



A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems

Starter Kit

3a: Developing a System Map

Navigating the Roadmap

Activity 3: Understand current practice within each agency/ across the system.

Introduction

One of the most fundamental ways to develop an understanding of a jurisdiction's justice system is to develop a "system map." Similar to an architectural diagram, a system map depicts the steps in the criminal justice process (i.e., processing of a case and the activities related to this), beginning with police contact and ending with the point in time when the case terminates. In addition to reflecting the key decision points in the system, the map reflects the decision makers at each key point and the amount of time it takes a case to move from one point to the next. It is also possible and desirable to document the volume of cases that flow through each process step and decision point. This may be accomplished first by noting estimated numbers and later by gathering data on a specified period of time to more precisely determine the flow and volume of cases and activities.

In the EBDM initiative, the system map will be the first step in developing a detailed understanding of each justice system decision point and of the evidence that informs these key decisions. Following the completion of the system map, a process to "dig deeper" into these decision points will be carried out. This more in-depth analysis will include an examination of the following as they relate to each decision point:

- written policies;
- the application of those policies to practice, as well as to other operational practices that are not formally articulated in policy;
- the various types of data and information collected at each decision point;
- the ways in which this data and information inform decisions;
- the ways in which information is stored and shared; and
- other factors related to using data, information, and evidence in the most efficacious ways.

Purpose

Mapping serves a variety of purposes:

- It increases awareness of the ways in which the entire system "works" and how different parts of the system interact with one another. (Most people understand quite well their own "part" of the system but have a less detailed understanding of the other parts of the system.)

- It brings together policymakers and agency staff to articulate the decisions they make, how they arrive at those decisions, and when (i.e., at what point in the process) decisions are made.
- It surfaces areas of interest for further inquiry.
- It can sometimes lead to recognition of quick solutions to bottlenecks or inefficiencies.

Participants

Building a system map is a time-consuming process. The most desirable method is for the entire policy team to be fully involved in its development. However, given that this process can take a full day or more, this may not be practical. A second, effective option is to convene a series of “work groups” to help with the construction of the map.

Work groups might be formed around the following decision points:

1. arrest
2. pretrial status
3. charging/plea
4. sentencing
5. local institutional intervention(s)/local institutional release
6. community intervention(s)
7. violation response
8. discharge from supervision

Work groups should include a range of individuals who have different roles and perspectives in the case and decision making processes. Different levels of decision making authority should be represented as well, including the highest decision maker (agency head), those who oversee the work being conducted (supervisors/managers), and those at the line level. In many cases, work groups will also include those who handle information flow and case files. Receptionists, clerks, and administrative staff often have the best “window” on how things actually get done; they should not be overlooked in this process.

In addition, it is strongly recommended that the persons involved in information technology (data collection and analysis) participate in work groups. As noted above, it will be important to affix data to the map at some point in the future. Involving those who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing that data will facilitate their understanding of what is needed when the time comes to collect this data.

Finally, it is highly desirable for one or more persons from the team (i.e., local coordinator and/or another member) to be present for the entire mapping process, if at all possible. While this is a major time investment, the opportunity for at least one member of the jurisdiction to observe and learn from the entire process should not be underestimated.

Instructions

1. The policy team should have a discussion about mapping in advance of the mapping session:

- Identify some of the issues and challenges the team most wants to learn about at each decision point to make sure these topics are addressed during the initial mapping session.
 - Identify the key individuals from each agency who have detailed knowledge about each decision point and make a plan for inviting them to attend each work group session. (See participants above.)
 - Identify the policy team member(s) who will attend the entire mapping session and who will be responsible, along with the local coordinator, for shepherding the mapping process for the team.
2. The local coordinator should work with policy team members to craft an invitation to work group participants who will attend the mapping sessions. (An invitation template is provided in Appendix 1.) The invitation should outline the purpose of the mapping work group sessions, the date and two-hour work group session(s) they are asked to attend, and any additional information they should bring with them to the mapping work group session (i.e., information about time frames between decision points, easily accessible data about the volume of cases at decision points, maps they know about or that already exist and that can be folded into the mapping process). Also, consider making resource materials (see Chapter 13 of *Getting it Right*) available to work group participants in advance of the session so that they can be familiar with the process and come to the session prepared to map.
 3. The local coordinator may sit down with the team chair and/or the policy team to review the final list of persons who are planning to attend each session in order to ensure a comprehensive group of participants.
 4. Prior to the mapping sessions, it should be determined who will take notes during the session. It is recommended that at least one staff person assist the facilitator in capturing the discussion during the sessions. The team should also determine who will be responsible (facilitator, local coordinator, and/or other policy team members or staff) for putting all the “pieces” of the map together in one diagram in an easy-to-view format.
 5. Select a room with a considerable amount of wall space, where flip chart paper can be posted from end to end. Rooms with walls that do not permit (or are not conducive to) taping lots of paper to the wall should be avoided. The facilitator will need to be provided with a full pad of flip chart paper, a good set of flip chart markers, and a roll of masking tape.
 6. While not a necessity, it is recommended that jurisdictions bring in an outside facilitator to facilitate each mapping work group session. The session will begin with introductions of all participants and a brief overview by the facilitator of the purpose of the process. You may wish to provide a handout on the mapping process. (A sample handout is provided in Appendix 2.) Following this, the facilitator will guide the work group through

