



Incentives List

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Summary of Accountability Courts Incentives Aligned with NDCI Categories

This document summarizes categorized incentives with guidance from the National Drug Court Institute (categories and descriptions may be found at <https://www.ndci.org/resource/training/incentives-and-sanctions/>).

1. Verbal Praise/Recognition in court

Verbal praise is provided for most routine accomplishments in drug courts, including timely attendance at appointments and participation in treatment - related discussions or activities. This is especially important during Phase 1 of the program, when participants have a relatively harder time satisfying basic expectations.

All team members should be prepared to offer praise at or near the time that accomplishments are achieved; for example, immediately after a productive counseling session or a drug - negative urine test. The judge later reinforces the praise during court hearings.

Common examples include:

- Verbal praise
- Group applause
- Encouragement

Formal recognition is provided in court when participants meet substantial milestones in the program, such as completing a standardized treatment curriculum or achieving 30 consecutive days of sobriety. In addition to verbal praise, participants may receive a handshake from the judge, a round of applause in open court, and/or a certificate of accomplishment.

Common examples include:

- Handshake from the judge/judicial praise
- Round of applause in court
- Certificate of accomplishment for achieving a clinically important milestone

2. Small Tangible Rewards

Many participants in drug courts are unaccustomed to earning positive reinforcement and respond well to low-magnitude rewards. The rewards are typically given for basic accomplishments during the early phases of the program, such as attending a full week of counseling appointments. The goal is to instill hope and encourage compliance with the treatment regimen.

The rewards are typically structured so as to increase participants' involvement in productive activities, and may contain pro-sobriety messages, toll-free phone numbers for local treatment services, or the drug court's logo.

Common examples include:

- Birthday cards
- Bookmarks



- Bus tokens
- Fast pass/court pass/front of drug screen line card
- Phone cards
- Healthy foods (e.g., juice, tea, granola bars, fruit, trail mix)
- Candy
- Coffee mugs
- Birthday or holiday cards
- Books or children's books
- Goody/incentive/prize box/wheel
- Planners or calendars
- School supplies
- Toiletries
- Underwear
- Frames for certificates
- Picture albums
- Serenity Stones
- T -Shirts with inspirational sayings or quotes

3. Reduced Community Restrictions/ Supervision Requirements

Many drug courts impose curfews and area restrictions on participants as a condition of entry into the program. After participants reliably engage in treatment and achieve a sustained period of abstinence, they may be rewarded by reducing those community restrictions. For example, curfews may be extended from 8:00 pm to 10:00 pm.

Common examples include:

- Driving privileges
- Later curfew
- Phase movement/up/promotion
- Relaxed area restrictions

4. Travel Privileges

In anticipation of commencement from the program, participants' travel restrictions may be formally lifted, allowing them to leave the county or state for a weekend, extended weekend, or week - long interval. Typically, phone - ins are required to ensure continued contact with the treatment program or supervision officers.

Common examples include:

- Weekend pass out of county
- Overnight pass/travel pass
- Travel approval/approved leave request
- Vacation days

5. Symbolic Rewards

Symbolic rewards may be inexpensive, but they have high emotional impact in the recovery community. Due to their symbolic value, they are generally viewed as being higher in magnitude



than the small tangible rewards listed above. Typically, they are delivered to commemorate the achievement of a clinically meaningful milestone, such as 90 consecutive days of abstinence.

Common examples include:

- Sobriety chips
- Sobriety key chains
- Sobriety tokens
- “Live Strong” bracelets
- Copies of addiction readings such as the AA “Big Book”

6. Moderate Tangible Rewards

As noted earlier, many participants in drug courts are unaccustomed to positive reinforcement and respond well to tangible rewards. As participants make positive progress in the program, the magnitude of the rewards progressively increases. The rewards typically encourage engagement in productive or healthful activities.

