

Target Population  
**Activities Guide**



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

**JUSTICE** ★ **CENTER**  
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

## Target Population

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### Target Population

These activities are designed to help you describe the target population your mental health court will serve. While you may already have ideas about who would be served best by your program, these activities will help your team draw on current research and resources available in your community to define an appropriate target population.







The activities, which include questions and worksheets, should be completed by the people who will serve on your mental health court team, including its primary champion(s) who will be involved in planning. You will complete some activities on your own and others as a group. You will begin by reading about the consequences of focusing on cases that are pre-adjudication (i.e., before a plea or verdict) versus those that are post-adjudication (i.e., at some point after a plea/guilty verdict, whether before sentencing or as a sentence). With this information, as well as the information in the online Presentation, you and the other members of the team will define a target population for your new mental health court. The final activity of the module shows how a target population definition is applied in practice through short video segments of a mental health court team as they discuss whether or not certain applicants fit in the program's target population. At the end of the activities, you will be asked to list three issues that the activities have raised for your own program planning.

Each activity is explained in the sidebar on the right-hand side of the page. The sidebar can also be used for notes as you complete the guide. If you are reading this document online, you can link to the resources for each activity below the activity description.



## Activity 1: Describing Your Target Population

As you'll recall from the online Presentation, recent research provides some guidance about what to consider in establishing your program's target population. In this activity, you will first read a case study of a mental health court program in fictional Water County. The case study illustrates some of the problems that arise when a program defines its target population without examining the research on who benefits from participating in a mental health court, inventorying community resources, or speaking with stakeholders to understand their concerns. Next, you will complete a worksheet to help you establish target population criteria. Finally, you will describe the target population you plan to serve. The chart below outlines steps to complete the activity, actions required, and how long each step will take.

Steps	Action	Complete as	Completion Time (in minutes)
<b>a. Scenario:</b> Water County target population	Read		5
<b>b. Questions:</b> Challenging assumptions	Discuss		15
<b>c. Worksheet:</b> Eligibility Criteria/ Target Population	Respond		30
<b>d. Questions:</b> Your target population	Discuss		10
			<b>60</b>
 Complete on your own		 Complete as a team	

**Activity 1 is designed to help you define your target population based on the resources of your community and the research on who benefits from mental health courts.**

### Outputs

- A brief description of your target population
- An understanding of how decisions on target population can present challenges for the team on whom to enroll in the program

**a. On your own, read about the target population for Water County, a hypothetical county planning a mental health court.**

The Water County Mental Health Court will serve Water County residents charged with non-violent misdemeanors where the individuals' serious mental illnesses caused the criminal behavior.

While the Water County Mental Health Court judge is able to hear violent felony cases, the team has decided to take only non-violent misdemeanors because it anticipates great resistance from the community if it accepts participants charged with more serious crimes and repeat offenses. The team is also concerned that recidivism among program graduates will make the public perceive the program as ineffective. They have decided therefore not to allow individuals with a high risk of recidivism into the program. Before accepting individuals charged with serious crimes, the team will build data on the court's success by working with misdemeanants under intensive supervision.

**b. As a group, discuss the following questions about the criminal justice eligibility criteria Water County applied in defining its target population.**

1. How does Water County's decision to serve non-violent misdemeanants account for current research on recidivism rates for misdemeanor and felony participants?
2. The Water County team is worried that the community will not want the program to serve repeat offenders charged with felonies. How might the team assure the public that they are equally concerned with the community's safety and allay the public's fears around this issue?
3. Based on the research, what can Water County expect to come of its decision to heavily supervise misdemeanor cases? How could this impact court operations and public opinion?

Notes:

**c. As a group, complete the following “Eligibility Criteria/Target Population” worksheet.**

It may be helpful to print out the worksheet and begin filling it in as you view the online Presentation. You will continue working on an expanded version of this worksheet in Module 5. Please keep a copy of your completed worksheet for that activity.

For each criterion in the left-hand column, your team should consider the following questions:

**Whom do you picture serving?** When you began planning the court program, what target population did you assume you would serve under each criterion?

**What does the research say?** Based on what you learned in the online Presentation, what does the research say about each criterion?

**What do you have the resources to do?** Despite what your team originally thought would be the target population, your criminal justice system, behavioral health system, and community may not have the resources to support the needs of that target population. Consider the work you did to create an inventory of your community’s resources in Module 2 when completing this column.

**What are your stakeholders’ priorities?** What do you know about the concerns of the members of your community? What do you not know that you need to find out?

It may not be possible to complete all the fields. For example, there may not be research for a certain criterion. In this case, you may put “N/A” in the corresponding field.

The first row of the worksheet contains an example from Water County for the assessment criterion “Criminogenic Risk.”