the development of their component of the system map. (It is possible, albeit rare, that time will run out before the work is completed. In this case, the facilitator will dialogue with the work group about the best way to complete the map.)

7. During or following each work group session, the facilitator should receive a complete list of the individuals participating in each session, including name, title, agency, and full contact information, for the purposes of seeking further information, receiving feedback on the accuracy of the map, and documenting those who contributed to its development.
8. At the conclusion of the session, the facilitator should make a plan with the work group to review the final, transcribed portion of the work group's portion of the map.
9. Because of the complexity of the entire system and the desire to capture a "picture" of the system on paper, it is not possible to include on a flow chart every detail about a particular decision in the criminal justice system. For this reason, the person(s) transcribing the map and notes may wish to use footnotes that provide additional narrative. (See the example provided for an idea of how one jurisdiction captured its system map—and accompanying map notations—on paper.)
10. Once the system map components have been reviewed by each work group, a final draft of the entire map should be presented to and reviewed by the policy team. For this meeting, a large share of the full team meeting time should be devoted to reviewing and discussing the map—first to ensure its completeness and accuracy, and then to discuss its implications.
11. Once the mapping activity is fully completed, the team should prepare for the next, more in-depth step of the decision point analysis process.¹

Tips

- For each work group session, carefully select a diverse group of individuals who have the most knowledge and perspective about both the *formal* policy/decision making and *informal* decision making that occurs at each decision point.
- The number of individuals invited to attend each work group session should be considered—large enough to ensure representation, knowledge, and diversity, but not overly large as to be unworkable (ideally, about 10–15 people in each work group session).
- Some individuals may have critical knowledge about more than one decision point and should be asked to attend more than one work group session, as appropriate. Likewise, some decision points may overlap more than others (for example, arrest and pretrial status or institutional and community interventions). In this case, consider whether it makes sense to combine decision point work groups into one group.

¹ See 3b: Conducting a Policy and Practice Analysis.

- Consider sequencing work group sessions from the earliest decision point (arrest) to the latest decision point (discharge from supervision). For example, those invited to attend the work group session on the arrest decision point might be scheduled from 9:00–11:00 a.m.; pretrial status from 11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., and so forth.
- Leave completed sections of the map hanging on the wall as each “new” work group convenes; visually, this will provide an overview of how each decision point “links” to the last one.
- Assure that adequate time is devoted to each decision point; it may not be possible to complete an initial map of all of the decision points in one day.
- Consider color coding the map or using sticky notes to flag questions that arise for further exploration, to identify specific processes for special populations (for example, domestic violence offenders) that may depart from the typical decision process, to identify gaps in current decision making, to note strategies that are being considered or implemented but that are not currently part of the decision making process, or to note other pertinent issues identified by the work group.
- Consider conducting a “debriefing” session at the conclusion of the mapping work group sessions with the facilitator, local coordinator, and policy team members assigned to shepherding the mapping process. The debriefing session will provide an opportunity to discuss how well they think the mapping work group sessions captured information about each decision point, confirm a work plan for completing the map, identify an upcoming policy team meeting to discuss the map in more detail, and discuss any other issues or logistics that need to be resolved before moving forward.

Mapping the Entire System

In Yamhill County, Oregon, the policy team created three separate maps in order to ensure that the justice system processes were adequately captured for the mentally ill, chemically dependent, and general offender population. To link the multiple maps, a process step was included in the main map that referenced a different track. The main and “mental health track” maps are provided.

Examples:

Yamhill County, Oregon, Main System Map

Yamhill County, Oregon, Mental Health Track System Map

Insert Main System Map here

Insert Mental Health Track System Map here

Example: Yamhill County, Oregon, Adult Criminal Justice System Mapping Notations (only notes 1–17 included; all notes abbreviated)

1. Community Crime Prevention Efforts: Yamhill County has a population of 93,000 persons and spans 718 square miles. Law enforcement is provided by six independent agencies: Amity, Carlton, and Yamhill, which are the three smallest municipal police departments; McMinnville, which is the largest of the municipal police departments; Newberg; and law enforcement services provided by the Yamhill County Sheriff’s Office (YCSO)...

