

# Engaging Service Providers

An essential component of connecting individuals to treatment is establishing strong communication between courts and community service providers. Effective collaboration fosters trust, expands understanding of available treatment options, and clarifies expectations. Building off of the foundation laid in the [Leading Change Guide for State Court Leaders](#), this guide supports courts in convening community partners to improve coordination and outcomes.

For assistance in implementing these recommendations, judicial officers are welcome to contact the [Office of Behavioral Health](#) or [Behavioral Health Committee](#).

## 1. Identify and Organize Key Stakeholders

Begin by creating a comprehensive contact list of agencies and individuals involved in the mental health and behavioral health ecosystem in your community.

### A. Establish Primary Contacts

Identify a primary contact within each organization and ask who else should be included in future collaboration.

### B. Examples of Mental Health System Stakeholders

- Judicial officers presiding over mental health cases
- Mental health facilities and providers
- Psychiatrists and emergency department physicians
- Nurses, therapists, case managers
- Substance use disorder treatment providers
- Law enforcement officers
- Jail staff
- Prosecutors
- Probation officers
- Public defenders
- County Council and County Commissioners
- Local bar association
- Department of Child Services staff
- School principals and counselors
- Local NAMI chapter
- Community homeless shelters
- Faith leaders

## 2. Structure Effective Stakeholder Meetings

### A. Meeting Format

- Prioritize **in-person meetings** where feasible; face-to-face conversation builds stronger trust.
- Keep participation to **10-15 engaged stakeholders**; often overly large groups hinder progress.
- Provide each stakeholder time to express challenges, needs, or successes.
- Assign a dedicated **note-taker** to document issues, recommendations, and commitments.

### B. Meeting Purpose

- Understand each stakeholder's role and self-perception.
- Explain your judicial role and goals for improving outcomes for individuals with behavioral health needs.
- Discuss shared problems, develop collaborative solutions, and promote transparent communication.

### C. Preparation and Follow-Up

- Send a brief **agenda** in advance.
- End each meeting with a clear list of **action items**, responsible parties, and timeline for progress.

## 3. Discuss and Evaluate Behavioral Health Services

Use meetings to clarify provider capabilities, accessibility, and readiness for justice-involved individuals.

Courts may consider asking:

### A. Services and Expertise

- What behavioral health services do you offer (e.g., counseling, crisis response, trauma-informed care)?
- Who is your target population?
- Do you use **evidence-based practices**? How are they implemented?
- What licensure and certifications do your organization and your staff hold?
- What experience do you have serving **justice-involved** clients?
- Will your program share progress updates with probation officers or the court?

## **B. Accessibility**

- Are services available to people involved in the justice system?
- Do you accept Medicaid or offer sliding-scale fees?
- Are waitlists an issue, and what is the average wait time?

## **C. Referrals**

- What is your referral process?
- How rapidly can an individual be assessed?

## **D. Crisis Response**

- Do you operate mobile crisis teams or 24/7 hotlines?
- How do you respond to acute mental health crises?

## **E. Justice System Collaboration**

- Have you worked with problem-solving courts?
- Are staff willing to testify or provide progress reports?

## **F. Outcomes**

- What outcome data can you share for court-referred clients?

## **G. Additional Discussion Topics**

- Common case types (e.g., substance use, mental health crises)
- Diversion options (pretrial services, alternative sentencing, problem-solving courts, furloughs)
- System barriers such as housing or transportation
- Questions providers have of the courts: process, terminology, needs, etc.
- Proposals for ongoing communication, liaisons, and cross-training

## 4. Establish Ongoing Communication and Collaboration

### A. Build a Consistent Structure Utilizing Local JRACs

- Consider creating a workgroup of your **local JRAC** dedicated to behavioral health.
- Host **lunch-and-learns**, cross-training sessions, or short updates to keep stakeholders current on new developments.
- Schedule **regular, ongoing stakeholder meetings** at a consistent day and time.
  - Limit meetings to **one hour** to maintain participation and reduce scheduling conflicts.

## Four Strategies for Effective Engagement

### 1. Listen Actively

- Listen carefully and ask thoughtful follow-up questions.
- Create space for stakeholders to share candid perspectives.

### 2. Understand System Strengths and Challenges

- Ask stakeholders to identify strengths, weaknesses, and barriers in the current system.

### 3. Provide Cross-System Training

Stakeholders often understand only their own segment of the system. Judicial officers and service providers are uniquely positioned to offer **cross-system training to one another**.

- Treatment providers and law enforcement welcome judicial guidance.
- Judicial officers should seek treatment provider expertise.
- Allow participant questions to guide the training.

### 4. Ask What Support Is Needed

- Ask directly what the court can do to help improve communication, coordination, or outcomes.