CENTER for RESEARCH and COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Partner Showcase: Colorado Problem Solving Courts Certification Process

The State of Colorado has 61 problem-solving courts across 19 judicial districts, including adult drug, DUI, veterans treatment courts, mental health/co-occurring, juvenile treatment courts, and family treatment courts. These courts employ over 700 problem-solving court professionals, including 5 statewide problem-solving court coordinators. In April 2008, the Colorado Supreme Court established and charged the Statewide Problem-Solving Court Advisory Committee with developing effective procedures and strategies for implementing evidence-based practices in Colorado Problem-Solving Courts. This Committee includes 5 subcommittees, representatives from multiple disciplines, and makes the final determination on Accreditation Status.

The Center for Research and Collaborative Partnerships has collaborated with the Problem-Solving Unit of the Colorado Judicial Branch since 2022. In 2023, Colorado modified and implemented its accreditation and certification practice.

The Accreditation Program

The Colorado Accreditation Program certifies Problem-Solving Courts that follow "evidence based and research-proven practices" and the Colorado Adult Problem-Solving Court Unified Standards. Its results inform "allocation of resources, areas of needs in training and technical assistance, statistical outcomes in relation to adherence to evidence-based practices, and reports of outcomes and effectiveness to outside agencies, other branches of government, the public, the Correctional Treatment Board, and other funding sources."[1] Colorado encourages all adult problem-solving courts to participate.

Prior Accreditation Process

Under the prior process, courts had to apply for accreditation, and a group of 3 advisory committee members would review materials and make the final accreditation determination.

[1] Colorado Problem Solving Courts Accreditation User Manual.

This tedious process took approximately 16 to 18 months to complete, required staff and advisory member capacity, lacked objectivity, and was even adversarial at times. Because of these issues, the program collected little data for evaluation, had limited ability to determine appropriate training and technical assistance, and left the advisory committee with only 3 outcomes to provide courts: accredited, not accredited, or pending accreditation.

New Accreditation Process

Before implementing changes to the accreditation process, the team presented proposed revisions to the Statewide Advisory and Coordinators throughout the state. Full implementation began in January 2024 with 10 programs volunteering to be the first cohort in the new process. These programs provided positive and constructive feedback. Reaccreditation is required every three years after the initial accreditation, but coordinators are only required to submit program documents, share when those were last updated, and mention any changes made to the program since its last reaccreditation

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"Our updated accreditation process is about more than meeting standards; it's about helping programs continually grow, strengthen their practices, and improve the services they provide. By establishing clear expectations and a structured process for improvement, accreditation helps programs identify their strengths, recognize opportunities for growth, and connect those needs to targeted training and technical assistance. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the individuals and families served by Colorado's Problem-Solving Courts have access to programs that are continually learning, adapting, and working to provide effective, evidence-based support. Accreditation gives us a framework not only to assess where programs are today, but also to help them continue moving forward."

-Desiree Hermocillo, Statewide Problem-Solving Court Unit Manager

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In 2023, the Colorado Judicial Branch made six changes to the accreditation process:

1. **Enhanced program capacity and reach –** The Problem-Solving Unit sought to enhance program capacity and reach through two updates: (1) the effective utilization of a Statewide Advisory Committee, and (2) creating a full-time Accreditation Analyst position.

The Statewide Advisory Committee, which maintains final authority on all decisions, increased capacity for statewide impact with a more comprehensive statewide outlook.

A full-time Accreditation Analyst position, dedicated to accreditation, was created and developed to bring an unbiased approach to the applications. The analyst provides

application training and technical assistance to programs, reviews all accreditation applications, determines application tier level, and presents recommendations to the Statewide Advisory Committee. The Accreditation Analyst serves as a point of contact for each court that applies for accreditation.

2. **Revised the application process to be electronic -** Paper copies have been replaced with electronic forms, and program documents (e.g., policy manuals, participant handbooks, brochures, and sample staffing reports) are stored in a shared folder. Coordinators can upload court documents when convenient, while analysts review applications as submitted. The Advisory Committee also released an updated Accreditation User Manual guiding Court Coordinators and Judicial Officers through the process.

3. **Revised the process so that courts "opt out" of the accreditation process rather than select in -** Programs that do not want to participate in the accreditation program must complete opt-out forms. Judicial district leadership, the judicial district Chief Judge, and the judicial officer presiding over the problem-solving court must approve the opt-out forms. Allowing programs to opt out creates an opportunity to have conversations and understand what barriers are present; however, to date, no programs have chosen this option.

4. **Developed an objective accreditation rubric for each key component -** An accreditation rubric was developed laying out clear expectations for Coordinators and Problem-Solving Court Programs. The rubric scores programs based on their adherence to key components and best-practice standards in their operations, with accreditation analysts rating programs as "exceeds," "meets," or "does not meet." The scored rubric is accessible to multiple individuals to ensure transparency and expectations.

