



# OKLAHOMA COUNTY VETERAN TREATMENT COURT

## Process Evaluation Report

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Prepared by

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<b>Process Evaluation .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Background .....	2
Process Evaluation Methods.....	2
<b>Program Strengths &amp; Recommendations .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Program Strengths .....	1
Priority Recommendations .....	4
Additional Recommendation .....	6
Recommended Next Steps.....	8
<b>Appendix A: Action Plan.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Recommendation Review Form .....	10

# PROCESS EVALUATION

## BACKGROUND

The Oklahoma County Veteran Treatment Court (VTC) is a problem-solving court that uses the treatment court model. Treatment courts provide integrated substance use treatment, behavioral health services, and intensive judicial supervision to support recovery and public safety. Many studies have demonstrated that treatment courts effectively reduce recidivism, including fewer rearrests and less time incarcerated. The ultimate goals of these courts are to provide treatment and other recovery support services to court-involved veterans with substance use or mental health disorders to promote long-term recovery and enhance the quality of life for participants, their families, and communities.

Veterans treatment courts integrate principles of the treatment court model with the structure and camaraderie of military culture. Veterans treatment courts leverage the familiar aspects of military culture with best practices in treatment courts to help veterans who are involved with the criminal justice system address substance use and mental health disorders. Teams uniquely understand the various agencies and organizations that provide services to veterans and the common issues veterans face. Veterans treatment courts provide treatment, accountability, and structure for veterans to improve their health and quality of life.

## Process Evaluation Methods

NPC Research conducted a process evaluation that comprised an online assessment of treatment court best practices, reviewing VTC program documents, conducting a participant focus group, and collecting observational and interview data via a site visit. These activities provided information about the VTC's structure and procedures and also informed the commendations and recommendations that are provided in this report.

## Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool (BeST)



The Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool (BeST) was used to collect program process information from the Oklahoma County VTC team as the first step of the process evaluation. The BeST is an automated online tool developed by NPC Research that measures fidelity to research-based best practices. The BeST collects basic, objective information about procedures and practices. The BeST report outlines the program's level of adherence to a variety of best practices across several areas including eligibility and exclusion criteria for entry into the program, team membership, services provided, graduation criteria, and data collection practices.

## Team member interviews



Interviews with team members were a critical part of the Oklahoma County VTC process evaluation. Interviews took place on August 19 and 20, 2025, with one interview taking place virtually on August 27 due to scheduling conflicts. NPC staff conducted detailed interviews with individuals on the VTC team, including: the judge, coordinator, assistant coordinator and grant administrator, director of treatment courts, justice navigator, mentor coordinator, public defender, supervision engagement officer supervisor, community-based treatment provider representative, and the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist.

## Site Visit

### Participant focus group



NPC staff conducted a focus group with 13 current Oklahoma County VTC program participants on August 19, 2025. The focus group provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions regarding the program and allowed NPC to understand the VTC from the perspectives of program participants who have experienced program processes directly.

### Observations



NPC staff observed a pre-court staffing session and court session on August 20, 2025. During the court session, the coordinator and assistant coordinator, judge, treatment representative, prosecuting and defense attorneys, supervision officers, and VJO were present.



# PROGRAM STRENGTHS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

### Supportive Multidisciplinary Team

One of the greatest strengths of the Oklahoma County VTC is its team members. Despite turnover in team member positions over the last year, team members have remained engaged and dedicated to their work. This strength was reported consistently through interviews, highlighted during the participant focus group, and observed during staffing and court.

“VTC staff help me stay accountable... is a group of people that genuinely care for my sobriety.”

*Quote from a focus group participant about the VTC team*

The Veteran Treatment Court team communicates effectively, shares information, and collaborates well, which can support better outcomes for participants. Effective team communication promotes consistent messaging to participants and thorough attention to participant behavior, and research shows that team members and participants rate team communication as one of the most important factors for success (All Rise, 2024). In interviews, team members typically rated communication highly and noted relevant participant information is shared consistently and in a timely manner, including between staffing meetings when appropriate.

