



Improving Probation Success: Reengagement Strategies in Pima County, Arizona

September 2023

The Adult Probation Department (APD) in Pima County and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) were selected by Arnold Ventures and the Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) at the City University of New York to participate in the Reducing Revocations Challenge (RRC), a national initiative aimed at exploring the drivers of unsuccessful exits from probation and identifying new solutions to bolster probation success. During Phase I of the RRC, APD engaged in an action research partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts and a team of external researchers to identify the drivers of revocations. Based on these findings, APD identified drug-related violations and absconding as major drivers of technical violations and revocations. APD developed three related strategies to implement in Phase II: warrant resolution, drug testing policy changes, and drug testing fee subsidies. This brief summarizes the research findings from Phase I of the RRC before describing the strategy implementation and outcomes from Phase II. It concludes with a discussion on longer-term continuation and sustainability of the strategies along with broader steps the department can take to reduce unnecessary violations and revocations going forward.

RRC Phase I	RRC Phase II
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• October 2018 - August 2021• Research & Strategy Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• October 2021 - September 2023• Strategy Implementation

The Adult Probation Department (APD) in Pima County employs evidence-based practices to supervise individuals on probation supervision, develop case plans, and make connections to service providers in the community. Officers are trained in field supervision, risk and needs assessments, and core correctional practices to reduce recidivism and improve problem solving and other life outcomes. They utilize a network of treatment supports in the community to address substance use, cognition, parenting skills, and mental and physical health needs. APD is committed to best practices and has invested in the infrastructure to drive behavior change through a risk-needs-based approach to supervision. Clients actively engaged in supervision can benefit from the resources the department has to offer while they serve their sentence. They may receive specialized responses from the Court, including services for drug and alcohol abuse, gang involvement, child abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.

“Pima County’s geography contains different and distinct populations, each with a unique dynamic. These include a metropolitan area, a large rural area, and several Native American tribal communities. Compared with the rest of the state, Tucson and Pima County face special challenges posed by a high poverty rate, and by ... the proximity to corridors for drug smuggling..”
 (Arizona Town Hall 2018, p. 69)

Most people on adult probation in Pima County complete their term without revocation. Revocation is the unsuccessful termination of probation, usually resulting in incarceration. In fiscal year 2022, 374 violation dispositions resulted in probation revocation. The total combined average probation population in the county that year was 7,958 across directly, indirectly, and administratively supervised populations, for a revocation rate of 5% (Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts, 2022). Still, probation violations, revocation, and re-incarceration impose a heavy cost on the legal system, clients, and the community. Moreover, racial and ethnic disparities in probation services and outcomes, which persist throughout the justice system, must be identified to be eliminated.

Through the RRC, and with support from local criminal justice system partners and community stakeholders, APD engaged in efforts to promote probationer success and racial equity in outcomes by addressing key drivers of technical violations and creating probation strategies that work across different demographic groups. Phase I of the RRC found that technical violations, as compared to new crime violations, make up over two-thirds of petitions to revoke (PTRs) and revocations. Moreover, this research identified overrepresentation of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American clients in the general probation population, among those on Intensive Probation Supervision (IPS), and across unsuccessful probation outcomes (Roberts Freeman et al. 2021).

Representation of Racial/Ethnic Groups by Pima County & Probation Populations

	Pima County ^a	Probation ^b	IPS ^b	Warrant ^c	Violated ^b	Revoked ^b
Black	5%	9%	11%	13%	10%	9%
Hispanic/Latino/a	39%	43%	47%	38%	41%	44%
Native American	4%	4%	6%	6%	5%	6%
White	50%	44%	42%	42%	43%	41%

a Other race categories are not shown. There is some overlap in the reporting categories. Source: 2010 Census
 b People who started probation between 2014 and 2018, excluding “Other.” Source: Roberts Freeman et al. 2021
 c APD data on active warrants issued between 2018 and March 31, 2022. Other race categories not shown.

Examining technical violations further, a case file review and interviews with probation officers and judges in Phase I of the RRC found that they often relate to drug use and absconding. Absconding means the probation client failed to report to their probation officer as required (either in the office or at another location), and their location is unknown. Nationally, fewer than 10% of people exit probation due to absconding (Kaeble, 2021).

In Pima County, revocation for absconding can only occur if the non-reporting was due to willful noncompliance rather than a scheduling conflict (e.g., work or family obligation) or because the person was physically unable to report to probation (e.g., detained or deported). Given the nature of absconding, little is known about the specific reasons people may have for non-reporting, such as addiction, housing instability, limited transportation or communication options, mental illness, or an inability to pay probation costs. Still, some evidence suggests that people who stop reporting experience the greatest need for services and interventions (Mayzer, Gray & Maxwell 2004; Denman, Willits, & Dole 2017; Stevens-Martin & Liu 2017).

