

Program Guide to Starting an Alumni Group



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Introduction

There is no better way to show continuing support for your treatment court participants than the creation of a treatment court alumni group. An active alumni group allows your participants to “start with the end in mind” by interacting with people who have successfully completed the program and “walked in their shoes.” **Your treatment court team can also benefit from a robust alumni group by listening to their ideas and hearing the valuable insight they can provide.**

This guide is for treatment court team members and/or motivated program alumni who are interested in starting an alumni group. Although the immediate inclination is to rush right into the first meeting, consider reading this all the way through before beginning any of the specific steps.

Like building a house, there are several steps to planning, building, and furnishing a fully functioning alumni program. Tents are good if you plan to move around a lot, but if you plan to build something to live in for a while, you want something that has a good foundation, is structurally sound and is functional for the long haul. This guide will help the reader think through the process of starting an alumni group using the metaphor of the stages of building a house:

1. Plans and permits – the basics for beginning the process
2. Construction – a good foundation and solid framing
3. Finishing & Furnishing – tidying up and making the place livable
4. Occupation – moving in and enjoying it



Eddy Magistrate DWI Drug Court celebrates five years of alumni support

*“I ENJOY
HELPING
PEOPLE ON
THEIR PATH
WHILE I’M
REMINDING TO
STAY ON MINE.”
GEORGE ARMIJO, EDDY
COUNTY*

Stage 1: Plans & Permits, getting permission

The *New Mexico Treatment Court Standards* provide a basic outline for getting started and are like the planning and zoning requirements for a building site.

To establish a firm foundation, the standards require a couple of basic things that should be considered at this very early stage:

1. The alumni group must have a liaison with the formal multidisciplinary team. The program coordinator might be a great place to start.
2. The second foundational piece is that the treatment court judge must approve the group, so make sure the judge knows about your interest in supporting the alumni group and discuss how you will go about following the stages in this guide to create the plan. The judge may benefit from updates on the progress, and this can be communicated through the liaison mentioned in number one above. Once the judge has given approval, you can move on to additional planning.

Eventually, the alumni group must have a set of policies and procedures to guide the way it operates. Appendix J in the *New Mexico Treatment Court Standards* gives you a place to start by providing basic expectations (J-1 through J-3) and required organizational elements to be addressed (J-4). As you build your team, you can create specific policies and procedures; just make sure you include the expectations found in Appendix J. (TJSP also provides a sample)

Keep in mind that the Therapeutic Justice Support Program team is always interested in assisting you, and there is a statewide program manager who focuses on alumni support.

Stage 2: Construction, building from the ground up

Step #1: Make a List

As you consider the members of the proposed alumni group, start with the graduates you have been in contact with as part of post-graduation outreach. This is the place to start asking for interest. The team member should develop a list of potential members.

Step #2: Connect

Reach out to the person or people on your list and ask them if they would be willing to meet with you to discuss the possibility of starting an alumni group.

As you have these conversations, it is very important to explain that the alumni group will be semi-autonomous (existing with court approval and under basic guidelines, with peer leadership using recovery-centered principles) and will develop based on the group consensus in collaboration with the program. This will be a partnership that creates empowerment and development of recovery tools and capital.

PRO-TIP: Even if you do not have a lot of people who are interested right away, don't give up. There may be virtual meeting options to support you as you get started. Contact Carlos Gonzales at aoccfq@nmcourts.gov for ways to get things moving with small groups.

Step #3: Gather Alumni Graduates to Organize

Once you have created interest in the concept, get together with those who are considering being involved.

A sample agenda for the organizational meeting is attached at the end of this document for reference.

This is an opportunity to honor your alumni by inviting them to court. The judge can announce their presence at the beginning of court and ask them to tell the participants when they graduated and what recovery looks like for them.

The focus is on sobriety, recovery and support. It is best to incorporate alumni interaction throughout your program, while encouraging positive environments.

Step #4: Gather Alumni Graduates to Strategize

Developing your alumni team and getting them on the same page is essential. Being able to put their lived experience into action sustainably and responsibly requires a bit of background preparation.

The next step is simply to strategize how to implement the ideas of the alumni and program. Organize the ideas into strategic goals, which will be realistic and attainable based on the availability and commitment of the alumni members.

There is not really a “boss” or person in charge of the alumni group other than the liaison, who will bring activities and event suggestions to the judge and multidisciplinary team for approval. Eventually, the group may designate an alumni coordinator to represent the group and help coordinate meetings and support opportunities.