The team members appear committed to the program and to effectively providing participant support. Staffing and court observations showed a respectful team with a strong rapport with participants. Their dedication to participants’ best interests was apparent.

All team members were spoken of favorably in interviews and in the participant focus group. In particular, the judge, VJO, coordinator, and assistant coordinator were highlighted as stand-out roles.

“[Team members] look at me as a human, not a case file number. I get to look forward to coming to this court program.”

*Quote from a focus group participant about the VTC team*

## Treatment Strengths

Based on the Best Practice Self-Assessment results and team member interviews, the VTC program has many strengths in treatment services. The Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in Oklahoma City provides high-quality substance use disorder treatment and mental health care for eligible participants. Though there are some participants who are not eligible for VA services, the team is committed to making referrals to community treatment providers that can best support the needs of non-VA-eligible participants. The team collects frequent updates from treatment providers and requests specific information when needed.

The program is commended for the following treatment offerings:

- Offers a wide range of treatment modalities and services, such as group therapy, individual counseling, intensive outpatient, outpatient, and residential treatment;
- Performs full clinical assessments (including trauma) to match clients to the appropriate level of care and services;
- Creates individualized treatment plans based on assessed needs;
- Connects participants who have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders to coordinated treatment;
- Utilizes evidence-based treatment, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Contingency Management (CM), Integrated Dual Disorders Treatment, Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), Motivational Interviewing (MI), Relapse Prevention Therapy (RPT), and Twelve Step Facilitation Therapy.

## Commitment to Innovation and Growth

In addition to implementing the best practice standards above, the VTC also has several innovative policies and practices that are particularly commendable.

- Treatment Court Director role guides the admission process as the first point of application review and provides support to the team through referral data tracking, marketing and outreach, and financial oversight.
- Assistant District Attorney expedites the referral and eligibility determination process with an efficient workflow, reducing participant time to entry.
- Diversion Hub partnership allows for multiple avenues for referrals and quick connections between participants and needed services.
- Veterans who are not eligible for VA services and veterans with violent offenses are allowed to enter the program, which allows these individuals in the community with need to access to necessary and/or beneficial services while still under supervision.

- Clinical stability of participants is accounted for in case planning, program activities, and achievement of success in the program.
- Program team is flexible and proactive when implementing new policies and practices.

## Successful Implementation of Many Best Practices

The VTC is commended for implementing many practices that align with treatment court best practice standards. Below is a selection of a few such practices. See Appendix B for a full list of best practices implemented by the VTC.



Holds bi-monthly steering committee meetings



Offers wide array of evidence-based behavioral health services



Accepts veteran participants with 'other than honorable' military discharge statuses



Accepts participants with current and/or prior violent offenses



Connects to treatment providers experienced in working with veteran populations



Provides parenting classes, family/domestic relations counseling, and other robust family services such as childcare



Assesses participants for trauma and suicidal ideation



Has a judge who serves voluntarily and indefinitely



Implements evidence-based drug testing procedures



Implements a five-phase structure



Monitors treatment offerings for quality



Refrains from phasing down participants



Maintains participants court hearing attendance across all phases

## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Even well-implemented programs have areas in which they can work to improve. This section of the report provides priority areas for the team to consider increasing the quality of the program.

### Continue Pursuing Stability with Community Treatment Providers

A big challenge encountered by the VTC program is the need for more reliable, high-quality treatment providers for participants who are not eligible for VA benefits. During team member interviews, several people voiced concerns about the quality of community treatment providers, including the care provided to participants, the timeliness of starting treatment after entering the program, and the provider's communication with the VTC team. Notably, the VJO has made significant efforts to change individuals' eligibility status for VA benefits and has secured benefits for previously ineligible participants. Though the team is committed to finding providers that best suit the needs of participants, additional options are necessary to meet differing participant needs.

- ▶ Ensure that all participants are receiving integrated SUD and MH treatment. Individuals with co-occurring disorders might have more complex treatment needs that require coordinated care as well as reassessment and adjustments to treatment plans.
- ▶ Track treatment data to closely monitor the progress of participants receiving care outside of the VA and assess for differences in aspects such as length of time to start of services, number of treatment sessions, and different types or modalities of treatment received.
- ▶ Specify information-sharing requirements in the MOU with community treatment providers.
- ▶ Continue to navigate barriers to treatment from the VA for non-eligible participants by supporting their application for a discharge upgrade or requesting a discharge review to become eligible for certain VA benefits.