Probation officers and judges interviewed during the RRC Phase I suggested that people who choose not to report to probation may be trying to avoid probation consequences that can result from a positive drug test or ongoing substance use issues. From their experience, it is common for people who do not report or who stop reporting, along with those who face revocation, to be struggling with a behavioral health issue like addiction. Recognizing the limited quantitative data on absconding (both locally and nationally), a public defender in Pima County surmised that most of the people who abscond have just started on probation and have not had a chance to see how the department works with people on probation to improve their outcomes. Some may not be ready to engage in treatment. Substance use is, thus, expected to be a primary reason for nonreporting to probation.

Through Phase II of the RRC, Pima County probation leaders and supervisors implemented a set of policy and practice changes in August of 2022 to 1) establish a new warrant resolution process for people who have a pending violation for absconding and an active warrant, 2) reform drug testing frequency requirements, and 3) provide subsidies for people who are unable to pay for the cost of drug testing. Additionally, a Community Advisory Board (CAB) was established to review APD's strategies and support implementation efforts and community outreach.

Strategies to Address Probation Revocations in Pima County, Arizona

Because absconding was identified as the most significant driver of revocations for technical violations locally, APD targeted their strategies towards the population of people most likely to face revocation – those who had an active warrant for failing to report to probation.^[i] The department proposed a reengagement strategy to reach people with a warrant who may have never reported or who stopped reporting to probation to get them under supervision and to connect them to needed treatment and support. This was necessary as people who abscond may have little reason to re-engage if not for reinstatement to probation along with service provision. Without such an opportunity, they are likely to be re-incarcerated if they are picked up on the warrant. This voluntary program would be advertised through community outreach efforts aimed at building trust in the program as a legitimate opportunity to avoid incarceration.

Key to engaging and supporting people who struggle with substance use issues was amending drug testing policies and procedures to cultivate a harm reduction and comprehensive case management approach that also holds people accountable to their case plan and recovery goals. While drug testing is aimed at supporting recovery, frequent out-of-pocket testing can be a barrier for people and, to the extent that missed or positive tests lead to probation violations, can undermine success on probation.

Prior to the RRC strategy implementation, people on probation had to pay between \$12 to \$15 for each drug test and could be tested up to 4 times a month. APD leadership changed operational policies and procedures to refine policy guidance on drug testing frequency, create drug testing fee subsidies to cover the full cost of drug testing for people who are indigent, and change the culture around positive drug tests.



These strategies were expected to both directly and indirectly reduce revocations by reducing drug-related violations and promoting recovery.

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) monitored progress by developing a performance management plan and producing quarterly metrics that provided key information on program participation and probation outcomes. This was intended to assist APD in identifying areas for improvement and communicating progress to stakeholders.

Initial Implementation

RRC Phase II strategy implementation began with a 6-month planning period to further develop the strategies and identify the steps necessary to implement the program and the performance monitoring components. During the planning period, APD engaged with ISLG, RRC technical assistance providers, RRC sites, and NCSC to identify and document implementation steps for each strategy. Action steps were documented in an implementation plan, which also provided an overview of the strategies, named key stakeholders and roles, laid out implementation activities and milestones, described anticipated challenges and outcomes, and identified goals around racial equity and sustainability. A probation working group was also formed to review and update internal procedures for initial implementation.

The workgroup of probation supervisors, program coordinators, administrative staff, and analysts primarily informed development of the warrant resolution program. As the first-of-its-kind program for both felony and misdemeanor probation, workgroup members aimed to reach and engage the target population while also maintaining client accountability and gaining the buy-in of probation officers and the community. They held several planning meetings in early 2022. Their discussion focused on the current process, the eligibility criteria for warrant resolution, and the warrant resolution procedures. At the same time, probation leadership separately formalized policies on drug testing and discretionary use of drug testing subsidies.

A central part of the implementation process involved participation in a series of race equity learning sessions, presented by the Center for Children's Law and Policy (CCLP) and hosted by ISLG. These cross-site learning sessions provided an opportunity to learn about key race equity concepts and principles and to hear from other jurisdictions about their engagement of communities and impacted people in their strategy development. Breakout sessions during these trainings allowed APD to discuss specific ways to engage members of the local tribes, employ incentives for surveys of people on probation, and co-design strategies to reduce disparities in implementation. Experts from CCLP also provided advisory assistance on applying a race equity lens specifically for Pima County's strategies, and supported APD in their work with the CAB. Some of the suggestions from CCLP included an off-site warrant resolution event to reengage in a more neutral community setting and to respond to positive drug tests with treatment referrals rather than a violation when drug use is not a part of the underlying criminal charge.

