



Improving Decision Making in Juvenile Probation Departments Using Risk Assessment and Behavioral health Screening (The RABS Project)

A Technical Assistance and Research Project

Request for Applications

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This Technical Assistance and Research Project is led by the National Youth Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP) and is funded by coordinated research grants from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. NYSAP is a technical assistance and research center dedicated to improving selection and implementation of screening and assessment tools in juvenile justice. NYSAP is located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and is a member of the Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Collaborative for Change, an initiative supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.nysap.us/> or contact Dr. Gina Vincent, the Principal Investigator, at Gina.Vincent@umassmed.edu, or Rachael Perrault, the Project Coordinator, at Rachael.Perrault@umassmed.edu.

Submission deadline: Thursday, October 30, 2014, 11:59 P.M. EST

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND RESEARCH PROJECT

We are soliciting applications from juvenile justice jurisdictions interested in participating in the second round of a technical assistance and research project called the Risk Assessment and Behavioral health Screening (RABS) Project. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the use of risk assessment, mental health screening, and substance abuse screening in case planning by juvenile probation departments. The project seeks to enhance the effectiveness with which a juvenile justice jurisdiction makes case management decisions, optimally resulting in improved allocation of resources, reduced costs, and reduced likelihood of further delinquency.

Applications to participate in RABS may be submitted by juvenile justice agencies or organizations (e.g., probation agency, judicial commission, juvenile court, defender or prosecutor organizations). If selected, your jurisdiction will receive resources, technical assistance, and training for several stakeholder groups. An investment of a minimum of \$50,000 will be made over at least two years to facilitate implementation of a risk assessment instrument, a mental health screening tool, and a substance abuse screening tool with strong research support to be used by juvenile probation officers. Depending on practices in your jurisdiction, the tools could be implemented at one of several legal decision-making points (pre-adjudication, pre-disposition, or post-disposition).

Background

This technical assistance and research project is a follow-up to major studies recently performed by NYSAP and funded by the MacArthur Foundation and OJJDP. One study demonstrated that for a risk assessment tool to be effective, it must be implemented properly. That is, it must be put in place with training and procedures to assure that it is used as intended. Through NYSAP's research and collaborative work with many state partners and agencies, we have developed a systematic method for implementing risk assessment in probation offices in a way that leads to more effective case management decisions and improved outcomes for youth. The key is to assign the right interventions to the right youth, and in a manner that takes youths' risk for future delinquency and individual factors into account. This approach is based on the strongly researched "Risk-Need-Responsivity" theory.

Our systematic approach is based on research and is outlined into practice guidelines, relying on the consensus of both experts and practitioners. The Guide, *"Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation,"* was developed to help juvenile justice jurisdictions through the process of selecting, using, and implementing a risk assessment instrument. This approach helped jurisdictions to better assign resources with respect to services and level of supervision (the rates of youth on high levels of supervision decreased dramatically). Sites that were putting 30% or more of their youths in out-of-home placements cut their placement rates in half.

Overview of the RABS Technical Assistance and Research Project

NYSAP will work with jurisdictions in two states to adopt and implement the tools and the research based case management approach outlined in the Guide. The approach is based on the use of validated tools that provide probation staff with information about youths' level of risk of re-offending and rehabilitation needs (i.e., criminogenic risk). In the RABS project, we will integrate this approach with the techniques for identifying and addressing behavioral health needs.

NYSAP and each agency will work together to determine whether effective implementation of the research based case planning approach decreases out-of-home placement and maximum levels of supervision, while increasing provision of appropriate services to youth at all levels of risk of re-offending, without jeopardizing public safety. We will do this by comparing outcomes for youth in the probation offices who were processed before and after the new case planning approach is used. NYSAP also will collaborate with each jurisdiction to gather information about the experiences and activities of everyone involved in the implementation process, including multiple stakeholders as well as the probation officers who actually use the new tools.

Eligibility Criteria

Applications may be submitted by juvenile justice entities and other stakeholder groups (e.g., probation, judges, defense, and prosecutors) who meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The agency can document that they have secured buy-in from probation offices in two counties to implement the risk assessment and behavioral health screening tools in one or two probation offices.
- The agency can demonstrate (a) that they have authority within the proposed county sites that will assure their compliance with the project agreements, and (b) that the agency has standing in the state that may promote expansion of the use of risk assessment and behavioral health screening methods to other probation offices statewide if the project demonstrates effectiveness.
- Probation offices are eligible if they do not currently use an evidence-based or promising risk assessment instrument (for pre-adjudication, pre-disposition, or case management decisions) and if a risk assessment tool is not already required by the state. Examples of risk assessment instruments that are evidenced-based/promising include (but are not limited to) the SAVRY and YLS/CMI. Jurisdictions are eligible, therefore, if they have no risk assessment tool in place or if they have a risk assessment in place but it is not 'evidence-based' and they are willing to change their tool.
- States may not apply if they are "core" states that have participated in the MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change* initiative (i.e., Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana and Washington) or if they participated in the "first round" of this project (Connecticut, Mississippi).