Equality is synonymous with empowerment in this instance, and most people will respond more effectively if they feel that all members are equal at the onset. It may be necessary for the members to elect someone as a representative to the court for the purpose of communication. This should happen through a discussion of the members and the suggestion of the liaison.

The designation of the representative or alumni coordinator will follow the requirements established in the NM Standards J-4.d. The liaison will discuss the roles and responsibilities of this designation with the individual and develop a plan for the completion of the following tasks:

Qualifications for formal alumni/peer group leadership, i.e., alumni coordinator(s)

- Length of time in treatment court or another program
- Progress toward recovery goals
 - Sobriety duration (minimum of 1 year)
 - Self-selection: interest, investment
 - Rationale for team selection/approval of the alumni program leader
 - Ability or capacity to articulate where they are on their journey, their goals, what changes they have made, and what they have achieved
 - Ability to articulate how they can be of service to others
- Experience volunteering
- Application and selection process
- The ability for the candidate to articulate interest and skills vi. Support/protection of the alumni/peer leader candidate
- Required training to include, at a minimum:
 - Program Policies and Procedures
 - Ethics
 - Cultural Competency
 - Peer engagement
 - SAMHSA’s Core Competencies of Peer Support-post meeting discussion/overview with Carlos
 - Confidentiality

All of this conversation will help in the development of policies and procedures for the alumni group. These can and should be updated as often as necessary, but certainly annually.

Remember, make this your own creation and give it some character.

Sample agendas for the strategy meetings are attached at the end of this document for reference.

Stage 3: Finishing & Furnishing, making it livable

Step #1: Organize the decisions you've made based on your preparation and planning meetings and include these decisions in your procedures

Remember: You are always welcome to contact the Therapeutic Justice Support Program for any assistance you need, including an outline to help you create your policies and procedures.

PRO-TIP: Make sure the policies and procedures include the information expected in Appendix J of the *New Mexico Treatment Court Standards*.

Step #2: Ask the judge to review your policies, procedures, and plans

Don't be surprised if the judge wants to take a little time to read through everything and ask a few questions. Sometimes the judge may even invite you to meet with the multidisciplinary team to share what you have put together.

Step #3: Schedule a kick-off meeting

Now that your workgroup has completed all the planning and strategizing, it is time to bring it all together. This meeting will be a special event to recognize the work you have already done, and most importantly, the support you will be providing through your alumni group in the future.

A sample agenda for the kick-off meeting is included at the end of this guide.

Stage 4: Occupation, moving in, and enjoying it

Step #1: Enjoy the supportive space of the alumni group.

You've done some pretty amazing work by this point, so stop and enjoy it for a minute! Announce it in court to the participants and have your alumni member(s) present for recognition.



Step #2: Continue to make it your own

After the alumni and program have discussed what the opening dynamic of the group will be, it is time to set it in motion. Do not worry if everything does not seem perfect, because the point is really to start, just start something.

- During the first 6 months of implementation, continue to review and revise policies and procedures as necessary. (*This is a good time to decide if the group needs an alumni coordinator for communication purposes with the liaison and team.*)
- Start slow with the meetings and be open to adjustment for the first few months.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the interactions from the alumni-specific meeting and meetings with participants.
 - Ask both groups what their thoughts are and what suggestions they may have.
 - Reevaluate as often as necessary to determine if adjustments should be made to enhance the engagements.
- Increase frequency of meetings with alumni and program to foster a solid sense of collaboration and understanding of needs and successes.
- To ensure there is adequate feedback to assess the success or changes needed with the alumni group, it is recommended that the team and alumni set specific timelines for review (i.e. every 6 months).



PRO-TIP: The Therapeutic Justice Support Program will assist in alumni communication and data collection through a special device application that will automatically store and sort alumni program information *while maintaining the confidentiality of the individual members.*



Carlos Gonzales, AOC Therapeutic Justice Support Program Statewide Program Manager for Alumni Support, speaks at the 2021 Community Coming Together Recovery Day Event in Santa Fe

Final Thoughts

Alumni support is a key component to treatment court participants finding the value in the continuum of care that alumni members can provide. In tandem, it is a circular process that allows for reciprocal support that fosters long-term recovery practices, fellowship, a sense of giving back, and the effect of empowerment to change and show others it is possible.

The support and lived experience of alumni and participants being shared consistently will enhance recovery goals and life skills. Long-term recovery can be challenging at times; peer support is a guide to sustainability. Those alumni who have successfully graduated and are willing to share their time, experience, strength, and hope about recovery will give cadence to dignity, value, and humanity.