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to the needs of people of color, and develop strategies to garner client trust and cooperation. While the overarching goals were to reduce disparities in revocation and incarceration, these conversations allowed APD to receive input on their practices more broadly and engage in informal discussion about the challenges people face on probation and in the community. For instance, members suggested that APD create an anonymous feedback box and hold a focus group facilitated by credible messengers to learn more about the experiences of Pima County’s supervision populations. There were 40 officers who used the subsidy program and 38 that had not as of a year after implementation.

Implementation Steps and Milestones

Select Activities/Milestones*	2021				2022					2023			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Race Equity Learning Sessions Held	1	2	1				1	1					
APD Workgroup Meetings Commenced		1											
Race Equity Impact Assessment Produced		1											
Coordination with Judges (& Resolution Forms Created)		1	1	1									
Warrant and Drug Testing Policies Updated			2										
Staff Trainings Held				1	1								
Strategies Launched (Full Implementation)													
Community & Media Outreach		2		2	2	1							
Community Advisory Board Meetings Held					2	1		1					
Quarterly Metrics Produced			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Notes: **Q1** = Jan – Mar, **Q2** = Apr – Jun, **Q3** = Jul – Sept, **Q4** = Oct – Dec
 light teal = activities with partners, dark teal = APD activities, gold = start of strategies

*List is not exhaustive of implementation activities.

Warrant Resolution

The **target population for warrant resolution** is people who had a warrant issued through the Superior Court for absconding from probation. People who were ineligible were those who posed a community or victim safety concern and those who did not have a Pima County Superior Court probation warrant. They also must not have had a previous warrant quashed through the program.

To be eligible for the “Clear My Warrant” program, a person had to have:

- A Pima County probation warrant
 - City court, failure to appear to court, and state warrants are ineligible,
- No pending charges or credible threat (e.g., potential victims in domestic violence cases),
- A nonviolent charge for the current probation sentence (e.g., the person is not on the IPS or sex offense caseload), and
- Not participated in the program previously.

Warrant resolution requires voluntary participation, where clients learn about their eligibility and agree to resolve the outstanding warrant and reengage with probation. Prior to warrant resolution, a court date would be set when a person requests to address a warrant or is arrested on a warrant. Through warrant resolution, however, there is no requirement to appear in court (see process changes below).

The warrant resolution policy and procedure changes led to:


- Agreement from the criminal bench judges to establish a paper-based resolution process
- Partnership with the Public Defender’s office on referrals;
- The creation of a call-in line [GT1] and team of people who respond to inquiries, review eligibility, and handoff eligible cases to the appropriate probation supervisor for final approval and assignment to a probation officer;
- Reengagement through an office visit scheduled with the probation officer (rather than scheduling of a court date) to address the PTR and warrant;
- Extension of the probation term for the length of time the person was out on warrant status; and
- Updated policies (e.g., *Operations Manual Section XVII. Warrant Resolution*), and
- Development of court orders to dismiss the PTR and quash the warrant.

An important feature of this program is that the criminal bench judges have agreed to a **paper-based probation reengagement process**. When people reengage through the warrant resolution program, they do not need to wait for a court date. They are informed that they are eligible and must report to the probation office. At that time, they meet with an assigned probation officer and are presented with a waiver of hearing and agreement to extend probation by the number of days from warrant issuance to the current date. The probation officer will then request to have their warrant quashed and PTR dismissed with the court. Reporting to the office may discourage some people from participating, but it shows that a person is ready to reengage. At the time of publication, no one reported to the office to begin the process and changed their mind.

To reach the target population, large print flyers about the “Clear My Warrant” program were created in Spanish and English and displayed in the probation office and community. To reach remote populations, officers who work on reservations and in remote parts of the county (e.g., Sells near Tohono O’Odham and Pascua Yaqui tribes) shared information with Tribal leaders and agencies about the program. APD also engaged with the court’s public information officer (PIO) to publicize the warrant resolution program and reach people in the community. Print and TV media also covered the warrant resolution program and provided information on how to participate. Additionally, the PIO assisted with developing bus signs, which were displayed on all routes over a 3-month period. These efforts were intended to have a broad reach and to maximize participation of people of color.




