

# Recidivism Studies of Georgia's Accountability Courts

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**ARS**   
APPLIED RESEARCH SERVICES, INC.

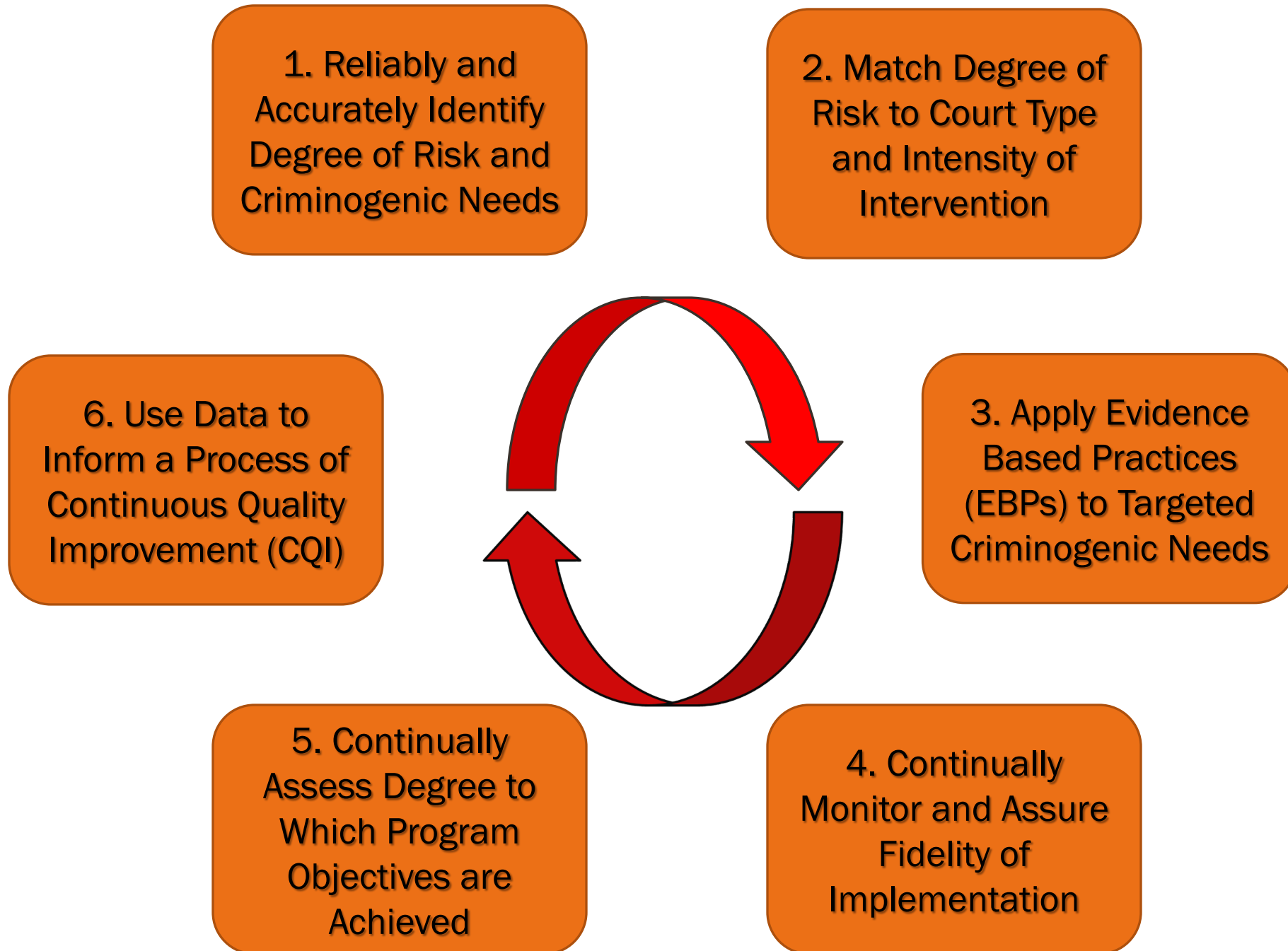
# A Brief History of Accountability Courts

