported in the aggregate.



# Key Findings from Ohio



- The 30 courts represented in this report include:
  - 16 Adult Drug Treatment Courts
  - 6 Family Dependency Treatment Courts
  - 5 Veterans' Treatment Courts (VTCs)
  - 3 other courts (including hybrid DUI/Adult Drug Treatment Courts and a Human Trafficking Court)
- The Supreme Court of Ohio reports Ohio has a total **224** treatment courts, including **101** Adult Drug Treatment courts, **26** VTCs, and **34** Family Treatment Courts, meaning this convenience sample includes data from approximately **15%** of each program type.
- Average length of operation was **12.3** years, suggesting that most courts are relatively well established.
- All programs predominantly serve white participants; **81%** of past year participants and **78%** of current participants are white. In contrast, **52%** of Ohio's incarcerated population are white, and **43%** are black. This white dominance is also reflected in staff demographics, as all teams are predominately staffed with white individuals.

# Key Findings from Ohio



- For the 30 Ohio courts assessed, the mean overall score on the RED assessment is **63%**.
- The courts, on average, scored highest in their use of **assessments** and **access to treatment and ancillary services**.
- The courts, on average, scored lowest on **team training** and **overall program setup and public facing information**.
- The graduation rates as reported by the teams for participants in Ohio treatment courts was **49%** overall; **65%** for white participants; **29%** for black participants; **24%** for Hispanic participants - this is in stark contrast to the official numbers maintained by the OH supreme court.
  - The individual participant-level data collected by the Supreme Court from the dockets participating in the RED assessment program was analyzed by the Supreme Court's Office of Court Services in an attempt to validate the quality of the dockets' self-reported graduation rate data. Demographic and exit data for all participants exiting those dockets during the 12-month period ending August 31, 2020 were analyzed and revealed that the dockets reported an **overall graduation rate of 54.4 percent, with African American participants graduating at a rate of 54.1 percent and white participants graduating at a rate of 55.2 percent.**



# Key Findings from Ohio



## Section 1: Court Information

- Of the 27 courts who have a staff policy and procedures manual, **75%** of them include discussion of racial equity in their manual.
- **0%** of courts have a website (or section of their website) dedicated to racial equity.

## Section 2: Intake

- **100%** of courts have their eligibility requirements in writing (but only **60%** share those requirements with all referral sources).

# Key Findings from Ohio



## Section 3: Assessments

- **97%** of courts use a substance use disorder assessment, and 93% of those courts use the data from the assessment to determine type and intensity of services.
- **59%** of courts do not know if their risk assessment is validated for their target population.

## Section 4: Demographics

- Graduation rate was highest for white participants (**64.9%**) and was under **30%** for all other races and ethnicities.

# Key Findings from Ohio



## Section 5: Team Members

- **87%** of courts have at least one non-white staff member, but few in positions of leadership.
- **100%** of courts agree with the statement “Our team is committed to addressing racial and ethnic disparities”.
- Only **47%** of courts agree with the statement “Our team is racially and ethnically diverse”.

## Section 6: Training

- **66%** of courts provided cultural competency training, but only **10%** (3 courts) made any changes based upon the training they received.
- Only **18%** of courts made any changes based upon training they received in the past year.
- Only **6%** of courts require all staff to attend racial and ethnic disparities trainings.



# Key Findings from Ohio



## Section 7: Drug of Choice and Treatment/Support Services

- **60%** of courts are confident they can provide relevant treatment services for their Hispanic participants and **77%** believe they can provide complete services for Black / African American participants.
- **80%** of courts charge fees for probation, which disproportionately disadvantage nonwhite participants.

## Section 8: Evaluation and Monitoring

- **81%** of courts have never evaluated their outcomes to determine if racial and ethnic disparities exist.



# Recommendations to Support Criminal Justice Reform

1. Schedule yearly RED, cultural competency regional and statewide trainings.
2. Include a RED component in all training initiatives including judges' trainings.
3. Develop statewide RED mission and vision statements and other equity language for local treatment courts.
4. Develop a statewide RED data dashboard.
5. Identify statewide choice points that address subjectivity in court operations based on the national adult drug best practice standards.



