PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK EXPLANATION

Section 4.3 of the Illinois Supreme Court Problem-Solving Courts Standards requires that each PSC develop a written Participant Handbook which must be provided to each participant and also must be submitted along with the Application for Certification. There is no specific format that this handbook must follow but its purpose is to provide each participant with a readily available resource and guide that sets forth the program requirements and provides the participants with certain mandatory information. The handbook MUST be consistent with the Problem-Solving Courts (PSC) written policies and procedures which also must be submitted along with the Application for Certification as set forth in section 4.2 of the PSC Standards.

Examples of handbooks that other Illinois Circuits have developed for their courts are included for your review and possible use as you develop the participant handbook for your PSC. However, there is no such thing as a "generic" handbook and the resources, policies, and procedures for each PSC will not be the same. For instance, the model for your PSC may be pre-plea, or post-plea, or a combination of both; your program phases may be structured differently or have different requirements for promotion and graduation; your testing and reporting requirements may differ from the examples provided; or perhaps your eligibility requirements may be more or less specific.

It is hoped that the samples which are attached are useful as you develop and write your participant handbook as required by Section 4.3. Be certain to note, however, that there are MANDATORY items that must be included in your participant handbook. These are:

1. In providing your participants with general information about the PSC they are entering they must be informed of the purpose of the PSC, the goals they should strive to reach by participating in the program and the eligibility criteria that they had to meet in order to be part of the PSC. Insure that this information mirrors that which is in your PSC's written Policies and Procedures. When placing this information in your participant handbook, however, it is suggested that you write it clearly using as little "formal" or "legalese" type language as possible so that immediately upon beginning the program each participant is able to grasp and understand the information.
2. The PSC Team members should be identified and each of their roles in the program should be briefly described. It should be emphasized that they act as a Team and interact in a non-adversarial way for the benefit of the participants.
3. The "how's" of the assessment and enrollment process should be understandably and simply explained: including the "Consent to Participate" that each participant signs, how the participant's needs are assessed and how a "case management plan" is developed by the Team, emphasizing that each participant's circumstances will be different and everyone's plan will likely vary to some degree.
4. A description of the responsibilities and expectations that will be placed on the participant by the Team during his/her enrollment in the PSC is also required. This must contain details on court attendance requirements and complying with the Case

Management Plan which, of course, would include sobriety, reporting, testing, as well as treatment participation and attendance.

5. An understandable summary and description of the program "phases" and what requirements need to be met in each phase in order to pass or be promoted to the next phase is also a required part of the handbook.
6. What possible "incentives," "sanctions," and "therapeutic adjustments" may be utilized in the PSC along with some examples so that the participant understands their use and what types of conduct might trigger their use.
7. A clear description and summary of the drug and alcohol testing procedures and requirements that each participant must follow should be carefully provided. The participant should be advised that there will be a significant amount of testing and that it can be required at any location with and without notice at any time of the day or night.
8. A concise summary of the possible outcomes of participation in the PSC and the specific requirements for successful completion of the program must also be included. A "successful completion," "neutral discharge," "voluntary withdrawal," and "unsuccessful discharge" should be described with some specificity and examples provided so that the participant understands how he/she can succeed by fulfilling the requirements of the program and how he/she could also be discharged from the program. While the consequences of an "unsuccessful discharge" might be obvious to a participant, the consequences of a "voluntary withdrawal" will likely not be. The consequences of all possible outcomes should be carefully included, particularly as to a "voluntary" withdrawal" that could result in a violation of probation or reinstatement of the criminal prosecution.

In addition to the above MANDATORY inclusions, PSC are encouraged to consider placing in their participant handbook any additional information that might assist the participant in achieving success and avoiding commonly encountered issues during the process of their continuing recovery.

The sample handbooks that are attached include information that might be helpful. Particularly note the types of attachments that might be continually referenced by participants during their participation in their PSC and which might be helpful to have readily available, i.e. their Consent to Participate, their court sentencing/probation/bond order, or a more complete list of sanctions and incentives. The participant handbook should be specific to your program.

Examples of other Court's handbooks follow.