- Accountability Courts, also referred to as Specialty Courts, Treatment Courts, Collaborative Courts, and Problem-Solving Courts, arose out of the realization that conducting “business as usual” with persons exhibiting serious behavioral health disorders was not working
- Rather than persons continually cycling through the criminal justice system due to unmet treatment needs, accountability courts aim to address the underlying criminogenic needs of persons with behavioral health disorders

# Accountability Courts – RNR Theory of Change

Their success is predicated on the following Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR Model) theory of change:

- Reliably and accurately identify nature and degree of criminogenic needs
- Match degree of assessed risk to intensity of intervention
- Apply evidence-based practices to targeted criminogenic needs
- Continually monitor and assure fidelity of implementation to the Ten Key Components and Drug Court Best Practice Standards
- Continually assess degree to which program objectives are achieved
- Use a process of Continuous Quality Improvement





# Accountability Courts: RNR Theory of Change

***IF*** your court adheres to the theory of change, ***THEN*** you can expect your court participants will demonstrate:

- Increased sobriety
- Increased lifestyle stability (employment, residential, and relational stability)
- Improved behavioral health
- Decreased recidivism rates

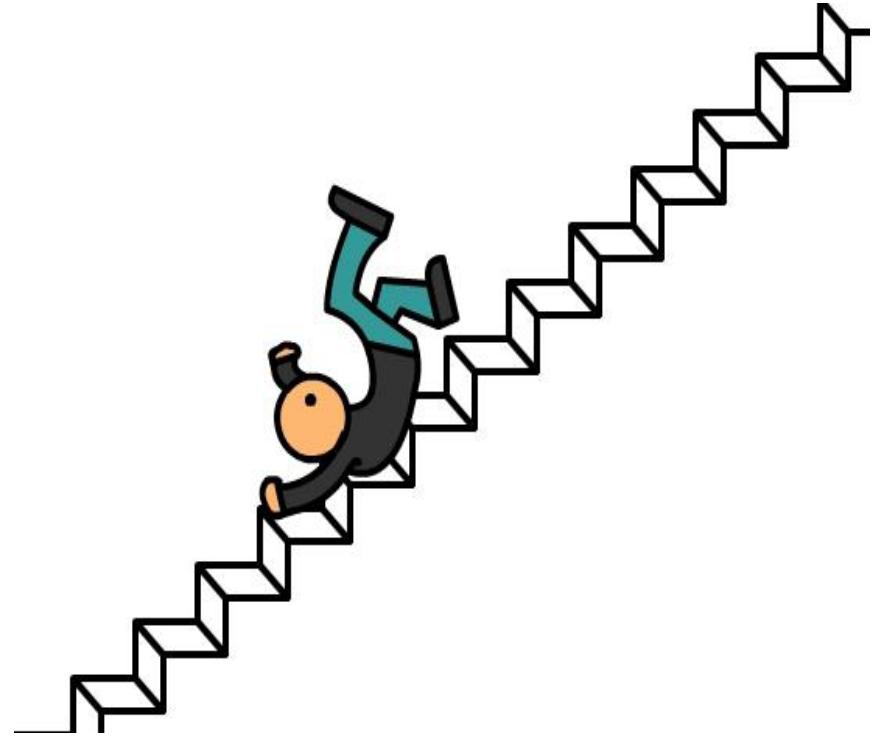


# Accountability Courts: Theory of Change

If your court does not:

