

What are Drug Courts?

A drug court is a special court given the responsibility to handle cases involving drug-using offenders through comprehensive supervision, drug testing, treatment services and immediate sanctions and incentives. [\(1\)](#)

Drug court participants undergo long-term treatment and counseling, sanctions, incentives, and frequent court appearances. Successful completion of the treatment program results in dismissal of the charges, reduced or set aside sentences, lesser penalties, or a combination of these. Most importantly, graduating participants gain the necessary tools to rebuild their lives. Because the problem of drugs and crime is much too broad for any single agency to tackle alone, drug courts rely upon the daily communication and cooperation of judges, court personnel, probation, and treatment providers. [\(2\)](#)

Drug courts vary somewhat from one jurisdiction to another in terms of structure, scope, and target populations, but they all share three primary goals: (1) to reduce recidivism, (2) to reduce substance abuse among participants, and (3) to rehabilitate participants. Achieving these goals requires a special organizational structure. Specifically, the drug court model includes the following key components: [\(3\)](#)

- Incorporating drug testing into case processing.
- Creating a non-adversarial relationship between the defendant and the court.
- Identifying defendants in need of treatment and referring them to treatment as soon as possible after arrest.
- Providing access to a continuum of treatment and rehabilitation services.
- Monitoring abstinence through frequent, mandatory drug testing.
- Establishing a coordinated strategy to govern drug court responses to participants' compliance.
- Maintaining judicial interaction with each drug court participant.
- Monitoring and evaluating program goals and gauging their effectiveness.
- Continuing interdisciplinary education to promote effective drug court planning, implementation, and operations.
- Forging partnerships among drug courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations to generate local support and enhance drug court effectiveness

1. *National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 2001*

2. *National Strategy for Co-Funding of Coordinated Drug Court Systems, 1994*

3. *Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components, 1997*