

Research Activities Policy

SMAART Performance Management Program Report

Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois

April 2013

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES POLICY

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. The Court accomplishes this mission by providing a fair and responsive system of justice, committed to excellence, and fostering public trust, understanding and confidence.

The Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County identifies and incorporates a number of goals and objectives based on those values that are important to the effective administration of justice. These strategic goals assure the community that: 1) Decisions are based on the best interests of the public and the court system as a whole; 2) The business of the court is based on an underlying commitment to equal and timely justice and to public access to an independent forum for the resolution of disputes; and 3) The continued development of an accessible, independent court system is ensured through planning, research and evaluation of programs and through the use of modern management approaches and technological developments.

To facilitate these objectives, the Circuit Court of Lake County supports and actively engages in research activities, which directly effect and direct its ongoing planning activities. It is the policy of the Circuit Court of Lake County to identify its needs for evaluation and conduct research concerning court programs, services, and other activities. The Court also encourages external research activities that are consistent with the needs and planning efforts of the court organization and are conducted by qualified researchers. Research and evaluation findings are used to inform the development and/or modifications of court programs and services.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois *Research Activity Policy* was implemented in December 2010. The purpose for its development was to provide a standardized policy to guide students, academic institutions and outside agencies in conducting research within the Circuit Court of Lake County. Prior to this, no formal research policy existed in the Circuit Court, or in the any other circuit within the State of Illinois. The Research Activities Policy establishes a uniform procedure for submitting and approving requests from independent researchers for the purposes of research or evaluations. The policy is applicable to all external organizations or individuals or by employees not acting in their official capacity (i.e., students). The policy addresses external research projects conducted concerning court programs, services and other activities under the jurisdiction of the Circuit Court of Lake County. The findings from such research are used to inform court leaders regarding the status of existing court programs and operations. The research policy affirms the court's commitment to the principals of evidence-based practices and the belief that research can contribute to new judicial, administrative, and correctional practices. Collaboration and partnership between independent researchers and the court organization contributes to more efficient and effective use of organizational resources and increases public trust, understanding and confidence in the judicial system.

Over the years there have been sporadic requests to conduct research of court operations and programming by students, academic institutions and external organizations. Approval for such research was typically provided informally on a case by case basis and no specific policy was developed regarding a standardized procedure for conducting research within the Circuit Court of Lake County. With the recent emphasis on evidence based

practices to determine the success of correctional programs in reducing recidivism there has been an increase in the number of requests to conduct research and provide data on circuit court programming. Early in 2010, such a request to conduct research was made by an academic institution for the purposes of providing a comprehensive assessment of a specific court program. When the request was received, it was suggested that the academic institution follow our research protocol for conducting research. Unfortunately, no such protocol existed. This led to the creation of a multi-divisional workgroup, which was assembled in August 2010 with the purpose of developing a standardized organizational policy to guide students, academic institutions and outside agencies in conducting research activities within the Circuit Court of Lake County. This workgroup consulted with national organizations, such as the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and examined existing research policies from various other jurisdictions nationwide. Many of the policies available for review, however, were developed for state correctional organizations, academic institutions or agencies of the executive branch of government. It was difficult to locate research activity policies specific to judicial organizations. The workgroup used these existing resources to create a policy that was unique to the court community in guiding independent researchers and senior court managers through the process of submitting and approving requests for research activities.

The Circuit Court of Lake County consists of six separate divisions: Court Administrative Services, Adult Probation Services, Judicial Information & Technology, Judicial Operations, Juvenile Probation & Detention Services, and Psychological Services. Each division may receive various requests for research. An informal approach to facilitating these requests limits organization-wide communication and may lead to confusion and miscommunication, especially when such activities are conducted across divisions. A uniform process was determined as necessary to ensure that comprehensive standards were consistently adhered to when reviewing, facilitating and providing internal oversight of research activities within each of the six divisions. Additionally, a single process involving senior managers from each of the divisions better facilitates internal communication and the use of court resources in support of research activities, as well as provides a process through which the activities and findings associated with such research can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of overall organizational operations, and improve collaboration and communication among the academic community, justice partners, and the court organization.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the *Research Activity Policy* is to provide a standardized procedure to conduct research within the Circuit Court of Lake County. This policy is applicable to all external research proposals submitted for consideration to the Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois. The policy is comprised of several processes: the independent research application, the approval process, and ongoing monitoring of the research project. A structured procedure allows for uniformity in these processes as well as safeguards for subjects, confidentiality of subject information and procedural provisions for the limitations and use of court data. It also puts in place guidelines and responsibilities regarding the collaboration process between the Circuit, the independent student researcher, academic institutions and/or organizations when conducting research. The policy outlines a review process of research findings and outcomes prior to publications and presentations regarding the results of the research.