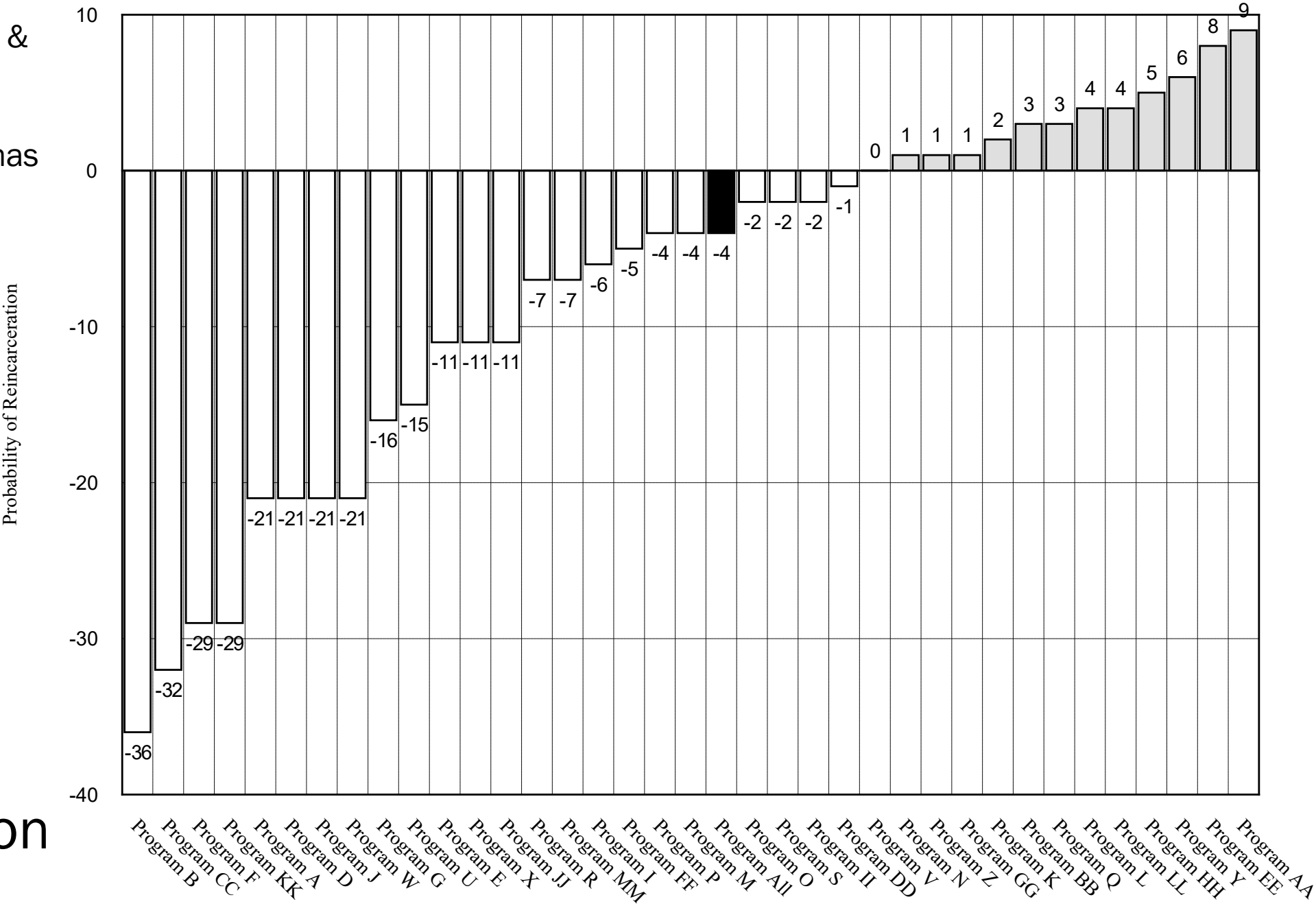
- Adhere to the RNR theory of change, and
- Demonstrate fidelity to:
  - Ten Key Components
  - NADCP Best Practice Standards
  - Best Practice Standards

Not only will your court likely not achieve the above outcomes, the court may actually be making things worse