Bus Stop Sign



**ADULT PROBATION DEPARTMENT OF THE
SUPERIOR COURT IN PIMA COUNTY**

David F. Sanders
Chief Probation Officer
2695 E Ajo Way
Tucson, Arizona 85713
520-724-4800



CR: _____

Warrant Resolution Program
Waiver of Hearing to Quash Warrant and Extend Term of Supervision

I, Type name here have been advised and understand that I am entitled by law to a hearing before any extension of my probation grant.

I understand that I have the right to be represented at the hearing by counsel of my own choosing if I am able to retain counsel. I also understand that I have the right to request the court to appoint counsel at no cost to myself if I am not able to retain legal representation.

I hereby voluntarily waive my statutory right to a hearing and the assistance of counsel. I also agree to the proposed extension of my term of supervision equal to the number of days I was on warrant status.

I am ready to work with my probation officer to get back on track. I am ready to comply with my conditions of probation which may mean going to treatment, talking to my probation officer about my drug use, living at a residence approved for me and other things that will help me succeed.

I was on warrant status commencing (Date). I understand that my probation term will be extended for # days. I understand my probation officer is requesting my warrant be quashed with the Court and my Petition to Revoke be dismissed without prejudice.

Probationer: (Type Name Here)

Signature

Date

Probation Officer: (Type Name Here)

Signature

Date

Copy:
Probation file
Probationer
Defense Counsel

Warrant Resolution Form

A central call-in number was established by APD for people to inquire about possible probation warrants and warrant resolution. Probation warrants staff respond to requests about eligibility made by probation partners (providers, public defenders, etc.), family members, and people who call APD about their warrant. A list of active warrants is used to verify that the warrant is eligible before conducting a review of the case. APD then attempts to notify the person about their eligibility and to schedule the in-person visit.

To foster trust in the legitimacy of the program, the probation department partnered with the public defender's office to serve as an alternative contact for persons interested in the program who may not be ready to reach out to probation directly. Fliers for the warrant resolution program included the phone number for their office. The public defender's office could provide information on the eligibility criteria and the process as well as answer questions. If a person reached out to their original probation officer, they were redirected to the warrants team and the officer's supervisor for review and approval.

This resolution process eliminates the need for a court date, reducing the use of limited court resources and making it possible to reengage in case planning immediately. The person on probation is also informed about their remaining time on probation and resources available to them, including job fairs and other community events and services.

Drug Testing Policies & Practices

Probation officers have discretion to assign drug testing and the frequency of testing at the start of a person's probation term, typically as a "manual" test. When someone is assigned to manual drug testing, they must call in daily to the drug testing facility, Averhealth, to find out if they need to provide a urine sample that day. Officers may also test people in the office at no cost. Additionally, probation officers can coordinate with treatment providers to access the results of drug tests they conduct. The operations manual indicates that **drug testing should be started if:**

1. The person has been convicted of a felony drug offense for their current sentence;
2. Testing has been ordered by the court; or
3. There is a history of abuse or substance abuse is suspected, as determined by:
 - a. Past drug related arrests/convictions.
 - b. Past treatment for substance use or abuse.
 - c. Score of 60% or higher on screening tool (OST/FROST).
 - d. Ordered to participate in rehabilitation program as part of current sentence.

Drug testing policy guidance. APD leadership reviewed the use of drug testing and formalized policy updates on testing frequency. Drug testing was reduced from a maximum of 3-4 times a month to 1-2 times a month. This testing frequency can still provide the information needed to inform case planning and treatment provision while also reducing costs. The target population for reduced drug testing is all caseloads except for drug court.

As officers set requirements early in the probation term, they now are directed to limit the frequency of testing and regularly revisit their testing results to see if the person can stop testing. Officers are advised to take people off testing when they have consecutive negative test results. APD tracks drug test frequency using data provided by the vendor, Averhealth.

Drug testing fee subsidies. Providing a subsidy for drug testing and addressing a positive drug test without a formal violation is intended to directly reduce revocations for people who would otherwise be unable or unwilling to submit a drug test due to the financial costs or potential for revocation from probation. This strategy is also expected to reduce violations and revocations related to drug use, such as absconding, non-payment, and new criminal charges.