Examples of moderate rewards include:

- Gift certificates (typically \$5 to \$20 value)
- Movies passes or movie rentals
- Admission passes to amusement parks or sporting events
- Introductory memberships to spas or gyms
- Haircuts
- Makeup or cosmetic sessions
- Groceries
- Work or school clothing or shoes
- Bowling, skating, or other recreational passes

7. Point Systems

Point systems can enable Drug Courts to offer large tangible rewards at a reasonable expense. Rather than earning rewards for each accomplishment, participants earn points or vouchers for satisfying the conditions for phase advancement or other major accomplishments. The points are banked until participants enter the last phase of the program, and they can then trade in the points for a substantial prize. Some programs also offer bonus points for unusual accomplishments, such as receiving a job promotion or earning a GED.

8. Posted Accomplishments

Evidence of exceptional accomplishments may be openly posted in the Drug Court. For example, pro-sobriety artwork or essays, photographs of participants receiving a diploma or GED, or letters of commendation from employers, may be publicly displayed in the courtroom, treatment program, or probation office.

Common examples include:

- Pro-sobriety artwork or writing essays displayed in the courtroom, treatment program or probation office
- Photos of participants receiving GEDs or other awards
- Letters of commendation from employers or teachers



- Star/Super Star/Rock Star award
- Participant of the week/month

9. Fishbowl Drawings

Many drug courts are stretched for resources and may have difficulty offering rewards of more than minor value. The “fishbowl procedure” allows Drug Courts to provide tangible rewards at lesser cost. Rather than earning tangible rewards for each accomplishment, participants earn chances to draw paper slips from a fishbowl. The slips award a combination of some tangible prizes and a greater percentage of nontangible incentives, such as certificates of accomplishment. There may also be 1 or 2 prizes of substantial value (\$25 to \$50), but the odds of drawing them are small. Research indicates that the opportunity to earn a substantial reward can be as reinforcing, or more reinforcing, than earning smaller rewards each time. It also adds entertainment value for persons who typically lack pleasurable, pro-social activities in their lives. A major advantage of this approach is that participants can earn multiple rewards in the same week (i.e., multiple draws) without incurring undue costs to the program. For example, participants may earn separate draws for attending counseling sessions, delivering drug-negative urine samples, and appearing in court.

10. Writing Commendations

Written commendations may be shared by participants (assuming they choose to do so) with outside parties, such as employers, family members or school administrators. They typically inform “to whom it may concern” that the participant has achieved a substantial period of stable sobriety and law-abiding behavior. Because the participant has “turned a corner” and made a significant shift in progress, he or she might be trusted to return to previous activity or roles, assuming that supervision and treatment in the drug court will continue.

Common examples include:

- Letters of attainment from the judge
- Reports cards from treatment providers or probation officers
- Certificates of completion
- Achievement awards

11. Commencement Ceremony

Virtually all drug courts put great thought and effort into their commencement or graduation ceremonies.

Elements of the ceremonies include:

- Robes and “pomp and circumstance”
- Flowers, plaques, and framed diplomas

12. Supervised Social Gatherings

Participants who have begun to assume appropriate life roles may earn inclusion in social gatherings coordinated by the drug court staff. These events are designed to provide healthy recreational experiences and opportunities for participants to practice appropriate social interactions in non-drug related situations.



Common examples include:

- Picnics or parties
- Sober dances
- Recovery games or activities
- Picture day (formal portraits taken)
- Family day (food and games provided to invited family members and friends)

13. Community Service Credit/Reduction

Some programs require participants to earn a certain amount of community service hours as part of program requirements. A credit or reduction for positive behavior may be used to reinforce this behavior and encourage continued performance.

14. Fee Credit/Reduction

Some programs require participants to pay a participant fee as part of program requirements. A credit or reduction for positive behavior may be used to reinforce this behavior and encourage continued performance.

15. Other

This should be reserved for circumstances for where the incentive delivered is not listed or does not fall into one of the above categories.