**Email: [redtool@american.edu](mailto:redtool@american.edu)**



# RED

# Program Assessment Tool

APRIL 2022

## Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Treatment Courts Guide for Initial Considerations

### INTRODUCTION

Professionals working in treatment courts must familiarize themselves with the Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards. These volumes serve as the underpinning for the operational best practices for treatment courts. This guide will focus on Standard II, Equity and Inclusion, honing in on race and ethnicity. Regardless of participants' social identities, they should have the same opportunities to participate and succeed in treatment courts (National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 2018). Research has documented treatment courts' ability to reduce criminal recidivism among participants (Belenko, Dematteo, & Patapis, 2007; Mitchell, Wilson, Eggers, & MacKenzie, 2012; Shaffer, 2011). However, as treatment courts have been evaluated, racial and ethnic disparities (RED) for minority participants have been identified in some programs, and these disparities have existed for over 20 years (Brewster, 2001). RED have been found in program admission rates and access to the program due to subjective eligibility criteria (Orr et al., 2009), program completion (Dannerbeck et al., 2006; Sheeran & Heideman, 2021), and criminal recidivism rates (Saum & Hiller, 2008; Rosssman et al., 2011).

The goals of this guide are to (1) introduce treatment court professionals to the topic of racial and ethnic disparities (RED), (2) provide an overview of the RED Program Assessment Tool, and (3) offer key considerations that courts should be mindful of as they implement new programs or make changes to existing programs.

### RED PROGRAM ASSESSMENT TOOL

The RED Program Assessment Tool was designed to assist treatment courts to address racial and ethnic disparities. The RED Tool is an automated web-based platform that has a series of closed and open-ended questions to capture information about treatment courts' operations and procedures, with an emphasis on examining areas where racial and ethnic disparities may exist. The RED Tool has the ability to (1) raise awareness about RED in treatment courts, (2) assist users in identifying RED in their system and processes, and (3) offer recommendations on alleviating racial and ethnic inequities in programs. The RED Tool has eight sections, detailed below, that outline topics and considerations under each section. These considerations when planned and implemented will provide an avenue for treatment courts to alleviate racial and ethnic disparities within their programming.

#### Section 1: Court Information

The Court Information section covers the background of the court (e.g., geographical location), policies, procedures, and interactions with non-English-speaking participants.

#### Considerations

Written Materials: Written materials, including mission statements, vision statements, staff manuals, websites, or participant handbooks, should promote racial and ethnic equity within the court. The creation and implementation of policies that address racial and ethnic equity is essential in creating an organizational culture that strives for equity. Any public facing documents can also serve as part of a marketing strategy to broadcast the benefits of program participation.

Non-English-Speaking Participants: Having translation services and court documents in participants' native languages allows for more racial and ethnic inclusivity in courts.

### Section 2: Intake

The Intake section addresses the referral process and the court's eligibility requirements.

**Consideration** Eligibility Requirements and Referral Agencies: Courts must have written eligibility requirements and share them with referral agencies. Subjective criteria like a recommendation from a staff member should be avoided. Instead, use procedures like an assessment from a treatment provider to determine program entry. Additionally, pay attention to factors that may disproportionately exclude racial and ethnic minorities from participating in your program, such as participant fees or access to transportation.

### Section 3: Assessments

The Assessments section includes questions on risk and needs, substance use disorder, and mental health assessments.

**Consideration** For each assessment that your court uses, make sure that it has been validated for your population. Assessments should be utilized to (1) determine eligibility, (2) determine services, and (3) determine the intensity and the amount of services. Using assessments allows for more objective decision-making to occur. Staff should also be trained to administer and interpret the results from assessments.

### Section 4: Demographics

The Demographics section addresses the racial and ethnic makeup of program participants.

#### Considerations

Participation Data: Collection of participant data is expected for courts. Particularly, courts should collect demographic data, including the racial and ethnic identity of participants.