When a request to conduct research is received, the independent researcher is provided a copy of the Research Activity Policy for review and an application form. The application to conduct research must include specific elements of the research project. This includes a coversheet with the proposed title of the study, the principal

researcher, a brief summary of the project and goals of the study and time lines for conducting the research. In addition the principal researcher must complete a compliance agreement identifying all parties involved in the research. A research summary is required to identify the reason for the research project (school paper, thesis, or dissertation) and statement of issues as well as goals and objectives of the project. The research proposal must outline the expected benefits of the research to the Court and/or the field of corrections or justice administration. A literature review is needed to identify how the project will improve upon existing research and a list of references regarding the specific topic of their research. A methodology section is also required which includes a summary of the sampling strategies, data collection methods and data analysis to be used in the research process. The application includes a Vita of the Principal Researcher, the Ethical or Professional Standards the research and publication will adhere to, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (especially for protection of human subjects that may be involved in the research). Provisions of confidentiality, informed consent and any resources or assistance needed from Circuit Court staff in order to support the project are also outlined in the application. The application is completed by the independent researcher and submitted to the Division Director where the proposed research will take place. The Division director reviews the application for completeness, clarity and the potential impact on resources and operations of the division.

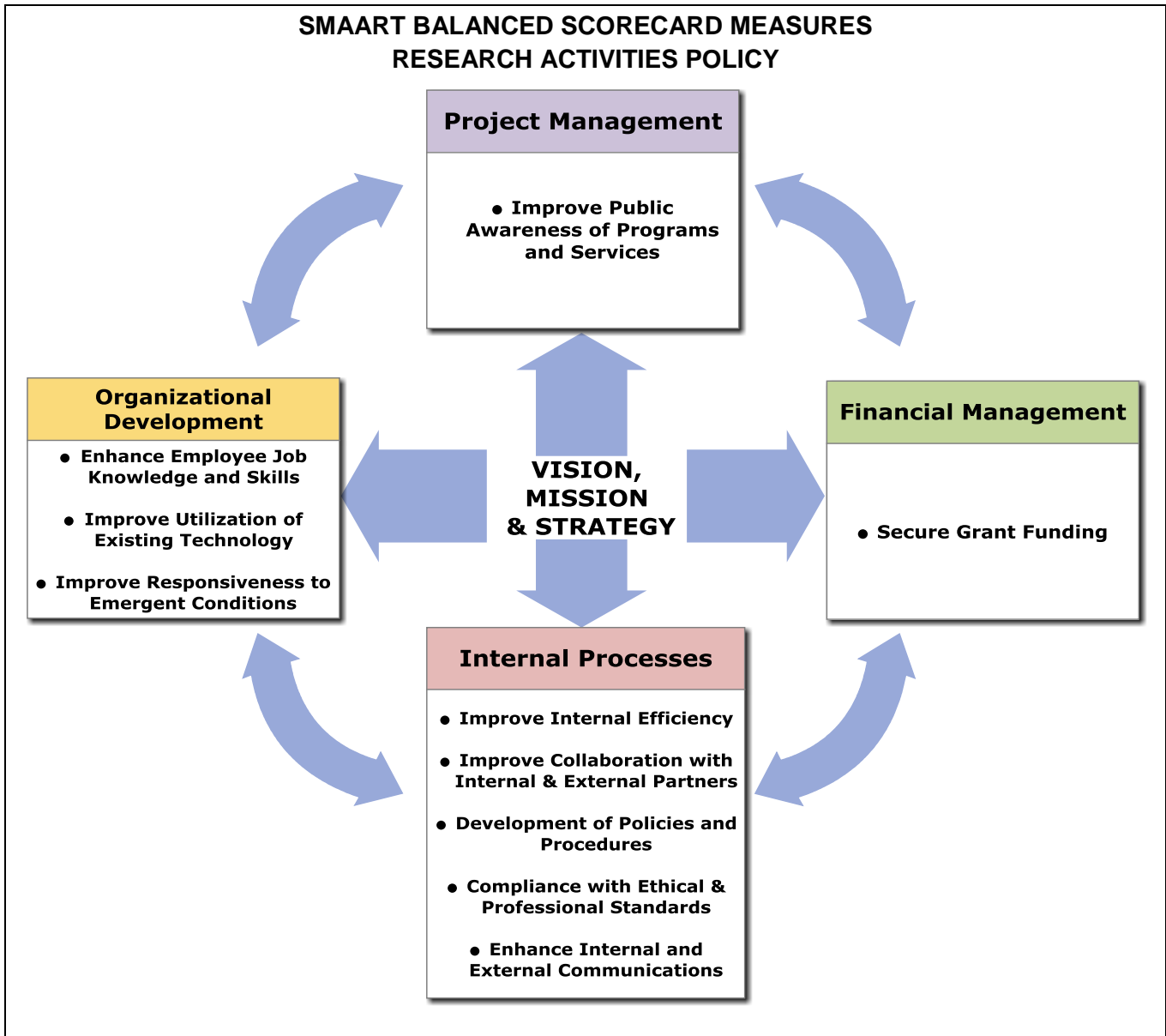
Once the application is completed, the division director reviews the application and meets with the researcher to address any outstanding issues presented in the research application. The proposal is then distributed to the Senior Management Team for a review. The Senior Management Team of the Circuit is comprised of the six division directors and the Executive Director of