



## JAIL REFORM TOOLKIT & RESOURCE GUIDE

### EPISODE 2

# Veterans Courts Give Soldiers a Way Back

A PODCAST BY



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# Hello!

Thanks for listening to 70 Million. Whether you're a seasoned criminal justice reform advocate, private citizen, educator, public or private sector leader, we appreciate your interest in finding solutions to the incarceration quagmire.

We've assembled this 70 Million Criminal Justice Toolkit for those ready to turn interest into action.

This resource guide draws from practical tactics shared by those who launched the initiatives chronicled in our episodes, including:

-- How to access and deploy public and private sector databases and legislative bodies to build reform solutions.

-- How to highlight individual stories of the incarcerated in order to drive organizational and grassroots action.

-- How to harness citizens' willingness to engage in methodical, trial-and-error pilot efforts in order to build effective reform programs and movements.

Our hope is that this Toolkit can help get you started. Keep in mind that steps do not have to happen strictly chronologically. Use them and the questions to frame and shape change in your community and let us know about it.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE TOOLKIT

### Using the SMART model

The SMART model of program development and evaluation is an open-sourced method used by public sector, nonprofit and citizen/community groups to organize solutions-oriented projects.

**S**pecific (Steps 1-4)

**M**easurable (Steps 5-6)

**A**chievable (Steps 7-8)

**R**elevant (Steps 9-10)

**T**imebound (Step 11)

## STEP 1

### Identify & Analyze Concerns

# Be specific about what you are trying to achieve

**Case Study -- Episode 2 of 70 Million Podcast:** Massachusetts is working to reduce the number of veterans who end up incarcerated. Returning members of US Armed Services can struggle with PTSD or other emotional challenges that lead to drug or alcohol addiction, or anger-management issues that bring them in contact with the criminal justice system.

In Boston, veterans advocates pushed for development of [Boston Veterans Treatment Court](#). Opened in 2014, the Veterans Treatment Court collaborated with a range of federal, state, and local agency representatives, including the federally-funded Veterans Center. It connects returning vets to social services and job resources designed to aid productive readjustment to society. Defendants voluntarily enter a 12-24 month-long program.



“The thing is we try to make vet centers look like your living room, so that way it's comfortable to come in. You are not sitting in this weird medical environment.”

**Chris Morse, LISCW, Director, Boston Veterans Center**

## STEP 2

### Identify and Convene Internal Division Representatives and External Stakeholders

# What is the minimum personnel needed?

- List Must-Have Roles
- List Potential Ideal Individuals to Assume Must-Have Roles

**Example:** Boston Veterans Treatment Court deploys a team that works in sync with a judge. Their program is structured as a 12-24 month long treatment that includes counseling for emotional health and drug and alcohol abuse. The multidisciplinary team includes social workers, substance-abuse counselors, community services agents, and veterans advocates.

## STEP 3

### Itemize Resources, Inputs, and Assets Needed to Achieve Solutions/Outcomes

# What do we want to accomplish?

- Why is this goal important?
- Who should be involved?
- What resources are needed?

**Example:** Employing veterans to coordinate programs at Veterans Centers, and partnering with social workers, public defenders, substance abuse and mental health experts, along with local law enforcement officials, is essential to shaping a range of effective jail reform and diversion options via the Veterans Treatment Court.



“Most didn’t know each other in combat, but they’ve become battle buddies here in court. In fact, there’s an even larger team there, sitting in the courtroom each week, ready to help. Not just the attorneys, but also a social worker and a mentor. If an issue comes up, they figure things out. Help decipher paperwork or next steps for a treatment plan. Right there in the courtroom.”

**Reporter Heidi Shin for 70 Million.**

## STEP 4

### Action Planning

# Develop Framework & Timeline for Achieving Goals

**Example:** Clients accepted into Boston Veterans Treatment Court must meet the terms of the 12-24 month structured program. They include\* :

- Submit a referral form, and complete an intake interview at the Court with the Boston Veterans Court Team Coordinator and Probation Officer.
- The District Attorney assesses the veteran's legal eligibility based upon criminal history and current charges.
- Submit to a clinical evaluation to determine if the offense was related to service-connected substance abuse, mental health issue and/or another co-occurring disorder.