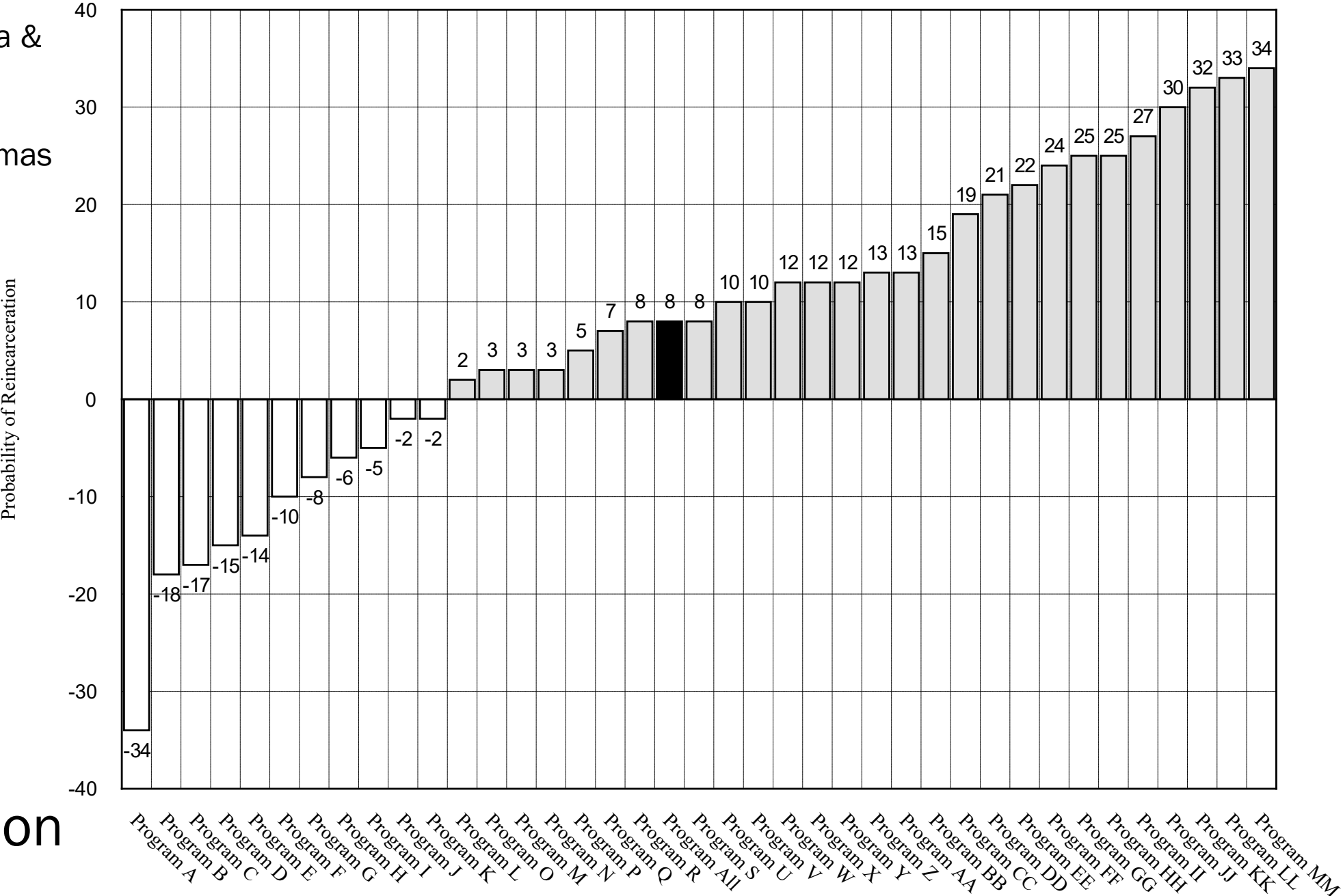
Source: Edward J. Latessa & Christopher Lowenkamp. What Works in Reducing Recidivism?, 3 U. St. Thomas L.J. 521 (2006).

The Risk Principle:  
Low Risk  
Participants  
and  
Probability of  
Reincarceration



Source: Edward J. Latessa & Christopher Lowenkamp. What Works in Reducing Recidivism?, 3 U. St. Thomas L.J. 521 (2006).

The Risk Principle: High Risk Participants and Probability of Reincarceration





# Accountability Courts – a National Perspective on Recidivism



**NDCI**  
NATIONAL DRUG  
COURT INSTITUTE

## Painting the Current Picture

A National Report on  
Drug Courts and Other  
Problem-Solving Courts  
in the United States

**June 2016**

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Douglas B. Marlowe, JD, PhD  
Carolyn D. Hardin, MPA  
Carson L. Fox, JD

# Findings at a Glance: A Summary from *Painting the Current Picture*

“More research has been published on drug courts and other problem-solving courts than virtually all other criminal justice programs combined. Hundreds of studies prove beyond a reasonable doubt that adult drug courts, DUI courts, family drug courts, and mental health courts improve justice system outcomes and can return net financial benefits to taxpayers.”