Completion Rates: Courts should track completion rates broken down by race and ethnicity. Tracking completion rates allows for courts to identify if there are racial and ethnic disparities.

### Section 5: Team Members

The Team Members section covers the racial and ethnic makeup of the team.

In addition, there are several topics such as team members' understanding of factors that contribute to racial and ethnic disparities and their understanding of cultural needs among participants.

#### Considerations

Diverse Staff: Implement inclusive practices to hire and retain a diverse team.

Team Members' Competencies: It is vital for team members to have a good understanding of the cultural needs of court participants and knowledge of factors that contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes.

### Section 6: Training

The Training section focuses on the court's experience with racial and ethnic disparity and cultural competency training.

**Consideration** Regular training sessions on reducing racial and ethnic disparities and cultural competency should be available to all professionals associated with the court. After completing trainings, courts should consider making changes where appropriate.



# RED

# Program Assessment Tool

APRIL 2022

## Section 7: Drugs/Treatment/Support Services

The Drugs/Treatment/Support Services section focuses on the participants' drug of choice(s), treatment available, incentives, sanctions, and supportive services.

### Considerations

Drug of Choice(s): Courts should track drug of choice(s) for participants broken down by race and ethnicity. This will allow for the court to ensure that there are appropriate treatment services for all participants.

Treatment Services: Evidence-based treatment services should be offered to participants. Clinicians must also be trained on using culturally informed practices.

Incentives and Sanctions: Give participants a written document that lists incentives and sanction and the corresponding behaviors. Regardless of race and ethnicity, incentives and sanctions must be applied equitably.

Supportive Services: Consider offering participants an array of services, including anger management, employment readiness, education services, HIV/AIDS education and testing, housing support, mental health counselling, parenting classes, and vocational services.

## Section 8: Evaluation and Monitoring

The Evaluation and Monitoring section addresses the type(s) of evaluations that may have been conducted in the past. Also, there are several questions on tracking participants' program completion outcomes.

Consideration Evaluation and Monitoring: Conduct regular evaluations and monitoring. Consider examining graduation/termination data and outcomes post program broken down by race/ethnicity.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, treatment courts are effective if implemented based on the Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards. However, as we have outlined, racial and ethnic disparities exist in some treatment courts. The RED Tool is a method for professionals to proactively identify disparities and then implement recommendations to make improvements to their programs. As you begin to work on a journey to make your treatment court more inclusive, please feel free to reach out to us at [redtool@american.edu](mailto:redtool@american.edu) for any additional questions or support.

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# ISSUE BRIEF

## RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES (RED) IN TREATMENT COURTS

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JULY 2019

### THE HISTORY OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES (RED) IN TREATMENT COURTS

Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) in policing practices, arrest and conviction rates, sentencing norms, and incarceration trends have continuously had a negative impact on racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> Treatment courts, unfortunately, have also experienced RED in outcomes (e.g. minorities graduating programs at a lesser rate than Caucasians). To their credit, treatment courts have taken a proactive, advocacy approach in researching and eliminating the problem to assure equal access and effective treatments for all participants. The first treatment court was a drug court that began in 1989 in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Since then, drug courts have been rigorously evaluated, and in the past 30 years research has demonstrated that drug courts are more effective than traditional criminal justice interventions (e.g. probation) at reducing criminal recidivism rates for individuals who have substance use disorders.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the success of drug courts, other treatment court models were developed, such as mental health courts, family dependency treatment courts, veterans treatment courts, and DWI (driving while intoxicated) courts, to name a few.

Although research has continuously shown that treatment courts are effective, there is an unfortunate trend in some treatment courts where RED exist. These disparities are primarily present in participants who have access to the programs, completion rates, and criminal recidivism outcomes. It is important to mention, however, that the majority of research on RED is focused on adult drug courts, which is not surprising, considering they are the most common type of treatment court. The findings, however, from previous research and recommendations to eliminate RED in outcomes may be applicable to all types of treatment courts, as they operate under the same, or similar, key components (e.g. frequent status hearings with a judge, random and frequent drug testing, court-ordered counseling, offering sanctions and incentives). The presence of RED in treatment court outcomes is not a new phenomenon. Nearly 20 years ago, Brewster found in a Pennsylvania drug court that Caucasian participants were more



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The National Drug Court Resource Center (NDCRC) is housed at the Justice Programs Office, a center in American University's School of Public Affairs, and is funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Issue briefs such as this are created to educate and inform the treatment court field about topics of importance. For more information please visit the National Drug Court Resource Center at [www.ndcrc.org](http://www.ndcrc.org).