the Judicial Circuit. Each member of the team conducts a full review of the proposal which includes a detailed reading of the research proposal, with input solicited as necessary from judges, assistant directors, staff, and other county departments whose operations would directly be affected by the proposed research. Each proposal is reviewed for consideration of the research activities' impact on Court operations, policies and programs. The Senior Management Team discusses the merits of the proposal and makes a decision to: a) reject the proposal at this time; b) return to the principal researcher for revision; or c) forward to the chief judge for final approval. The approval process takes into consideration the court's resources to support the research project, the impact on court operations, and potential benefits to the court organization in supporting the research project. The process also safeguards against invasive techniques and ensures court users or staff participation is voluntary. The research proposal must include a clear and comprehensive outline of the objectives, methods of research & analysis, and expected benefits of the research activity.

If approved by the Senior Management Team, the research proposal is forwarded to the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Lake County for final approval. The decision regarding the research proposal is then returned to the Researcher and, if approved, the process of conducting the research is coordinated with an appointed representative of the division where the research will be conducted. Close cooperation is encouraged between Court staff and research personnel, by assisting in the research design, establishing research priorities, data collection, assessment, and evaluation.

Once research activities are concluded, the Principal Researcher provides the Division Director and Senior Management Team with a copy of or access to the original research data collected within or about the Circuit Court and a final research report. The Senior Management Team prepares a research summary and distributes the findings to the Chief Judge. Any materials (written, presented, or otherwise) produced by the Principle Researcher or the research team based on the data collected as part of the research project are submitted to the Senior Management Team for review and comment prior to submission for publication.