Resources in the Guide

- ✓ Checklist and Overview
- ✓ Alumni Selection Criteria
- ✓ Principles of Peer Core Competencies-SAMHSA
- ✓ Sample Policy and Procedure Manual
- ✓ Sample Agenda for Organizational Meeting
- ✓ Sample Agenda for Strategy Meeting(s)
- ✓ Sample Agenda for Kickoff Meeting
- ✓ Sample Agenda & Topics for Ongoing Alumni Meetings

Checklist and Overview

Introduction: There's no better way to show continuing support for your treatment court participants than the creation of a treatment court alumni group. An active alumni group allows your participants to "start with the end in mind" by interacting with people who have successfully completed the program and "walked in their shoes." Your treatment court team can also benefit from a robust alumni group by listening to their ideas and hearing the valuable insight they can provide.

- ❖ Stage 1: Plans & Permits, the basics for beginning the process
- ❖ Stage 2: Construction, building from the ground up, with a good foundation and solid framework
 - Step #1: Make a List of alumni graduates
 - Step #2: Connect
 - Step #3: Gather Alumni Graduates to Organize-Agenda
 - Step #4: Gather Alumni Graduates to Strategize-Agenda (Principles of Peer Core Competencies-SAMHSA)
- ❖ Stage 3: Finishing & Furnishing, finalizing the details, and making it sustainable
 - Step #1: Organize the decisions you've made based on your preparation and planning meetings, and include these decisions in your policies and procedures
 - Step #2: Ask the judge to review your policies, procedures, and plans
 - Step #3: Schedule a kick-off meeting-Agenda
- ❖ Stage 4: Occupation-interaction and engagement
 - Location, location, location-safe and controlled environment, court or treatment facility
 - Step #1: Enjoy the familial space of a supportive alumni group.
 - Step #2: Continue to make it your own

Alumni Selection Criteria

Alumni groups shall be established with judicial approval and operate according to policies and procedures established by the treatment court policy committee. Alumni groups are recovery and/or program support meetings facilitated under the guidance of the treatment court program coordinator or another team member, an alumni coordinator, or an approved Certified Peer Support Worker. Attendees may include current or former treatment court participants.

Alumni are treatment court program graduates who attend treatment court events to assist and support program participants and other alumni. Alumni coordinators are associated team members who meet the appropriate conditions as noted below:

Length of time in treatment court or another program

Progress toward recovery goals

Sobriety duration (minimum of 1 year) Self-selection: interest, investment

Ability or capacity to articulate where they are on their journey, their goals, what changes they have made, and what they have achieved

Ability to articulate how they can be of service to others. Experience volunteering

At least one treatment court team member must be designated to oversee the alumni program and must receive approved training in the supervision of peer workers in addition to the minimum training required of alumni coordinators. Cultural competency, peer engagement, and de-escalation strategies.

Principles of Peer Core Competencies-SAMHSA¹

Core competencies for peer workers reflect certain foundational principles identified by members of the mental health consumer and substance use disorder recovery communities. These are:

- **Recovery-oriented:** Peer workers hold out hope to those they serve, partnering with them to envision and achieve a meaningful and purposeful life. Peer workers help those they serve to identify and build on strengths and empower them to choose for themselves, recognizing that there are multiple pathways to recovery.
- **Person-centered:** Peer recovery support services are always directed by the person participating in services. Peer recovery support is personalized to align with the specific hopes, goals, and preferences of the people served and to respond to specific needs the people have identified to the peer worker.
- **Voluntary:** Peer workers are partners or consultants to those they serve. They do not dictate the types of services provided or the elements of recovery plans that will guide their work with peers. Participation in peer recovery support services is always contingent on peer choice.
- **Relationship-focused:** The relationship between the peer worker and the peer is the foundation on which peer recovery support services and support are provided. The relationship between the peer worker and peer is respectful, trusting, empathetic, collaborative, and mutual.
- **Trauma-informed:** Peer recovery support utilizes a strength-based framework that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

The applicability of SAMHSA Core Competencies is a clear picture of the guideline to engagement with participants and each other. The key goal should be the value and effectiveness of being of service to a fellow in recovery.

¹ SAMHSA. (2020, April 16). Retrieved from www.samhsa.gov: <https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers/core-competencies-peer-workers>

Treatment Court Alumni Group Policies and Procedures Sample

How to Use this Document:

This document should function as the direction for an alumni group and treatment court team to create and sustain an alumni group serving participants and alumni alike. This model policy and procedure manual is designed to serve as a guide that helps to incorporate the drug court best practice standards and the NM Treatment Court Standards.