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The Justice Programs Office, a center in American University's School of Public Affairs, supports the National Drug Court Resource Center, part of a BJA-funded drug court initiative. This issue brief was created to respond to significant issues identified during the provision of technical assistance to the field. For more information about accessing technical assistance services or to learn more about the AU Justice Programs Office, go to [www.american.edu/justice](http://www.american.edu/justice).



likely than African Americans to be successful in the program.<sup>3</sup> In a Texas drug court, 65.42% of Caucasian participants graduated the program, but only 52.17% of Hispanics and 45.71% of African Americans graduated the program.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, a recent study of more than 17,000 treatment court participants found that African Americans graduated less than other participants.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the study found that African Americans had the lowest graduation rate (37.9%) in the sample, compared to that of Caucasian participants (54.7%), Hispanic participants (49.2%), and those who identified with another race and ethnicity (54.2%).

## SOLUTIONS

Finding solutions to address RED in treatment courts is a complex process and, while solutions may vary from court-to-court based on their individualized needs, there are multiple suggestions for solutions based on previous research. An important solution to eliminate RED in graduation and criminal recidivism outcomes is to first identify and rectify the factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in some treatment courts. Qualitative<sup>6</sup> and quantitative<sup>7</sup> studies have both suggested that when non-Caucasian participants are underrepresented in treatment courts, this may be a factor that contributes to RED in graduation and recidivism outcomes. For instance, African Americans in a Southern drug court felt that the program could have been improved by increasing the number of African Americans admitted into the program, as they felt that would increase camaraderie, friendships, and overall support

among themselves.<sup>8</sup> Treatment courts should assess for RED in admissions by using appropriate measurements (e.g. RED Program Assessment Tool) and develop strategies to eliminate barriers and improve equal access to their programs. To put this in perspective, as a general guide, best estimates are that some treatment courts should increase their admission of racial and ethnic minorities by approximately seven percent.<sup>9</sup>

Treatment courts should evaluate their eligibility criteria to determine whether any criterion may inadvertently exclude racial and ethnic minorities. Criteria that seem to commonly exclude some racial and ethnic minorities from treatment courts are having a criminal history, particularly prior felony convictions, or even less objective measures, such as suspected gang involvement, ability to pay program fees, or perceived level of motivation. Implicit bias is another factor that cannot be ignored, as it may impact stakeholders' decision on who is and is not admitted into the program.

It is recommended that treatment courts develop a comprehensive assessment to determine eligibility, which includes an individualized approach by interviewing potential participants. Also, treatment court teams should attend training to increase their awareness of implicit bias and eliminate its potential impact on the decision-making process. To reiterate, to improve equal access to treatment courts for all races and ethnicities, it is recommended that treatment courts assess for RED in their programs, evaluate their eligibility criteria, and attend training on implicit bias.

In addition to identifying and rectifying the factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in some treatment courts, it is recommended that treatment courts refer their participants to counselors and agencies who are using evidence-based interventions. Research has suggested that some treatment court participants may not be receiving best practices when it comes to treating their substance use disorders and mental illnesses.<sup>10 11</sup> In two qualitative studies, the majority of drug court participants who identified themselves as Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, or multiracial cumulatively felt that counselors used punitive and judgmental approaches in treating their substance use disorders<sup>12</sup> and they were not receiving adequate mental health care, most commonly for depression and anxiety symptoms.<sup>13</sup> Receiving adequate mental health care is essential for participants in all treatment courts, not only mental health courts. It is also essential in veterans treatment courts where many participants have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and family dependency treatment courts where many children will need trauma-informed care.