### Develop Orientation and Role-Specific Training Plans

Research has demonstrated that regular training for treatment court team members is related to greater reductions in participant recidivism and higher cost savings. Specialized knowledge and skills are required to implement these multifaceted treatment court programs effectively. To be successful in new roles, staff members require knowledge of best practices in a wide range of areas, including behavior modification, substance use disorder and mental health treatment, complementary treatment and social services, community supervision, and drug and alcohol testing.

There are many online high-quality courses and on-demand webinars offered by All Rise (see <https://allrise.org/trainings/e-learning/> and <https://allrise.org/trainings/>) and Treatment Courts Online (see <https://treatmentcourts.org>), which are free<sup>1</sup> and easy to access. Treatment Courts Online offers

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<sup>1</sup> A free account is required to view Treatment Courts Online materials.

lessons tailored to specific roles—including the role of the coordinator, judge, probation officer, and defense attorney—in addition to offering training on general topics, such as *Building Capacity*, *Implementing Evidence-Based Practice*, and *Maximizing Participant Interactions*. In addition, NPC created a team member onboarding manual for Oklahoma County Adult Treatment Courts that is organized by team member role. A copy of this manual is provided in Appendix C. There are also virtual site visits available that provide opportunities to see how other courts operate.

- ▶ Because the program has recently experienced turnover, the team should consider enhancing and documenting new team member orientation and identifying specific trainings to be completed, including general and role-specific trainings (e.g., training specific to SEOs).
  - Update the onboarding manual with a list of specific trainings (with links) to provide new team members with needed guidance.
  - Include training for working with veteran populations.

## Continue to Monitor Capacity and Time to Entry

The time between arrest (or the incident that led to treatment court participation) and entry should be as short as possible. The sooner individuals needing treatment are connected to services, the better participant outcomes are on average. Furthermore, an arrest or probation violation provides a window of opportunity in which participants may be more willing to participate and try something new, which could boost program entry rates. According to the program’s BeST self-assessment, the average time from the event that prompts program referral (e.g., probation violation) to program entry is more than the best practice goal of 50 days.

The team should consider and discuss ways to increase referrals and decrease time to program entry to swiftly connect more eligible participants with services, such as assessing the feasibility and resources needed to allow participation pre-adjudication. We recommend that the team:

- ▶ Continue to strengthen the collaboration with the Diversion Hub system as it likely has reduced time to entry.<sup>2</sup> Partner with Diversion Hub staff to measure time to entry since implementation to confirm people are getting into the VTC faster when referred through that system.
- ▶ Continue to support the Assistant District Attorney’s (ADA) process for reviewing and admitting participants.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the submission of the VTC’s most recent BeST submission in 2024.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Build Participants' Recovery Capital with Peer and Alumni Support

Team members and participants alike noted a desire for more prosocial activities for participants and families. Providing safe and rewarding leisure opportunities for participants can enhance their resiliency, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Since organized activities were well-received and well-attended in the past, the program is encouraged to continue planning future events to support participants' recovery.

Encourage alumni involvement in the program to further support participant recovery capital. Prosocial community connections are necessary to facilitate long-term recovery (All Rise, 2025), and successful alumni can act as great prosocial mentors. Additionally, alumni can facilitate more opportunities for prosocial events for the program.

Additionally, to further aid participants' recovery process, more support is needed to establish a veteran mentor program. The VTC needs a Veteran Mentor Coordinator who can focus a substantial amount of time on building a system of veteran mentors. This VTC is a large program and would require a sizeable number of mentors to support it, making it even more important to have a full-time Veteran Mentor Coordinator. Consider recruiting successful and stable alumni to act as veteran mentors.