5. **Created a system of accreditation levels -** The establishment of accreditation levels introduced tiers based on level of adherence to best practice standards: platinum, gold, silver, bronze, and provisional accreditation. The tier levels, based on prior applications, recognize high-performing courts and help lower-tier courts access resources to improve their programs. Unlike an all-or-nothing system, tiers highlight strengths and areas for improvement, and courts can advance between reaccreditations.

Courts have the opportunity to receive accreditation enhancers from having a peer review within the year prior to their application, having a formal review within the last three years prior to application, being recognized by National Problem-Solving Court agencies, participating as a Peer Mentor Court, participating in the Equity Mentor Court Program, and/or participating in advanced trainings.

Accreditation Tiers/Ratings

	Points	Description	Potential training/CQI
	Max 380 Min 321	Courts in the Platinum Category are implementing all Fundamental Practices as well as all best/recommended practices in the Colorado Unified Standards within their programs. Platinum courts have also participated in the Equity Mentor Court Program and are adhering to DEI Standards. These courts are high functioning and are typically asked to mentor other courts in early implementation stages. Team members of these courts are also asked to be mentors in their role and be peer reviewers for other programs.	*Opportunities for specialized training tailored to meet specific program needs, by contracted subject matter experts and/or SCAO PSC analysts, as appropriate and accessible. *Possible team member invitations to participate in the state peer professional mentorship program and PSC state level committees. *Opportunity to work with SCAO on further specialized program enhancement projects. *Priority registration for advanced training opportunities. *Team summit tailored to team needs. *DEIA implementation workshop. *Program materials review.
	Max 320 Min 261	Courts in the Gold Category are implementing all Fundamental Practices in the Colorado Unified Standards as well as some best/recommended practices within their programs. Gold Category courts are also sought out to be part of the Equity Mentor Court Program. Team members of these courts may also participate as a mentor within their role and be peer reviewers for other programs.	*Potential for national training opportunity scholarships, if available. *Opportunity to work with SCAO on further specialized program enhancement projects. *Possible team member invitations to participate in the state peer professional mentorship program and PSC state level committees. *Priority registration for advanced training opportunities. *Team summit tailored to team needs. *DEIA implementation workshop. *Program materials review.
	Max 260 Min 200	Courts in the Silver Category are implementing most of the Fundamental Practices, however, because of various reasons, also need to submit waivers for some Fundamental Practices in the Colorado Unified Standards. These courts may need assistance in strategic planning , training, resource development and technical assistance to increase their level of adherence to all fundamental standards.	*Best Practice Standards Trainings, as needed to promote fidelity to a specific standard(s). *DEIA Standards Training. *Facilitated strategic planning. *Team training program development and implementation. *Peer Review. *National mentor court observation. *Team Cohesion training workshop series. *Team Communication training workshop series.
	Max 199 Min 120	Courts in the Bronze Category are courts that are either in early stages of implementation and are not yet implementing an acceptable level of Fundamental Standards or courts that are struggling with adherence to best practice standards. Bronze level courts will be provided technical assistance and training as well as participate in the Peer Review Process to develop a strategic plan to enhance implementation of the Colorado Unified Standards.	*Best Practice Standards Training. *DEIA Standards Training. *Facilitated Strategic Planning *Team training program development and implementation. *Peer Review. *National mentor court observation. *Team Cohesion training workshop series. *Team Communication training workshop series.

Figure 1

6. Provide comprehensive training and technical assistance

A major improvement to the new system is enhanced training and technical assistance for courts. Personalized, intentional assistance plans are tailored to each court's accreditation tier. Figure 1 lists tier-based opportunities, except for Provisionally Accredited courts. Provisionally Accredited courts may receive team training program development and implementation; cohesion and communication workshops; program consultation and policy review; best-practice standards and DEIA training; facilitated strategic planning; and state mentor court observation.

Assistance also includes on-demand learning modules, tracking engagement and access data, training badges, in-person team summits, and statewide training events and conferences.

Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

The Colorado Accreditation Program has recently implemented Statewide Juvenile Treatment Court Standards, and accreditation will be available for those programs beginning early 2027. The Program plans to introduce team member (2027) and participant

surveys (2028). While overhauling their accreditation process, the Advisory Committee learned some takeaways. The accreditation process does not have to be punitive or advisory, the committee must be open to continuous adaptation and must determine what programs get out of the accreditation process, and perhaps most importantly, there must be buy-in! By April of 2027, the state will have 100% participation in accreditation by all 61 active programs! Desiree Hermosillo, Statewide Problem-Solving Court Unit Manager, says the revised accreditation process "has helped in how we work as a team and serve professionals across the state, and it will eventually trickle down to the participants."

If you have questions about Colorado Problem Solving Courts' Accreditation process, please contact:

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