Additionally, when comparing and contrasting the lived experiences of Caucasians and African Americans in drug court, further evidence suggests that African Americans may be more likely to be dissatisfied with the quality of counseling they receive, as compared to Caucasians.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the majority of African Americans felt that their counseling was more like an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting, as compared to normative



counseling interventions (e.g. cognitive behavioral therapy), and they felt forced to accept culturally incompetent labels.<sup>15</sup> There is a trend, particularly with African Americans, that suggests that providing individualized, culturally-informed interventions is an avenue to eliminate RED in treatment court outcomes. It is common for treatment courts to refer participants to community support groups (e.g. AA, NA). Consistent with best practices, however, treatment courts should not mandate all participants to the same types of support groups. For instance, some African Americans will respond best by utilizing natural supports for their recovery, such as talking with a pastor or attending church, as compared to being mandated to attend community support groups.<sup>16</sup> Some African Americans in a Texas drug court actually felt that the format of AA and NA was inconsistent with their culture; hence, highlighting the importance of providing individualized, culturally-informed interventions.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned previously, the majority of research on RED has been focused on adult drug courts, particularly with African Americans. Therefore, there are emerging interventions that have shown promise in serving African American participants, but more research is needed on other racial and ethnic minorities. One such intervention that has shown promise in improving outcomes for African American men is Habilitation Empowerment Accountability Therapy (HEAT). HEAT is a culturally-informed intervention designed for African American males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine.<sup>18</sup> HEAT curriculum is guided by a trauma-informed and strengths-based lens, meaning it addresses topics such as generational traumas experienced by African Americans and utilizes personal strengths in accomplishing treatment goals, such as maintaining abstinence from drugs, completing treatment court, and not recidivating.<sup>19</sup> Reentry court participants who received HEAT were more likely than comparison groups to graduate and complete parole, and, equally as important, participants who received HEAT reported being satisfied with the counseling they received and as having a good rapport with the counselor and group members.<sup>20</sup>

The St. Joseph County (Indiana) drug court is an example of a treatment court that priori-



ties racial and ethnic equality. Previous studies of this treatment court have shown equal graduation<sup>21</sup> and criminal recidivism<sup>22</sup> outcomes across race and ethnicity. The treatment court attributes their success to several factors. First, beginning in 2012, a researcher joined the drug court team. Indiana state law requires treatment courts do program evaluations at least once every three years, and this is an opportunity for programs to assess whether or not they are meeting their goals and objectives. It is recommended that treatment courts invite researchers from local colleges or universities to join their team, as this will provide an objective method to continuously assess for RED in outcomes. Second, the treatment court refers participants to counselors and agencies that provide a range of evidence-based treatments for substance use disorders and mental illnesses. The community mental health center, for example, where most participants are referred to, offers a range of culturally-informed treatments, such as a group for African Americans who have substance use disorders and histories of trauma. No one approach to treatment is best for all; therefore, it is important for treatment courts to refer participants to counselors and agencies that offer multiple modalities of treatment.

Third, program evaluations of the St. Joseph County (Indiana) drug court showed that racial and ethnic minorities tended to have more economic (e.g. unemployment), educational (e.g. no high school diploma), and other

barriers (e.g. no transportation) to being successful in the program, as compared to their Caucasian counterparts.<sup>23 24</sup> Therefore, the treatment court incorporated recovery coaches into their programming. Recovery coaches were an extra resource for participants who experienced these barriers. In addition to offering peer support for ongoing recovery, recovery coaches assisted participants in applying for jobs, earning their GED, and providing transportation to treatment court hearings and drug testing. Recovery coaching seems to be a promising adjunct to the traditional treatment court team. In this Indiana treatment court, they successfully treated substance use within their minority population by analyzing and utilizing research results. By having a researcher join the treatment court team and completing regular program evaluations, the treatment court team made informed decisions of referring participants to counselors and agencies that use evidence-based, culturally-informed interventions, and incorporated recovery coaches into their programming.