This guide is designed to help you navigate the process of creating the policy and procedure manual for your program, so make it your own and add to it if needed.

Remember to review your policy & procedures with your team annually to ensure they are accurate and current

Program History

A brief statement on the history of the treatment court program and what issues it was created to meet. Length of time in service and number of participants served may be useful.

Mission Statement

A brief statement developed by the alumni/team that reflects the purpose of the alumni group.

Goals and Objectives (optional)

Goals are general statements about what you need to accomplish to meet your purpose or mission.

Policy and Procedures Must Address, at a Minimum:

- The application and selection process should follow the NM Standards-pg. 71, J-4.d
- The ability of the alumni coordinator candidate to articulate interests and skills
- Support/protection of the alumni/peer leader candidate
- Required training to include, at minimum, a thorough explanation of the program policies and procedures respective to alumni/peer services, ethics, peer engagement, SAMHSA's Core Competencies of Peer Support, and confidentiality.
 - CONFIDENTIALITY (42 CFR PART 2) Describe your treatment court's confidentiality protocols and expectations. Include the process followed should a breach of confidentiality take place. (Document to sign)

- Include retention of treatment court program records.
- Scope of alumni activities
 - Roles and responsibilities at graduations and other court-sponsored events such as support and recovery groups, including reporting attendance.
 - Whether attendance at staffing or status hearings is allowed and under what conditions.
 - Types of functions and responsibilities the alumni/peer volunteer(s) will assume (for example, clarify the position is not surveillance and not treatment, and what the position will accomplish).
- Qualifications for formal alumni/peer group leadership, i.e., alumni coordinator(s)Length of time in treatment court or another program
 - Progress toward recovery goals
 - Sobriety duration (minimum of 1 year)
 - Self-selection: interest, investment
 - The rationale for team selection/approval of the alumni program leader
 - Ability or capacity to articulate where they are on their journey, their goals, what changes they have made and what they have achieved
 - Ability to articulate how they can be of service to others
 - Experience volunteering

Community Resources and Ancillary Services

Include the community resources/ancillary services available in your area to where partnerships are formed and reinforce recovery for alumni and participants.

Appendix

This section is for all forms and court documents used for the program. Also include signed MOUs with community partners.

Be sure to update all forms, policies, and procedures to reflect any changes to your program

MOUs must be reviewed and signed every year

Sample Agenda for Organizational Meeting

[30 minutes before treatment court docket]

Have Food and refreshments!

Greeting: Judge and/or Coordinator

- Gratitude for time and willingness to share their recovery with others and each other

Introductions: Team (available members) & Graduates

- Team: role, position, thoughts about an alumni group
- Graduates: name, date of graduation, the most positive outcome so far of recovery, motivation to be a part of the alumni group.
- Alumni Story

Topics:

- Alumni involvement during the graduates' time in the program
 - o Was it helpful and why?
 - o If not, what would have been helpful?
- How could an alumni group help current participants?
- Would you be willing to
 - o Consider being involved in future meetings?
 - o Commit to being involved in the preparation and planning process?

Comments from TJSP Visitors

- Satewide Program Manager, TJSP/AOC

Comments from attendees who desire to speak

Announcements

Next Meeting: *Strategy*

Sample Agenda for Strategy Meetings (This make take several meetings)

[30-60 minutes before court or when agreed upon]

Have Food and refreshments!

Greeting: Judge(optional) and/or Coordinator

- Gratitude for time and willingness to share their recovery with others and each other.

Discussion:

- Experience
 - o What are the best parts of peer support groups you've attended?
 - o What are some of the difficulties/struggles of peer support groups in your experience?
- Education
 - o The basics of a peer support network, agreed-upon goals – SAMHSA's Core Competencies for Peer Support
- Homework
 - o Is there anything that needs to be researched, thought about, or prepared for the next meeting(s)?

Suggested topics of conversation for strategic planning:

- Support: How does the group define it?
- Guidance-Life in the program and afterward, based on lived experience.
 - o Understanding the participant handbook
 - o Share how successful graduates have learned ways to successfully work through triggers, cravings, and stressful situations.
- What are 3 things we can do as alumni to start a consistent presence and support?
 - o Attend court periodically and speak to participants
 - o Attend and help plan graduations
 - o Plan and execute an event (i.e. BBQ, court in the park, afternoon fellowship party, meet and greet after court, etc.)
 - o Events/Engagements-Substance-free recreation and socialization.