To administer the subsidies, APD coordinated with their drug testing vendor, Averhealth, to develop a specific participant tracking and accounting program for APD to pay the full cost of the tests for

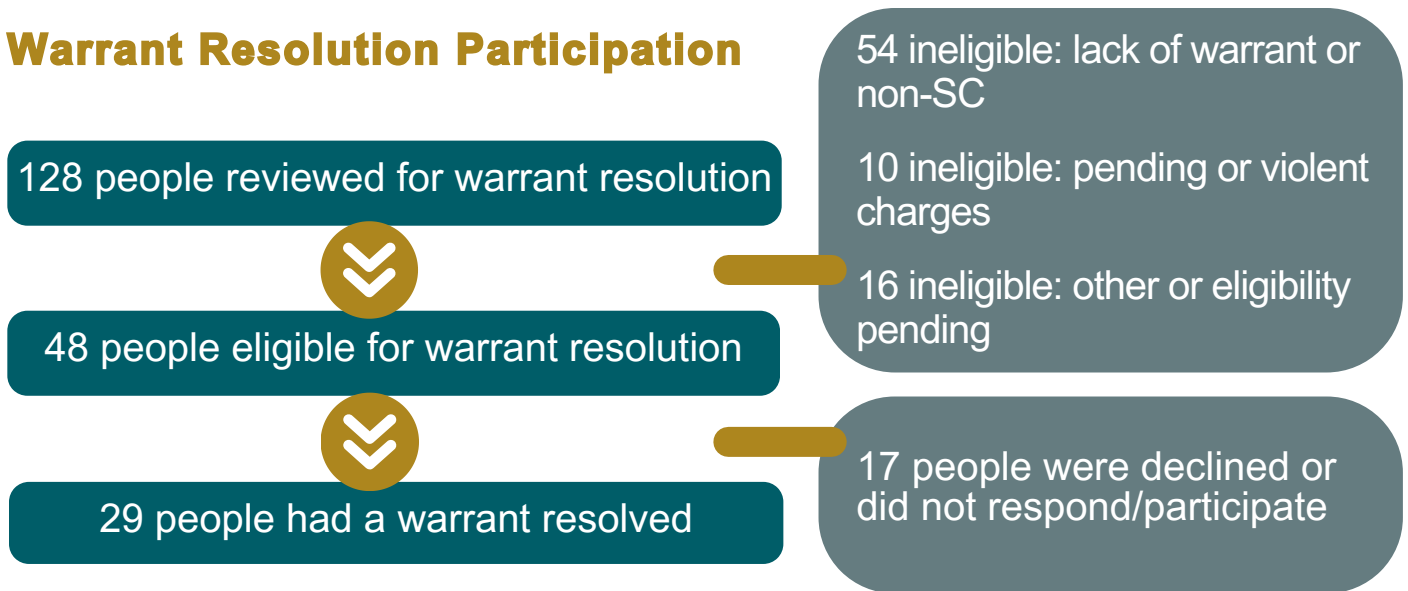
RRC participants. This is like the co-pay and drug court programs APD has previously established with the vendor. APD already provides co-pays for people on probation for a portion of the testing cost, and drug court participants receive subsidies for the full cost of testing. APD sought to expand the use of subsidies due to the number of people both being tested and failing to submit to testing but not otherwise receiving a subsidy.

The target population for drug testing fee subsidies is people who have a demonstrated need for substance use treatment as assessed on the Offender Screening Tool (OST) or the Field Reassessment Offender Screening Tool (FROST) and an economic hardship (e.g., un-/under-employment) or people recently released from confinement or residential treatment for whom treatment and testing are no longer being provided. Officers have discretion to use the fee subsidies, and they identify and notify people on their caseload that they qualify so that the person on probation can request the subsidy be applied when they are required to test.

Participation in the Strategies

APD tracked program participation through each step of the warrant resolution process. The diagram below shows the total number of people reviewed by APD for warrant resolution eligibility and who participated and completed probation successfully through June 15, 2023. Out of the 71 people who had a Pima County probation warrant, 68% were deemed eligible for the program and 41% completed warrant resolution.

Warrant Resolution Participation



Among the 17 people who were deemed eligible but did not participate, most (10) did not show up to complete the process or the officer was unable to contact them. Others were declined because they did not live in Tucson (3) or there was a community safety concern (2). One person was declined because they did not remain in treatment. A warrant was quashed through a separate process for another person.

Administration of the drug testing subsidies was tracked with data from the drug testing vendor. The following box shows the number of people impacted by the drug testing subsidies and their outcomes.

Drug Testing Subsidy Participation

There were 116 people who received a subsidy and 326 tests that have been subsidized as of June 15, 2023. That means that each person received, on average, 3 subsidies for drug tests.

Racial Equity

Most people who inquired about warrant resolution for a Pima County probation warrant were white (46%). This is higher than their shares in the population with a warrant (42%) and on probation (44%). Native Americans with Pima County warrants inquired about warrant resolution at a similar rate (4%) relative to their numbers in the probation population (4%) but at a lower rate compared to their representation among those with an active warrant (6%). Black people make up 9% of the probation population, 13% of those with active warrants, and 11% of people who inquired about a Pima County probation warrant. There is an equal representation of Hispanic/Latino people among those with a warrant and inquiring about warrant resolution (38% each). The overrepresentation of white people inquiring about the program could suggest that additional targeted outreach may be necessary to get people of color to participate in the program.