### **RESOURCES/TRAININGS OFFERED BY TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AGENCIES**

The National Drug Court Resource Center (NDCRC) in the Justice Programs Office at American University created the Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Program Assessment Tool. The RED Program Assessment



was designed to capture information about treatment courts' operation and procedures, with an emphasis on examining areas where racial and ethnic disparities may exist. The RED Program Assessment is a series of open and closed-ended questions regarding the following categories: (1) Court Information, (2) Intake, (3) Assessments, (4) Demographics, (5) Team Members, (6) Training, (7) Drug/Treatment/Support, and (8) Evaluation and Monitoring. It is recommended that the entire treatment court team works in collaboration to complete the assessment. Teams should set aside approximately two hours to discuss and enter responses into the web-based form. Based on inputted responses, courts receive recommendations on how to alleviate racial/ethnic disparities in the program accompanied by

scores for the multiple sections. The overall benefit of the assessment is for treatment courts to create programs that are fair and equitable to all participants regardless of race and/or ethnicity. To register your court for an account, visit [www.ndcrc.org](http://www.ndcrc.org).

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals' (NADCP) National Drug Court Institute (NDCI) developed a training on equity and inclusion to address racial disparities, bias, and access and retention of participants to improve outcomes. Courts can also receive a training on equity and inclusion during an operational tune-up. To learn more about this training, visit their website at [www.ndci.org](http://www.ndci.org). Additionally, NADCP has an equity and inclusion toolkit that focuses on access to programming.

The Center for Court Innovation (CCI) offers an online module on Habilitation Empowerment Accountability Therapy (HEAT). HEAT is a cognitive behavioral approach designed for African American males between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine who are involved in the criminal justice system. The approach utilizes culturally responsive practices and a strength-based model to engage participants in treatment. CCI is also working with treatment courts in Missouri to implement HEAT. In addition, CCI offers an online module on Cultural Competency. This module focuses on strategies to build a culturally proficient program. These modules can be found on their website [www.treatmentcourts.org](http://www.treatmentcourts.org).

## CONCLUSION

Treatment courts are effective criminal justice interventions that are beneficial to many, such as individuals who have substance use disorders and mental illnesses, veterans, children and families, and communities. For treatment courts to sustain their progress in reshaping the culture of criminal justice, it is essential that they assess for RED in their programs and provide programming that is accessible and beneficial for all the races and ethnicities. Program evaluation is a key component of the treatment court model,<sup>25</sup> and the RED Program Assessment Tool is an easy-to-use, practical method to transfer evaluation findings to treatment court practice. In addition to the RED Program Assessment Tool, treatment courts should incorporate qualitative research methods into their program evaluations. This may include having participants complete satisfaction surveys or facilitating individual interviews and focus groups with participants to learn their views on the strengths of the program and areas for improvement.

To date, qualitative research have offered a behind the scenes perspective of treatment courts and have given participants a voice in the services they received. This insight has provided an in-depth understanding of the factors that may contribute to RED in treatment court outcomes. These studies have offered concrete suggestions to eliminate RED in graduation and criminal recidivism outcomes, including: 1) referring

participants to counselors and agencies that use evidence-based, culturally-informed interventions and are trained in treating both substance use disorders and mental illnesses;<sup>26</sup> 2) inviting employers and vocational counselors to join the treatment court team;<sup>27</sup> 3) providing individualized treatment by encouraging participants to utilize their natural support systems (e.g. church) for their recovery;<sup>28</sup> and 4) rectifying the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in some treatment courts in order to promote camaraderie. With this said, there are two important things to highlight. First, the majority of qualitative research has been specific to African Americans in adult drug courts; therefore, little is known about the experiences of other races and ethnicities in other types of treatment courts. To address RED comprehensively, it is important that future research explore the phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Second, assessing for and rectifying RED in outcomes is complex and no one response will solve the problem. It is only throughout individual program evaluations that treatment courts will be able to create and sustain positive programming for the diverse populations they serve. The RED Program Assessment Tool is one resource that can assist treatment courts in creating and sustaining a positive culture of recovery and well-being for participants.

# ENDNOTES

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2016-DC-BX-K008 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice or grant-making component.



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