(Marlowe, et al., 2016, p. 32; see appendix)

# ADC Findings at a Glance: A Summary from *Painting the Current Picture*

Over a quarter century of research studies on Adult Drug Courts (ADCs) have demonstrated:

- Reductions in recidivism by an average of 8% to 14%; the very best ADCs have been shown to reduce recidivism by 35% to 80%
- ADCs produce an average return on investment (ROI) of between \$2 and \$4 for every \$1 spent
- When serving high-risk, high-need individuals, ADCs demonstrate twice the reduction in recidivism and are 50% more cost effective

# DUI Court Findings at a Glance: A Summary from *Painting the Current Picture*

Newer and less of a research base than ADCs:

- On average DUI courts reduce recidivism 12%, with the best DUI courts achieving recidivism reduction in the 50% to 60% range
- Average ROI is \$2 for every \$1 spent
- Some emerging research has identified best practices in DUI courts; similar to the “10 Key Components” but also include restricting access to motor vehicles and twice-daily breath testing or utilization of continuous alcohol intake monitoring devices
- DUI courts appear to be most effective with high-risk, high-need participants

# FDTC Findings at a Glance: A Summary from *Painting the Current Picture*

Also newer and less of a research base than ADCs:

Family Dependency Treatment Courts (FDTCs) have been found to increase the degree to which parents enter and complete substance abuse treatment, to decrease time children spent in out-of-home placements, increase family reunification rates, and to decrease issuance of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) findings

FDTCs reduce costs associated with foster care and community corrections, but increase treatment costs

# MHC Findings at a Glance: A Summary from *Painting the Current Picture*

Also newer and less of a research base than ADCs:

- Mental Health Courts (MHCs) have been found to moderately but significantly reduce recidivism and that these results remain for at least two years post-participation
- Study results to date have been mixed regarding the cost-effectiveness of MHCs, due to the increased cost of treatment; it seems clear that it takes years to recoup the costs associated with participation in an MHC



# Recidivism Studies of GA Accountability Courts

- Applied Research Services, Inc. (ARS) has been retained by the CACJ to conduct four statewide recidivism studies of accountability courts in Georgia
- These studies were conducted in 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2022 (ongoing)
- Each of the studies employed different methodologies
- The studies have benefitted greatly from increased reliance on the Internet-based client case management systems used by the courts

# The 2016 Recidivism Study

- The first study, conducted in 2016, compared accountability court graduates to those who entered but did not successfully complete the court (program starts and program terminations)
- This first study was limited somewhat by data-related issues, and thus the sample sizes were relatively small compared to our subsequent studies
- Nonetheless, the study still found significant benefits associated with court completion as measured by reduced arrests following participation in adult accountability courts

# The 2016 Recidivism Study, cont.

Percent Arrested for Any Offense Within 24 Months...			
	After Program Start	After Program Termination	After Program Graduation
Adult Drug Court	43%	71%	20%
Adult MHC	44%	69%	24%
VTC	32%	54%	12%
DUI Court	27%	62%	17%

Percent Arrested for Any Offense Within 36 Months...			
	After Program Start	After Program Termination	After Program Graduation
Adult Drug Court	46%	74%	27%
Adult MHC	47%	72%	32%
VTC	36%	54%	19%
DUI Court	29%	63%	21%

# The 2017 Recidivism Study

- The second study, conducted in 2017, expanded the 2016 study by utilizing a matched comparison sample of accountability court participants (irrespective of their completion status) and persons who are similar to accountability court participants but who did not enter an accountability court in Georgia
- ARS relied on a method known as Propensity Score Matching (PSM), a sophisticated statistical method that matches subjects (i.e., those entering an accountability court) and a comparable comparison group who did not enter an accountability court but entered an alternative (probation or prison)

# The 2017 Recidivism Study, cont.

- We used a sample of 8,068 individuals who had started participating in Adult Drug Courts, DUI courts, Adult Mental Health Courts, and Veterans Treatment Courts across Georgia between January 2012 and July 2016
- We then applied the PSM method, which after completing hundreds of thousands of iterations, resulted in a matched comparison sample of 8,068 persons matched to the sample of accountability court starts on 12 relevant characteristics