After inquiring about participation, the eligibility criteria could unintentionally exclude people of color at higher rates compared to white participants. Therefore, we examined the rates at which different racial and ethnic groups were found eligible. While caution should be taken interpreting these percentages given the small sample sizes, we found that most people were found eligible across race and ethnic group. Among those with a Pima County warrant, all three Native Americans and 70% of the 27 Hispanic/Latino people who inquired were eligible. However, only half (or 4) of the Black people who inquired were found eligible. Pima County can review the specific criteria that led to ineligible warrants to identify any systematic factors contributing to these disparities and to identify possible ways to address them.

Warrant Resolution Eligibility Status by Race/Ethnicity (excluding non-Pima warrants)

Race/Ethnicity	Open Warrants in County		Total Program Inquiries *		Ineligible		Eligible	
	#	%	#	% of Total	#	%	#	%
Black	106	13%	8	11%	4	50%	4	50%
Hispanic/Latino	303	38%	27	38%	8	30%	19	70%
Native American	50	6%	3	4%	0	0%	3	100%
White	336	42%	33	46%	11	33%	22	67%
Total	795	100%	71	100%	23	32%	48	68%

*Excludes 3 people whose eligibility status was pending at the time of analysis. Warrant data as of 3/31/2022 and for warrants opened between 2018 and 2022. Excludes other race/ethnicity categories (1% together).

The drug testing subsidies were administered across racial and ethnic groups in a proportionate manner to the overall probation population – 10% of the people receiving a testing subsidy were Black, 42% were Hispanic/Latino, and 6% were Native American compared to 9%, 43%, and 4% among the full probation population, respectively. Additional data is needed to measure the assignment of drug testing across racial and ethnic groups over set periods of time to assess the extent to which people of color are being tested at a higher rate than white people. Still, this strategy appears to be applied in a more balanced manner, possibly because drug testing is not specific to certain caseloads or supervision levels in which racial and ethnic disparities often present.

Drug Testing Subsidies Provided to People on Probation by Race/Ethnicity People with Testing Subsidies

Race/Ethnicity	#	%
Black	11	10%
Hispanic/Latino	45	42%
Native American	7	6%
White	45	42%
Total	108	100%

Reflects total people receiving subsidies, not total subsidies provided. Excludes 8 people whose race and ethnicity were unknown.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

1. The convening of a CAB provided an opportunity for APD to engage in discussions centered on building trust with people sentenced to probation, understanding their barriers, and identifying ways to include their voices and perspectives in probation supervision strategies.

It took some time to establish the CAB while initial implementation of the RRC strategies was underway. The department sought a diverse group of 8-12 people who could meet in person over the course of several months. Although many candidates for the CAB were identified during the planning period, it took time to introduce the project, invite individual members, and schedule a meeting at the best time for most people in the group. APD selected people who have a history working with the criminal courts or with community providers, lending to a high degree of familiarity with the criminal court process. This also meant that it could be difficult to get everyone together and provide enough time for a robust conversation.

Nevertheless, the first CAB meeting proved very engaging. APD provided an overview of the research from Phase I and the strategy implementation plan for Phase II. Shortly after, CAB members openly discussed how people on probation perceive the justice system and what it would take to engage those who felt like they had no chance of making it on probation or lacked trust or rapport with their probation officer. The subsequent meetings involved sharing updates on implementation and open discussion where members could ask questions, share suggestions, and provide perspectives that APD might not otherwise have had as practitioners.

Examples of topics covered included:

- Perspectives of people who have been involved in the criminal courts
 - Recognizing the lack of trust across all criminal justice system agencies (police, courts, probation, public defense, prosecutors) and the mindset shift required for people on probation
 - Client experiences with addiction and drug testing and treatment (“Humiliation,” fear of withdrawal)
- Training for officers on:
 - Personal trauma and understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to better support clients
 - Culturally-informed supervision approaches, particularly for tribal populations (e.g., focusing on storytelling, family, and community)
 - Interpersonal communication and use of officer discretion and flexibility (e.g., helping people get to meetings)
 - Implicit bias
- Building trust in relationships with people on probation
 - Using peer navigators/screeners, recruit from those who were successful as credible messengers
 - Meeting people in the jail to build trust prior to release to supervision
 - Host circles with probationers, with meals provided and led by a CAB member
 - Greater use of positive reinforcement (“celebratory framework”) knowing there will be mistakes rather than providing incentives such as not having to report that month.
- Suggestions for strategy implementation
 - Design strategies to help the person, not the department
 - Hold community-based resolution events
 - Have discussion about why someone stopped reporting to probation, what thoughts are on the program, and barriers
 - Do outreach on social media
- Questions on the data presented
- Probation officer culture, beliefs about individuals, and views on fairness
- Hiring officers

Some challenges arose as APD led the planning, scheduling, and coordination of the CAB meeting. Although the CAB reflected a diverse and experienced group of people, it was difficult to identify community residents and people with lived experience who were not involved in treatment provision or other county-led efforts to join the board. Additionally, APD experienced staff turnover and transition periods that impacted communication with the CAB.