Project Design

Two jurisdictions in two states will receive technical assistance for at least 18 months. Both jurisdictions will participate in a pre-post design. The sites will implement an evidence-based risk assessment instrument (to be selected in consultation with NYSAP), the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-Second Version (MAYSI-2, a well-validated mental health screening tool used widely in juvenile justice), and a validated substance abuse screening tool. **(Sites that already have a substance abuse screening tool or the MAYSI-2 in place are still eligible to apply.)** Depending on the practices and laws in your jurisdiction, these tools would be implemented at one of several possible legal decision making points: pre-adjudication, pre-disposition, or post-disposition.

Before the risk assessment and behavioral health screening tools are implemented, data will be gathered from the jurisdiction to document case processing practices (e.g., rates of placement out of the home, dispositions, services received by youth on probation). The same information will be tracked after the jurisdictions have received technical assistance to implement the risk assessment and screening tools. At the end of the Technical Assistance and Research Project, states will be provided some guidance to implement the instruments throughout the remainder of the state's probation offices.

In collaboration with NYSAP, the study sites will be provided assistance to:

- Offer brief training to judges, attorneys, and other stakeholders about evidence based risk assessment and case management approaches.
- Select and implement an evidence-based risk assessment tool, either the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk for Youth (SAVRY) or the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI). Other evidence-based tools may be considered.
- Implement the MAYSI-2 and a validated substance abuse screening tool (like the CRAFFT). For sites that already use the MAYSI-2 or a substance abuse screening tool, the technical assistance provided would be adapted as necessary (e.g., to provide assistance regarding implementation issues, to provide booster training, etc.).
- Modify existing case dispositional plans to reflect a decision-making model for case planning that integrates information about behavioral health variables and risk for re-offending.
- Develop policies related to the use of risk assessment and behavioral health screening.
- Categorize available service options.
- Modify existing data management systems, if necessary.
- Monitor collection of data on specific outcomes of interest.

- Facilitate participation by probation officers and other key staff to complete questionnaires and be interviewed by NYSAP.

Benefits to Participation

In addition to receiving the technical assistance to implement the actions described above at no cost, jurisdictions will benefit in several other ways:

- NYSAP will provide funds for the state agency to compensate a regional manager or deputy of the probation office for 12 months to serve as the state's Assessment Coordinator on a half-time basis. The Assessment Coordinator will provide on-site management of all implementation efforts.
- NYSAP will provide a training workshop to staff on the risk assessment, MAYSI-2, and the substance abuse screen. As a means to ensure sustainability, master trainers at each site will be trained to provide in-house training to staff for future trainings.
- Manuals of the risk assessment and other tools will be provided for each probation staff member conducting assessments.
- Computer software for administering the MAYSI-2 (MAYSIWARE) will be provided to each probation office.
- NYSAP will provide training and templates for a decision-making model for case planning based on the Guide.

Site Selection Criteria

Selection to arrive at two states will be completed in a three-stage process.

First Stage

The first stage will involve screening applications to determine whether they meet the basic criteria described earlier under "Eligibility Criteria." Applications that meet eligibility criteria will move to the Second Stage.

Second Stage

The second stage will involve a review of applications using criteria described below to arrive at selection of a small number of finalists. Criteria for Second Stage evaluation are listed below in order of importance.

1. The degree to which the state agency and its collaborators have demonstrated their dedication to implementation of a risk assessment instrument, as well as their capacity and intent to pursue implementation of the tool in the rest of the state, given positive results from the project.

2. The degree of capacity for the agency to offer a quality electronic data management system that tracks (or is able to be modified to track) essential case data for individual youth (e.g., arrest and reoffending in the juvenile and adult justice systems, dispositions received, placements and services, etc.).
3. The degree to which the application demonstrates the agency's ability to designate a group of individuals in the organization to coordinate the implementation efforts and on-going monitoring.
4. The degree to which the agency can identify a qualified individual whom can be hired on a part-time basis to serve as the Assessment Coordinator.
5. The willingness of the juvenile justice agency and its partners to allow NYSAP to disseminate de-identified project findings.
6. Whether the state has previously been selected for funding under other grant mechanisms related to the MacArthur Foundation's juvenile justice initiatives.

Third Stage

Finalist states selected during the Second Stage review will be visited by the project investigators for in-person discussions and review of data management capacities. Particular emphasis will be placed on the agency's ability to record data at the individual youth level and to obtain data regarding re-offending. The capacity of key stakeholders to implement necessary reforms and the existence of an engaged leadership also will be weighted heavily. Selection of the two states from among the finalists will then be made by NYSAP in consultation with OJJDP and the MacArthur Foundation.

Applicants are required to submit a letter of support from the state leader over juvenile justice related matters who has authority to commit the agency to the RABS Project.

How to Apply

To apply, please contact Rachael Perrault, Project Director (Rachael.Perrault@umassmed.edu or 508-856-8726) for an Information Guide and Application Form or download forms from NYSAP's website (<http://www.nysap.us/>). **We strongly encourage you to contact us if you have questions about whether your agency meets eligibility criteria or the project more generally.** Contact Ms. Perrault or Gina Vincent, PhD (Gina.Vincent@umassmed.edu; 508-856-8727).

Application Forms are due by 11:59 p.m. E.S.T. on Thursday, October 30, 2014. Please see the accompanying Application Form for details.