# The 2017 Recidivism Study, cont.

- Results indicate that with very few exceptions at 6, 12, and 18 months follow-up accountability court participants get arrested (felonies and misdemeanors) less frequently than matched comparisons who
- had not participated in an accountability court
- These findings generally held over time and across four types of accountability courts in Georgia – Adult Drug Courts, DUI courts, Adult Mental Health Courts, and Veterans Treatment Courts



# The 2017 Recidivism Study, cont.

- Furthermore, those accountability court participants that do get arrested are in many cases arrested significantly later than the matched comparisons
- The results of the 2017 study significantly extended the findings of the 2016 study
  - Generally speaking, those that complete programs fare much better than those that do not
  - The use of PSM is as close as we can get methodologically to a randomized controlled trial

# The 2019 Recidivism Study

- The 2019 study included more participants and supported the findings from the 2016 and 2017 studies, in that accountability court participants, whether they successfully completed the programs or not, were less likely to be arrested during the follow-up period
- Those that were arrested were arrested significantly later than the matched comparisons
- Therefore, even some participation in an accountability court in GA leads to reductions in recidivism

# The 2019 Recidivism Study, cont.

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# The 2019 Recidivism Study, cont.

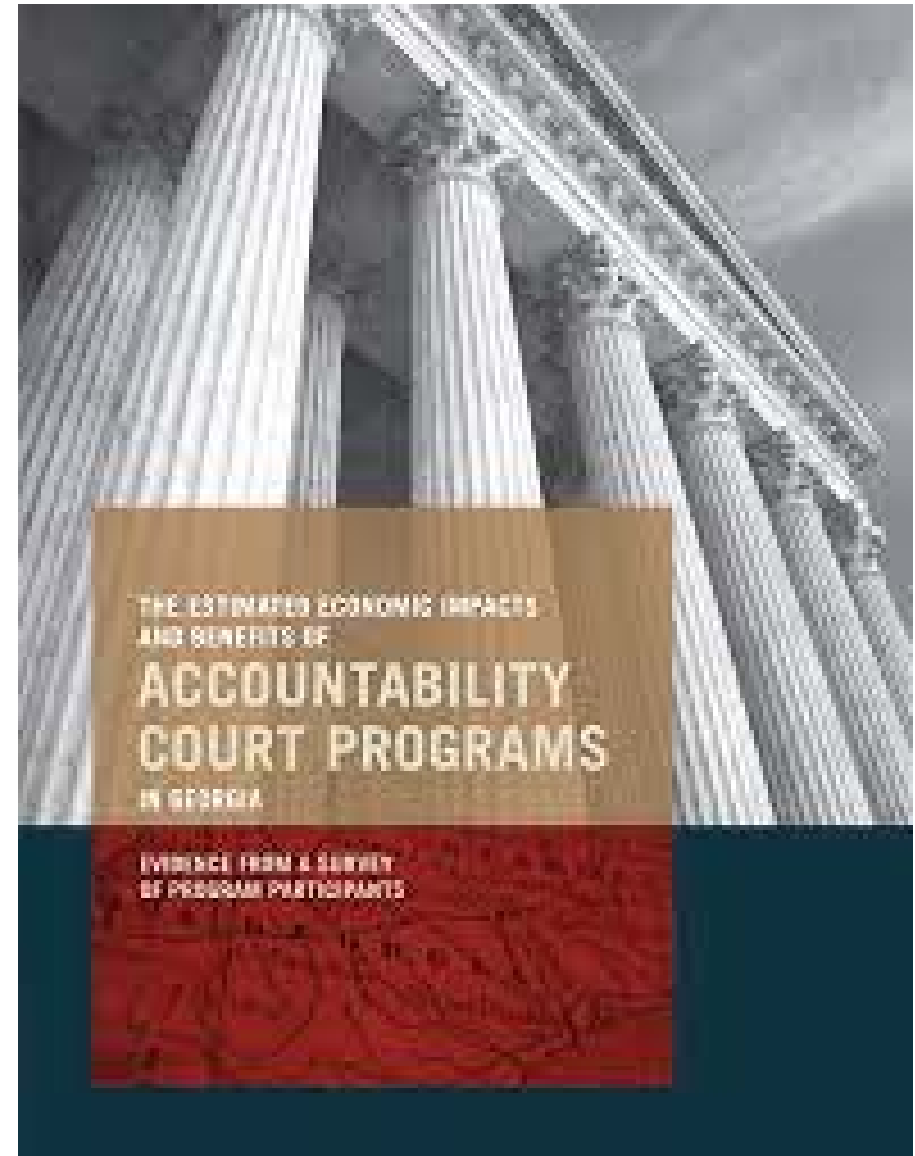
- The 2019 study benefitted significantly from increased data availability and quality, as more courts came to rely on and more fully utilize the client case management systems
- The 2019 data were published to a secure, password-protected website that permitted each court included in the study to view their recidivism numbers as well as those of similar courts aggregated across the state