To reduce the impacts of these challenges and strengthen CAB participation and impact, APD has requested that a CAB member serve as a lead organizer and to share meeting responsibilities across the members, such as note taking, new member recruitment, and agenda planning. This will make it possible to continue CAB activities uninterrupted and to expand participation while also centering the perspectives of the CAB members in the work.

2. Interviews conducted with probation officers revealed that there was variation in how they learned about the strategies and in how they described implementation of them.

Most officers were not actively looking for people to reengage and stated that there was a single person responsible for responding to inquiries and reviewing eligibility for the resolution program.

Officers largely felt that they had little involvement in the decision making, but some acknowledged their supervisor was involved. However, a few officers described being proactive in the process by reaching out to people and their families or other contacts to get them to resolve their warrant. This proactive approach may improve officer perceptions of the process and, possibly, their perceptions of participant commitment.

Likewise, when a person is deemed eligible, they were initially assigned back to the same officer, creating issues for clients who stopped reporting because of distrust of or poor rapport with their probation officer. This was changed during implementation to assign clients to a new officer. In addition to re-assigning people to a new officer, one officer suggested the department could provide guidance on how to handle the initial conversation during the reengagement office visit to establish rapport and start off on the right foot. Some of the key pieces of information to share with the person on probation include:

- The department's goal to support individual recovery and success in the community.
- A recognition that mistakes can happen and that the person on probation must do their part to communicate about barriers and assist with possible solutions.
- Programmatic information, such as:
 - They are only permitted to clear their warrant one time,
 - This process only applies to the Clear my Warrant program – there are other types of warrants and processes for quashing a warrant outside of this program,
 - Maintaining all paperwork on resolution in case of contact with law enforcement while warrant clearance is pending, and
 - The time out on the warrant will be added to the probation term. Officers should make sure the date the person is reengaged is clear.

3. An important takeaway from strategy implementation was the importance of gaining probation officer buy-in for policy and practice changes to have the greatest impact.

Interviews and focus groups with probation officers shed light on both their level of participation in strategy development and overall approval of implementation. Perhaps not surprisingly, officers who were more involved in the development of the strategies and who had more discretion or decision-making power during implementation were more likely to favor the strategies or to have no opinion on them. Officers who stated they were not involved in the development were the least bought in and were generally less likely to approve of them. Several probation officers acknowledged that they view probation as a privilege and are concerned about a purported lack of accountability with warrant resolution. Officers stated, for instance, that the public outreach on warrant resolution sent “the wrong message” to the community and people on probation, giving the impression that people can take a “break” from supervision.

APD worked to improve officer buy-in by communicating about the advantages of the strategies for the community, clients, and the officers. Warrant resolution is, at its core, a community safety initiative meant to bring a person who has stopped reporting back under supervision where they would be held accountable for their actions. The alternative is for a person on absconder status to remain in the community unsupervised and potentially at greater risk to the community and themselves (i.e., to the extent that engagement in prosocial behaviors like finding employment, housing, and treatment are hindered). Officers can also avoid the court process for those who self-surrender through this program. Longer-term benefits include possible reductions in recidivism among people who re-engage and receive the treatment they need.

4. Probation officers who used the drug testing subsidies held highly positive views of them, but challenges with drug testing for clients persist.

Probation officers use the drug testing subsidies at their discretion and on a case-by-case basis. They also choose how to communicate with their clients about the reasons for providing them (or not). Officers who used the subsidies described using them liberally and suggested that they made it easier for people to meet drug testing requirements. Still, there were officers who said they have not used them despite having people on their caseload who might qualify or benefit from them. One officer explained that they felt the cost of drug testing was the responsibility of the person on probation. Still, officers generally held positive views about providing the subsidies and wanted to see them continue.

As a complimentary strategy to providing the subsidies, drug testing was reduced to no more than once or twice a month. Despite the reduced testing, officers stated that some people have trouble complying because they must travel long distances to get to one of two locations in the county for drug testing (see related [Arnold Ventures 2022](#)).

