

This NIJ-funded paper examined process, outcomes and costs in 18 drug courts across 4 states and one U.S. territory (California, Michigan, Oregon, Maryland and Guam). This study explores how different drug court programs are implementing the 10 Key Components and, in particular, how practices vary across programs. This paper also examines whether and how these practices have impacted participant outcomes and program costs including graduation rate, program investment costs, and outcome costs related to participant criminal justice recidivism. A thorough understanding of the drug courts' procedures, and the variation in procedures, helps increase awareness of the unique aspects of the programs and may help explain why some drug courts are more effective than others. Our analyses revealed that despite the availability of benchmarks through the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, drug courts still have a lot of discretion in how they implement the 10 Key Components. Analysis of outcomes showed that some drug court practices were significantly associated with higher graduation rates and lower outcome costs (higher cost savings). However, it is important to acknowledge that what is a best practice in one drug court context may not be in others. Participant populations differ in drug of choice, level of addiction, legal issues, and life issues such as employment, education, and health needs. Drug courts must remain flexible in practices so as to best fit their participants, their relationships among the collaborating agencies, and their environment. In spite of this, there may be practices that transcend these differences. This study provides a list of practices that were most effective across 18 drug court sites. This list represents a starting point for further examination of best practices for drug courts.