\*Partial List

## STEP 5

### Measuring Progress & Efficacy

- Set evaluation criteria to determine progress & success rate
- Assess Legislative/Funding/Regulatory Barriers & Opportunities

**Example:** Those accepted into the Boston Veterans Court must adhere to all parts of the five-phase regime, including:

- Appear often before the judge for review hearings.
- Meet regularly with a probation officer.
- Participate in random and frequent drug and alcohol screens.
- Develop an individualized treatment plan, including mental health or substance abuse treatment.
- Participate in needs-assessment evaluations for housing, medical care, etc.
- Utilize the Veterans Benefit Administration to determine if they qualify for disability.





## STEP 6 Support Desired Outcomes with Data/Metrics

**Example:** The Boston Veterans Treatment Court judge, along with defendant's veteran-mentor and representatives of the multidisciplinary team that manage individual cases, and regularly assess participants' progress within the five phases of the alternative sentencing program.

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## STEP 7 Achievability Review

- Revisit whether goals are realistic and introduce flexibility in goal-setting
- Operational Oversight Assessment

**Example:** Key to achieving successful outcome for participants is regular contact with their assigned veteran-mentor. The veteran-mentors, many former participants themselves, serve as accountability monitors, to aid mentees in staying on track with the requirements of the Court's 12-24 month long program.

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## STEP 8 Program(s) and Asset Resource Monitoring

**Example:** Resources for Boston Veterans Treatment Court are funded by the annual Massachusetts State Legislature as part of more than 30 'specialty courts' in the state, with funds administered by the City of Boston and Boston Municipal Court. In 2016, Veterans Treatment Court received [\\$3.2 million in funding](#).

"I try to show them like, hey, you know what, I've been down and out, but that's a part of my life. I'm not there anymore in my life. And I wouldn't trade it for anything now."

**Don Purrington, Veteran Mentor, Boston Veterans Treatment Court.**

## STEP 9

### Relevancy Check-Up

- Examine whether each milestone supports the overall vision
- Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation & Process Updates

**Example:** Since its full-scale operation in 2014 (it was piloted beginning in 2012), Boston Veterans Treatment Court is widely viewed as a promising vehicle for reducing the population of veterans who enter the criminal justice system.



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## STEP 10

### Full Program Review

**Example:** City, state, and federal veterans affairs officials conduct reviews of outcomes. Boston Municipal Court officials, and elected officials, oversee data evaluations of Veterans Treatment Court defendants on a regular basis.

“Graduates of...Veterans’ Treatment Court have a recidivism rate of about 11.5%, while the average rate in Massachusetts is between 40 and 50 percent in its nearly 4 years of operation.”

**Boston Bar Association, Issue Spot, 2016**

## STEP 11

### Ensure Reform Efforts Are Time-bound

# How long does it take to achieve goals?

→ Are established deadlines realistic?

**Example:** There are more than 300 similar Veterans Treatment Courts nationwide. Policy-makers, jail reform activists, and veterans advocates, as well as elected officials, review budget data, defendant outcomes, and other metrics in determining lifespan of programs. In Boston, former participants in the 12-24 month program, as well as criminal justice experts and social services partners, hold favorable views of the treatment courts.



“I think it’s something that’s made [defendants] more proud of themselves. It not only shows respect for themselves, but they get respect from others.”

**Eleanor Sinnott, presiding judge, Boston Veterans Treatment Court**

## RESOURCES

To learn more about Boston Veterans Treatment Court, a jail diversion program for United States Military vets in the city of Boston, these resources can help:

- The City of Boston Veterans Treatment Court information pack is [here](#)
- Boston Mayor Marty Walsh [spoke in support](#) of the Veterans Treatment Court as it formally opened in 2014.
- The state of Massachusetts provides [information about Veterans Treatment Courts](#) and other specialty courts.
- Director of Boston's Veterans Center, Chris Morse, [shares insights about the multidisciplinary approach](#) to assisting US military veterans.

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