# The 2019 Recidivism Study, cont.

- The 2019 study used a sophisticated matching process and large, statewide sample of a variety of court types to demonstrate reduced rates of rearrest
- We recommended after the 2018 study that the next question to be answered was “at what cost?”, in that a detailed Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) was needed to address the issue of the fiscal implications of accountability courts

# The Carl Vinson Institute for Government CBA

- The Institute surveyed 463 court participants in 32 programs across court types to assess the benefits of participation
- Using these results along with estimated program costs, the Institute estimated the benefits of one program graduate to be \$22,129 or \$37.7 million for those that graduated in 2017





# The 2022 Recidivism Study

- The 2019 study, currently underway and due to be completed in November 2022, combines elements from our previous studies and extends them via the following:
  - The sample size of court participants is just below 20,000 across the court types included
  - For comparison, the NIJ's Multisite Adult Drug Court Evaluation (MADCE, begun in 2003) sampled 1,156 drug court and 625 non-drug-court probationers from 29 rural, suburban and urban jurisdictions in FL, GA, IL, NY, PA, NC, SC, and WA

# The 2022 Recidivism Study, cont.

- We are again using PSM to construct a comparison group that looks very much like court participants
- We are also assessing the degree to which pandemic-related policies and procedures are associated with court and treatment enrollment, participation, and completion
- We are conducting a limited cost-benefit analysis to better understand the impact of court participation on local communities – jail costs and cost offsets, such as employment

# What Does All This Mean?

A variety of different accountability court types have been demonstrated to effectively reduce recidivism and positively impact participants in other ways in GA and across the US



# What Does All This Mean?

- These courts have also demonstrated significant cost avoidance, in GA and across the US
- At this point we are working to identify what works, for whom, and under what circumstances
  - Across a number of studies, certain factors appear repeatedly as being associated with graduation:
    - Age (older is better)
    - Education (more is better)
    - Employment (working is better)
    - Behavioral compliance (more is better)
    - Race/Ethnicity (findings are mixed)

## What Does All This Mean, cont.?

- In a study of 2,381 ADC, MHC, and VTC participants in 77 accountability courts in GA, we found that:
  - Females had higher graduation rates than males
  - White participants had higher graduation rates than others (NADCP and CACJ are actively addressing this)
  - Those entering the court on drug charges had higher graduation rates than those with other charges, with those entering the court on a probation violation having the lowest graduation rates
  - The older the participant, the higher the graduation rate