# Module 4

## Worksheet: Eligibility Criteria/Target Population

Criteria	Determining Eligibility Criteria for Your Program's Target Population				Your Program's Target Population
	Whom do you picture serving?	What does the research say?	What do you have the resources to do?	What are your stakeholders' priorities?	
<b>Example:</b> Criminogenic Risk for Water County	Non-violent individuals appearing on their first arrest	This level of supervision most effective for high risk individuals	Probation officers have high case loads	County Board President promised criminal justice funding overhaul – wants to reduce recidivism	High-medium risk
Criminogenic Risk Level					
Criminal History					
Type of Current Charges					
Case Status: Pre- or Post-Adjudication					

# Module 4

Criteria	Determining Eligibility Criteria for Your Program's Target Population				Your Program's Target Population
	Whom do you picture serving?	What does the research say?	What do you have the resources to do?	What are your stakeholders' priorities?	
Mental Illness					
Traumatic Brain Injury					
Developmental Disability					
Substance Use					
Residency					

**d. Based on these limitations and strengths, describe your target population.**

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## Module 4



### Activity 2: Target Population in Action

In this activity, you will consider how your decisions about your target population will shape your process for selecting individual cases. You will view and then discuss video segments of a Bonneville County Mental Health Court team staffing meeting. In Bonneville, the team regularly reviews new applications during staffing meetings, at which point the team decides who is eligible for the mental health court program; some individuals referred to the program meet the eligibility criteria, while others do not. The video and discussion questions will help your team make decisions about next steps for clients who do not fit your target population, as well as work through disagreements about who is eligible. The chart below outlines steps to complete the activity, actions required, and how long each step will take.

Steps	Action	Complete as	Completion Time (in minutes)
<b>a. Video Clip:</b> Lisa Empey	View		5
<b>b. Questions:</b> Considering a Clear Fit	Discuss		10
<b>c. Video Clip:</b> Roger Wilson	View		5
<b>d. Questions:</b> When the referral does not fit the target population	Discuss		10
<b>e. Video Clip:</b> Bill Smith	View		5
<b>f. Questions:</b> Working through disagreement	Discuss		15
			<b>50</b>
 Complete on your own		 Complete as a team	

**Activity 2 is designed to help your team better understand how the decisions you make regarding your target population impact which applicants are eligible for the program.**

#### Output

- An understanding of how your target population decisions will impact case selection and staffing

**a. As a group, view the following video segment of a Bonneville Mental Health Court mock staffing meeting.** To access the video, follow the link below to the course site.

**Video Link:**

**Video 1: New Applications: Lisa Empey**

**b. As a group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Based on the team's conversation, what is the target population for the Bonneville Mental Health Court, in terms of criminogenic risk (measured here by a Level of Services Inventory (LSI) score), type of charges, criminal history, and mental health diagnosis?
2. What possible groups are excluded based on how Bonneville defined its target population?
3. What role does each team member play in a staffing meeting and how does the discussion proceed when parties disagree on a client referral? Does one staff member chair the meeting, and is there a final decision maker for a referral?
4. The Bonneville Mental Health Court does not have a defense attorney present at their staffing meeting. How might the conversation have been different if a defense attorney was present? What role would a defense attorney generally play in this process?

**c. As a group, view the following video segment of a Bonneville Mental Health Court mock staffing meeting.** To access the video, follow the link below to the course site.

**Video Link:**

**Video 2: New Applications: Roger Wilson**

**d. As a group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Why does Mr. Wilson not meet the eligibility criteria of the Bonneville Mental Health Court?

Notes:

2. What factors does the team consider when discussing criminogenic risk?
3. Why is Mr. Wilson's case complicated, as Eric, the court coordinator, describes?
4. After the team decides that Mr. Wilson does not fit into their target population, what are its next steps?
5. What resources (e.g., other problem-solving courts) are available in your community to support individuals who do not fit within your target population, but who also seem inappropriate for jail or prison?
6. Are there mechanisms in place to make referrals to other community resources in the event that the individual does not fit your eligibility criteria?

**e. As a group, view the following video segment of the Bonneville Mental Health Court mock staffing meeting.** To access the video, follow the link below to the course site.

**Video Link:**

**Video 3: New Applications: Bill Smith**

**f. As a group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Why is Mr. Smith a good fit for the Bonneville Mental Health Court? Why might he not be?
2. How does the team resolve its disagreement about whether or not to accept this case? What does this mean about the flexibility or inflexibility of the target population criteria for this program?
3. How important is having flexibility in applying pre-determined eligibility criteria to your team's decisions?

**Notes:**

## Summary

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List three issues these activities have raised for your own program planning.

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