Training and information sharing on the use of drug testing and the empirical research base on the impacts of drug testing on probation outcomes could reduce the frequency of drug testing, thereby reducing violations and revocations. Research suggests that drug testing should be used for treatment planning rather than punishment ([Reichert et al 2020](#)). Requiring a person to test frequently means that they may rack up many violations if they are struggling in their recovery. At the same time, the presence of several positive tests does little to inform probation case planning. Officers stated that some people on probation like the testing as an accountability measure for themselves, but no data was collected from people on probation about their drug testing preferences or whether reduced testing frequency was beneficial or not.

5. While probation stakeholders all identified absconding and drug-related violations as key drivers of revocation, the court would benefit from systematic tracking and reporting on petition filing for these behaviors (compared to other forms of noncompliance).

Improved data collection can benefit the department in several ways. First, regular reporting on these violations would shed light on the prevalence of, and trends in, these behaviors over time. Second, it would allow for an analysis of the impacts of strategies designed to reduce them. Lastly, this data would allow for a more in-depth understanding of how people who report to probation differ from those who abscond. For instance, it could answer questions about the rates of substance use among these groups. Some research has shown that people who have an identified substance use issue and those who have positive drug tests are actually less likely to abscond ([Stevens-Martin et al 2014](#)), perhaps because they are benefitting from treatment services. Similarly, this study found that people on specialized caseloads were less likely to abscond. The authors surmised that these groups “may be more amenable to assistance or more motivated to change.” If that is the case in Pima County, it would have important implications for the warrant resolution outreach and reengagement.

Sustainability and Continuation

Phase II of the RRC made initial implementation and testing of the strategies to reduce revocations possible. Through this work, Pima County has established a level of coordination among the judges, officers, and public defender partners for these programs and can continue to track and monitor participation and outcomes to guide the work and achieve success. Established performance metrics also lay the groundwork for future strategy advancements and evaluation. It has been only a year since initial implementation, and warrant resolution and more tailored drug testing practices are still part of a change in the culture of probation to a harm reduction approach. Officers need to be bought into the strategies for them to continue to grow and achieve their intended impacts. But the strategies lend themselves to longer-term continuation in several ways.

As a paper-based process, the warrant resolution program requires little to no funding to continue. There may be a cost involved to provide for overtime for the officers who review and re-engage with clients, particularly if participation rates increase. Still, some cost savings may occur with fewer court hearings, more efficient communication mechanisms, and reduced jail holds and incarceration. The need for overtime pay may also decline as the program becomes more established and trusted and officers adapt to the practice changes. APD may also want to consider other ways to reduce the occurrence of absconding – before a warrant is issued – through additional outreach on both the consequences of non-reporting and the supports that the department has available for people on probation.

Reduced drug testing means that people on probation spend less of their own limited resources on probation requirements. It also helps lower the cost associated with providing drug testing subsidies and co-payments for the probation department. Officers may still supplement reduced “manual” testing with random testing in the office (i.e., provide office test kits), but this should only be used if current substance use is suspected or the person cannot make it to a testing facility. In addition to the department-wide change from 3-4 tests a month to 1-2, APD created written procedures and regular training for officers on assessing the need for drug testing. This may help limit the broad application of it at the start of probation. Other ways to reduce probation fees and/or modify the types of tests administered could be explored to limit the impact of drug testing costs on probation clients and the department. Limiting the filing of violations related to drug testing allows for more time spent on achieving stability and connecting people to community resources.

Beyond reducing revocations, any strategy implemented should be part of a broader focus on reducing further justice system involvement and racial inequities in these outcomes. Strengthening partnerships and collaboration with tribal communities in Pima County could lead to increased access and utilization of the programs. Training on cultural competency from both a treatment and supervision perspective may assist officers who work with people residing on tribal land or who have different backgrounds than themselves. Some officers also expressed the importance of recognizing the stigma around behavioral health needs and how different communities view and respond to them. While many officers said they value honesty about substance use, they may not recognize the cultural implications and differing treatment modalities that may be necessary for working with specific populations. APD already trains on implicit bias and best practices in supervision. Applying a public health and healing lens to substance use can build upon that success.

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ii Warrant resolution aims to reach people who have already received a warrant for nonreporting to probation. It is not intended to prevent absconding or reduce the issuance of warrants. The department has a protocol in place to locate and reengage with people before filing a PTR or issuing a warrant. These steps include reaching out to collateral contacts (family, friends, employers), attempting contact at a last known address, and performing criminal records checks. For standard caseloads, officers have up to 90 days to locate a person before filing a PTR and issuing a warrant.