BALANCED SCORECARD OUTCOMES

The Research Activities Policy was developed as a performance improvement project under the SMAART Performance Management Process of the Circuit Court of Lake County. The objective of the SMAART Performance Management Process is to improve the Court organization's capacity to monitor, manage, and enhance its services, programs and support activities. The Court organization has selected a number of outcome measures arranged in a Balanced Scorecard format which represent organizational effectiveness. The following scorecard measures were selected by the Research Activities Policy Team during the development and implementation of the program:



The development and the implementation of the *Research Activity Policy* have resulted in multiple benefits to the court organization. The policy has provided the basis for effective collaboration with multiple external community partners. During the development process, collaborative relationships were developed or enhanced with the following organizations:

- Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC),
- American Probation and Parole Association (APPA),
- Iowa Department of Corrections,
- National Center for State Courts (NCSC),
- National Institute of Corrections (NIC),
- Maricopa County (AZ) Adult Probation Department,
- Pennsylvania Department of Corrections,
- Pennsylvania State University, and
- Rhode Island Department of Corrections.

The *Research Activity Policy* has provided court staff an opportunity to establish positive collaborative relationships with students, academic institutions and/or external organizations in examining and developing effective criminal justice initiatives and programming within the Circuit. The research process allows for better integration of evidence-based practices, improved communication, and data information sharing. The research policy has promoted increased professional understanding among court staff and academics, and provided an opportunity to enhance the delivery of offender services within the criminal justice system by identifying scientifically validated outcomes. It provides enhanced employee job knowledge and skills, improved efficiency of programs and services and increased organizational commitment to program development. In addition, the policy allows for improved access to services and programs and improved public awareness of programs and services as a result of the publications of completed research projects on the Court's website. Since implementation of the *Research Activity Policy*, a number of research projects have been submitted electronically through the Court's website, and have subsequently been reviewed by the Senior Management Team and approved by the Chief Judge. Among these external projects are:

- *Analysis of Personality Variables of Sex Offenders: Contact versus Non-Contact Offenders*. Doctoral Dissertation. Argosy University; Schaumburg, IL
- *Evaluation of a Cognitive Intervention for High Risk Probationers*. Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science; North Chicago, IL.
- *Evidence-Based Programming Initiative in Illinois*. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority; Chicago, IL
- *Identifying the Common Predictors of Court Appearance and Risk to Public Safety: The Development of a National Pretrial Risk Assessment Model*. Luminosity, Inc; St. Petersburg, FL
- *Illinois Mental Health Courts Study*. Loyola University; Chicago, IL
- *Juvenile Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Statewide Assessment – Analysis of TRACKER Case Management System Data*. Illinois Criminal Justice and Information Authority; Chicago, IL
- *Outcome of Mandated Domestic Violence Treatment for Male Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence in Lake County, Illinois*. Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science; North Chicago, IL.

- *The Impact of Social Media on Adult Probation Services*. Staff Fellowship Project. Institute for Court Management (ICM) – National Center for State Courts; Williamsburg, VA

Technology has played a pivotal role in the development and implementation of the *Research Activity Policy*. Once the Research Policy was finalized, and the independent research application and approval process was completed, the information was uploaded to the Circuit Court website for access, review, and use by independent researchers. The Request to Conduct Research application and accompanying forms are available through the Court's website in a reader-enabled PDF fillable format. This format allows independent researchers to type and/or copy and paste information directly into the form and submit the application electronically to the division director where the research will be conducted. These resources can be accessed via the Court's public website:

- Research Activities Policy:
http://www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Guides/AO10-40Addendum-ResearchActivitiesPolicy_121310.pdf
- Request to Conduct Research in the Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois:
http://www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Smaart/RequestToConductResearch-A_081611RE.pdf

CONCLUSIONS

The *Research Activity Policy* was developed to provide a comprehensive and standardized guide for students, academic institutions and external organizations conducting research on programs and operations under the jurisdiction of the Circuit Court of Lake County. This policy provides a template for other court organizations interested in supporting the efforts of independent researchers. In general, this policy affirms the court's belief that controlled experiments, evaluations, and policy research are consistent with the needs and planning efforts of the court organization and should be conducted by qualified researchers. It provides consistency in the process and is results driven. This policy encourages enhanced communication among internal and external partners and justice stakeholders. It integrates evidence-based practices through the independent evaluation of programs and services provided by the court organization. This program also improves data and information sharing, clarifies the issues of data ownership, and promotes professional growth. The results of independent research assist with enhanced delivery of services within the justice system and allow for improved public awareness and access to the justice system.