

4/6/16: Implementation of the Arnold Foundation Risk-Based Assessment Tool

Presenters:

- Charlotte McPherson, Manager, Kentucky Pretrial Services, charlottemcpherson@kycourts.net
- Jessica Ireland, Program Administrator, Pretrial Services/Fine and Collections, Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services, Jessica.Ireland@mecklenburgcountync.gov

Charlotte McPherson, Kentucky

Key Takeaways: When implementing risk-based assessment, judges re key (work with them and let them be your advocate), start training early and heavily with staff, make sure that public defenders understand the risk assessment, and make sure the prosecutors are brought in as well.

Charlotte McPherson of Kentucky explained that when they initially tried to implement the Vera risk-based assessment tool, their judges were reluctant to sign on and wanted input from their peers. As a result, they sent a survey out to all 200+ judges state-wide; 75% of judges responded with the information that they thought was necessary to have in a risk assessment. Based on that survey they pulled the top 20 picks of important items for risk-assessment and had other judges present the survey results. This Judge-to-Judge approach helped foster more acceptance of the tool the second time around.

Some tips that Charlotte McPherson of Kentucky suggests are getting Judges to advocate on your behalf and starting to train early and heavily with your own staff. It would also be beneficial to bring the Prosecutors onboard as well as Public Defenders. Charlotte also explained that the risk assessment tool that they utilized is based on court records and that there are no mental health/illness data sets involved.

Jessica Ireland, Mecklenburg County, NC

Key Takeaway: To start implementing a risk-based assessment tool, get buy-in from all stakeholders from the start.

Jessica acknowledged that they operate a countywide system and that North Carolina does not operate a pre-trial system. She recommended that communities looking to implement the Vera tool should get stakeholders on board earlier rather than later, and that you provide information and training to the judges and staff on risk-assessment tools. They did over 20,000 assessments since they implemented the tool in June 2014, and their jail population has decreased substantially.