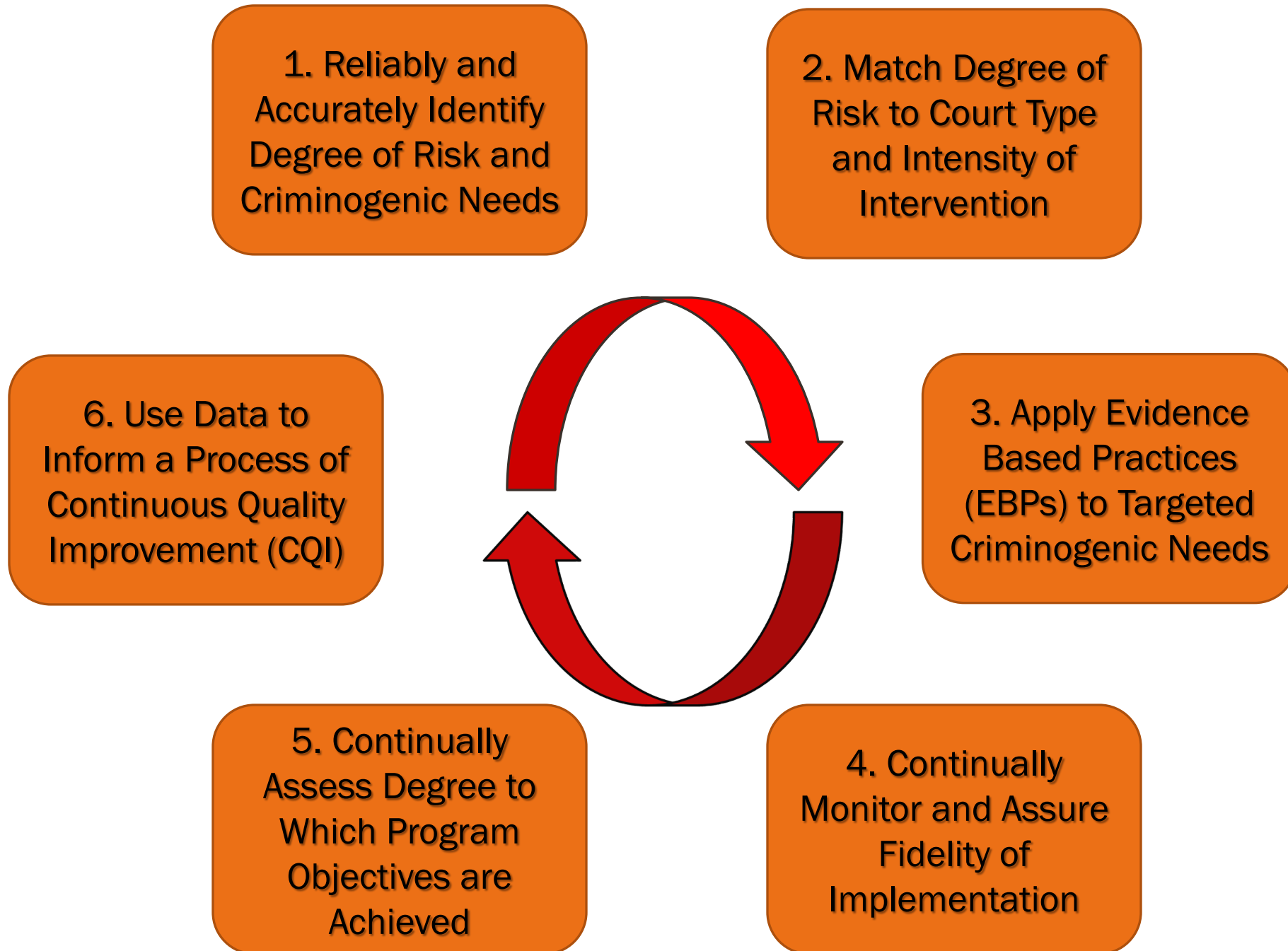
# What Does All This Mean, cont.?

- No difference in graduation rates was found by type of court (ADC, MH, VTC)
  - VTC graduation rates appeared to be the lowest, but there were too few cases compared to the other court types for a robust test to be computed
- No difference in graduation rates between those with a violent entry offense versus those with a non-violent entry offense

# What Does All This Mean, cont.?

The key to achieving the desired outcomes, those achieved by effective courts, can be summed up in a single word...

**FIDELITY**





# What Does All This Mean, cont.?

Doug Marlowe's excellent presentation entitled:

## ***Signs That You Might Not Be A Drug Court***

- The Ten Key Components define the floor – what a drug court is
- The Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards define the ceiling – what an excellent drug court looks like

Use these documents and the RNR Theory of Change to continually assess where your court falls

# What Does All This Mean, cont.?

- You have many resources to engage in this continuous process:
  - Self study
  - Peer Review
  - CACJ Standards and Certification processes
  - CACJ resources, including the CACJ Model Fidelity Handbook, Rules and Regulations, Data Collection Manual, and Court Information Packet
  - Program Evaluation

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# Contact Information

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