

**Evaluating Domestic Relations Programs
Summary of Presentation for
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Managers are called on to consider the effectiveness and resource needs of domestic relations programs, ranging from self-help centers, to custody mediation, to guardianship investigations. They often have limited information about how these programs work or should be evaluated. Better data is always useful but how do you determine your specific data needs before launching an assessment of these programs?

Our approach to evaluating court-connected domestic relations programs has two essential aspects:

1) Think about these programs in terms of the National Association of Court Manager's Core Competency known as the "Essential Components".

Managing Domestic Relations programs is considered one of the "Essential Components" of a high functioning court system. Underlying the core competency of "Essential Components" is the premise that the court is responsible for oversight of court-connected services, whether they are provided by court staff, by contractors or by referral to a list of experts provided by the court.

By thinking and talking about these services in terms common to the rest of the court, managers can determine whether and how a given program meets the court's needs and begin to assess resource needs. Ask yourself, for example, whether and how your domestic relations programs support case preparation (e.g., case intake and screening, aid to *pro se* litigants, education or orientation of parties); adjudication (e.g., through mediation, arbitration, special masters or hearing officers, services connected to problem-solving courts); or enforcement of orders (e.g., supervised visitation, certification of completion of court-ordered programs, or reviews of parenting plans). Once you've thought through how the programs support essential court functions, the types of data that need to be collected will be clearer.

2) Utilize our 10 Keys for Effective Assessment©. Managers can begin to get their arms around whether their domestic relations programs are accountable and effective by asking:

1. Is the service guided by rule, ethic or standard?
2. Are there policies guiding the population to be served?
3. How are the results of the service (e.g., compliance with court-ordered program attendance) reported to the bench?
4. Are litigants prepared to make good use of the service through orientation or written materials?
5. Are there initial and ongoing education requirements for providers?
6. How are service providers evaluated?
7. Is there a complaint procedure?
8. Are there standards for timeliness for providing the service?

9. How are the program's benefits measured?
10. What statistics does the court collect?

The answers to these questions can help you begin to consider the effectiveness of your court's domestic relations programs overall and of individual providers.

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