- ▶ Identify who on the team could assist with brainstorming prosocial event ideas as well as planning and hosting the events.
- ▶ Engage the steering committee to seek out community partners that would support more opportunities for prosocial events for participants.
- ▶ Consult the steering committee to identify resources and develop a hiring plan for a Veteran Mentor Coordinator position. Consider having a similar discussion with community partners.

### Monitor Data Entry Processes

The VTC has recently adopted the Drug Court Information Management System (DIMS) as their new case management system to store and access program data for participant monitoring and program evaluation. The program is commended for adopting a case management system designed for treatment court programs. An initial review of program data from the previous case management system showed that the program is tracking many key data elements, but some elements are being tracked more consistently and completely than others.

Collecting real-time information about participant activities and services allows programs to monitor the quality of their services, extent to which they are addressing participant needs, and the program's adherence to best practices. Regular evaluation of data can allow programs to inform key staff

members and decision makers on a routine basis as well as implementing remedial action plans where indicated. For example, recording participants' exit dates and graduation status can help programs monitor graduation rates and address connected factors or barriers that might influence successful graduation from the program.

- ▶ Identify a person on the team whose role it will be to review the data on a regular basis, run reports, and share information with the team and steering committee. Regular data review should look places to improve completeness of data entry (see the Program Data Review Summary report) as well as provide information of interest or raise questions for the team (e.g., decreasing
- ▶ Establish a regular interval for reviewing program data as a team. Determine what you are doing well and discuss how to make related program modifications.

## Recommended Next Steps

The results of this report can be used for many purposes, including 1) improving program structure and practices for better participant outcomes, 2) preparing grant applications to demonstrate program needs or illustrate the program's capabilities, 3) requesting resources from potential government or private funders or other local groups, and 4) requesting training and technical assistance from NPC Research, All Rise, or other technical assistance providers. Possible next steps for this report include:

- ▶ **Distribute copies of the report** to all members of your team, steering committee, and other key individuals involved in your program.
- ▶ **Set up a meeting** with your team to discuss the report's findings and recommendations. Ask all members of the group to **read the report** prior to the meeting and **bring ideas and questions**. The coordinator will **facilitate** the meeting to prioritize goals and next steps.
- ▶ During the meeting(s), **review each recommendation**, discuss any questions that arise from the group, and develop plans to set goals and timelines, and implement any new policies or procedures.
  - See Appendix A for an action plan template to support the team's review of the recommendations provided in this report.

# APPENDIX A: ACTION PLAN

Please complete the following table with relevant information for each recommendation from the site visit report. For any recommendation there may be multiple tasks in the action plan.

**Responsible individual, group, or agency:** Identify who is the focus of the recommendation, and who has the authority to make related changes.

**Action plan:** Describe the status of action related to the recommendation (some changes or decisions may already have been made). Identify which tasks have been assigned, to whom, and by what date they will be accomplished or progress reviewed. Assign tasks only to a person who is present. If the appropriate person is not present or not yet identified (because the task falls to an agency or to the community, for example), identify who from the group will take on the task of identifying and contacting the appropriate person.

- Person: (Name)
- Task: (make sure tasks are specific, measurable, and attainable)
- Deadline or review date: (e.g. December 1<sup>st</sup>) The dates for some tasks should be soon (next month, next 6 months, etc.); others (for longer-term goals for example) may be further in the future.
- Who will review: (e.g., steering committee will review progress at their next meeting)

**Goal dates:** Indicate the date that each task will be accomplished. Add task deadlines to the agendas of future steering committee meetings, to ensure they will be reviewed, or select a date for a follow-up review (in 3 or 6 months, for example), to discuss progress and challenges, and to establish new next steps, task lists, and review dates.

**TA or training needed:** Add a check mark in this column if training or technical assistance is needed to help address this recommendation.

## RECOMMENDATION REVIEW FORM

Recommendation	Responsible individual, group, or agency	Action plan	Goal completion dates	TA or training needed?
▶ Continue pursuing stability with community treatment providers				
▶ Develop orientation and role-specific training plans				
▶ Continue to monitor capacity and time to entry				
▶ Build participants' recovery capital with peer and alumni support				
▶ Monitor data entry processes				



## ABOUT NPC RESEARCH

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