- o Learn ways to stay clean and sober and have fun.
- How can activities be funded to start with?
 - o Ideas for funding if necessary and possible Ideas for funding if necessary and possible
 - o Donations from the community, fundraisers, court?
- Access to local resources and employment opportunities.
- How will the group support their own long-term recovery?
- How often should the alumni meet?
- How often should the alumni meet with the participants?
 - o Will it be mandatory?
 - o What day and time?
 - o What will work with your program dynamics?
- Develop a list of subject matter for group interactions, keeping in mind the alumni group is not facilitated by a licensed behavioral health provider.
 - o These subjects can respect the successes and challenges encountered during and after the program. Examples: Coping skills, life on life's terms, amends for relationship restoration, proximal and distal goals, education, and local resources.
 - o A key subject for both alumni-specific and participant groups is methods of self-care.
- Overview of the policies and procedures
- Will we have any "ground rules"?
 - o Tardiness
 - o Participation
 - o Cross talk
 - o No glamourizing the past behaviors
- What are the proposed names for the group? If possible, narrow it to 2 and decide at the next meeting.
- What other ideas?
- Kickoff / Start date
- Action Items and who is responsible Next meeting

Sample Agenda for Kickoff Meeting

Have Food and refreshments!

Welcome and Introduction of the Judge: [Team Liaison] Greeting and

Opening Comments: Hon. _____ [Program Judge] Comments

from the Alumni Coordinator:

Comments from the Team Liaison: [maybe Program Coordinator]

Comments from Other Members of the Multidisciplinary Team [Support and Acknowledgement of Need / Value]

- Alternate Judge
- ADA
- Defense Counsel
- Law Enforcement
- Probation / Surveillance Officer

Comments from Visiting Alumni [May be from other jurisdictions, groups, etc.]

Comments from TJSP Visitors

- Satewide Program Manager, TJSP/AOC

Comments from attendees who desire to speak

Announcements

Next meeting

Contact Info Refreshments

Sample Agenda & Topics for Ongoing Alumni Meetings

Have Food and refreshments!

Greeting: Judge (optional), Alumni Lead or Coordinator, Program Coordinator

- Gratitude for time and willingness to share their recovery with others and each other

Introductions: Graduates

- Graduates: name, date of graduation, the most positive outcome so far of recovery, motivation to be a part of the alumni group.

Topic: (Insert here)

Samples: These can be split up very easily or combined depending on your group's dynamic. Always be prepared to allow the subject to be organic as long as it is recovery-oriented.

Alumni Only Topics:

- Support and Fellowship:
 - o Open sharing by topic or organic
 - o Shared facilitation
 - o What works what doesn't
 - o Resources in the community
 - o Post-graduation challenges
- Live by Example: Role Model
 - o The importance of positive role modeling.
 - o A positive role model serves as an example.
 - o A positive role model encourages others to live positive lives.
 - o Did you have a hero?
 - o Someone you looked up to?
 - o How was that influential in your life and now in recovery?
 - o How can you share your recovery to empower others?
- Giving Back:
 - o Using your knowledge and experiences to encourage others to refrain from substance use and misuse.
 - o Effectively sharing your story of recovery to enlighten others.
 - o Giving back to your community will build a sense of self-worth and gratification.
 - o Sharing your story:

- What is the most important thing you can think of to tell them?"
- What stories would you share with them?
- What advice do you have to give in order to encourage them to refrain from alcohol and drugs?

Alumni and Participants Topics:

- Support System

- o A support system may include family members, friends, co-workers, and members of local support groups.
- o Someone to share your thoughts, dreams, hopes, gains, and losses.
- o A person or group of people who will support your mental and emotional needs through life. What does this look like?
- o Discuss ways to build your support system for you. This is personal ideation.
- o Questions:
 - Who is a member of your support system?
 - How do the people of your support system support you?
 - What else could they do to support you?
 - How do your peers and Alumni support you?
 - Are you willing to be a support system for someone?
If so, how would you provide support to others?

- Hope

- o Definition:
 - A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.
- o Sobriety and recovery from substance addiction do not just start with
abstinence: it starts with hope.
- o Belief and expectation are the key elements of hope; Hope has the ability to help you heal.
- o Recovery comes with challenges, difficulty, frustration, and obstacles.
- o Set goals. You need hope to keep your focus on those goals.
- o Hope will help you build a solid foundation for long-term recovery.

Questions:

- What does the word "hope" mean to you?
- Have you ever hoped you could stop using substances for good?
- What did that feeling of hope feel like?