3. Suspected Criminal Behavior Detected: Criminal behavior is detected through a variety of means, including observation of crime symptoms (e.g., graffiti), investigation, tips, or coordinated intergovernmental efforts (e.g., multidisciplinary child abuse teams)...

4. Suspected Criminal Behavior Reported: Criminal behavior may be reported through citizen reports or through mandatory cross-reporting between agencies...

5, MH1. Law Enforcement Response: Responses include in-person contact with a suspect, telephone contact for follow-up with the individual reporting the suspected criminal activity, or a request that the reporter complete a form...

9. On-Scene Investigation: a) The on-scene investigation will include gathering and analyzing information from the following sources: information collected by/received from dispatch, visual observation of the scene, interviews conducted on the scene...

10. Develop Probable Cause: a) The following information is gathered/considered in the process of developing probable cause: the crime; prior history of incidents at this location and the suspect’s criminal history (officers have immediate access to criminal records and can access the regional police database); the suspect’s mental health status (i.e., officers make a determination of the suspect’s ability to be culpable for the crime)...

13. Custody: a) An individual will be transported to a police station and held if further questioning is needed or if evidence needs to be processed...

14. Cite in Lieu of Custody: The following considerations factor into the cite and release vs. detain decision: the extent to which an individual’s true identity can be ascertained, the suspect’s criminal history, the severity of the crime, the presence of a specific victim and the extent of victimization, the community’s expectation, and whether the individual is a public safety risk...

17, MH8. Jail Booking: a) Jail staff processes probable cause paperwork, the affidavit, and a booking sheet. In addition, a pretrial release determination is made by the booking officer...

Additional Resources/Readings

McGarry, P., & Ney, B. (2006). Chapter 13: Map the System. *Getting it right: Collaborative problem solving for criminal justice* (pp. 115–124). (NIC Accession No. 019834). Retrieved from <http://nicic.gov/Downloads/PDF/Library/019834.pdf>

Appendix 1: Invitation Template

Dear Colleague,

On [Date], the [Site Name] policy team will be conducting a series of “mapping” work group sessions with decision makers and operating agency staff from across the criminal justice system to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of each of the key decision points in the jurisdiction’s criminal justice system. The final product of the mapping work groups will be a flow chart, or map, of the jurisdiction’s criminal justice system. When completed, the map will illustrate (in some detail) how defendants and offenders flow through the criminal justice system from arrest to post-release.

The Mapping Process

At each mapping work group session, participants will engage in an interactive process designed to articulate a complete “picture” of how critical decisions are made at each decision point in the system:

1. arrest
2. pretrial status
3. charging/plea
4. sentencing
5. local institutional intervention(s)/local institutional release
6. community intervention(s)
7. violation response
8. discharge from supervision

Those with knowledge and experience in day-to-day decision making have been invited to participate. Work group sessions are as follows:

[Session descriptions and times to be completed]

DATE/TIME Arrest and pretrial status

DATE/TIME Charging/pleas

DATE/TIME Sentencing

DATE/TIME Local institutional interventions/local institutional release

DATE/TIME Community interventions

DATE/TIME Violation response/discharge from supervision

All mapping work group session will be held at [location].

Preparations for Mapping Work Group Sessions

There is little preparation involved. For those who are interested, “Chapter 13: Map the System” of *Getting it Right: Collaborative Problem Solving for Criminal Justice* (McGarry & Ney, 2006) provides a more detailed overview of the mapping process and what to expect during the work group sessions.

Discussions during the mapping work group sessions will revolve around issues raised by the following kinds of questions:

1. Who is involved in decision making at this decision point?
2. What are the major decision options at this point?
3. What formal procedures or policies are followed?
4. What information is needed to make decisions?
5. What other factors are considered, including unspoken or implicit norms?
6. How long does it take to make a decision?
7. How effective is the decision making process? How do we know?
8. What are the challenges and/or barriers to effective and efficient decision making?

What to Bring to the Mapping Work Group Sessions

- Most importantly, work group participants are asked to come to the mapping work group sessions prepared to discuss how they participate in decisions that affect individuals who come in contact with the criminal justice system. In this regard, participants' candid perspectives and insights about criminal justice processing and decision making in the jurisdiction will be invaluable to constructing the map.
- Participants may wish to bring any EASILY attainable written policies, procedures, statistical data, and the like that would better inform the discussion, but this is not essential.

Appendix 2: Sample Handout for Participants

System Mapping: A Brief Overview for System Mapping Participants

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