

CHECKLIST: Creating an Effective Court Reminder Program

ideas⁴²

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COLLECT CONTACT INFORMATION EARLY AND OFTEN

Collect early and often: identify where and when to collect phone number and email

- When booked, Sheriff collects at booking or Court/Pretrial Staff collect during bonding process or on bond forms
- When cited and released, LEAs collect phone number on citation. Ensure citation includes phone number field (or work to add this)
- Understand percentage of citations/bookings with phone numbers. Low collection could stem from law enforcement not asking and training can address this

Ensure collected contact information **can be shared with the court**

Court **actively updates contact information** at all subsequent touchpoints

AUTOMATICALLY ENROLL PARTICIPANTS

Enroll all people into reminders for whom court has contact information

Seek vendors who will send to those auto-enrolled with an “opt-out/stop” option

Use multiple delivery methods based on available contact information

CHOOSE TECHNOLOGY WITH KEY FEATURES

Prioritize technology that offers flexible content, auto-enrollment and easy setup and use

Technology options: Turnkey (use current CMS); DIY (custom-built by court), Specialty Communication Platform (vendors offering fully managed platforms)

Provide system at state level for all courts and if not yet possible, local courts should implement their own reminder program

SEND REMINDERS TO EVERYONE WITH A PRETRIAL CASE

Send for all hearings including the first one out-of-custody, as it is often the most missed

After a missed court date, send a message to help people get their case back on track

SEND REMINDERS WITH SUFFICIENT TIME TO RECEIVE, READ AND ACT

Text/email: Up to 3 reminders before each hearing at 7, 3 and 1 day before

Mail: Send 14 days before and to anyone for whom text/email not possible

Set default method for all (i.e., text for all and if no phone number, send what’s possible)

WRITE MESSAGES PROVEN TO WORK BEST

Plain language: Avoid technical language, make titles clear and descriptive

Formatting: Place court date, time, location and consequences of inaction at top; no “all caps”

Behavioral Content: Make consequences clear; prompt to make a plan; offer live help, use name for relevance; identify typical outcomes (i.e., continuances or fines with 60 days to pay)

Ease of Use: Add links (maps, website, virtual hearings); offer translation; if grace periods, offer link for ease in rescheduling

Missed court dates: Clarify how to cure a missed court date and clear a nonappearance warrant and assure “no arrest”

To make content as relevant as possible, identify the following:

- What happens when someone does not appear (warrants, grace period, etc.)
- Instructions on how to cure nonappearance (call, reschedule, etc.) or clear warrant
- For first out-of-custody hearing, will a public defender be made available to everyone
- Do most hearings have a typical outcome (dismissal, fines paid in 60 days, etc.)

UPDATE FORMS TO FURTHER INCREASE APPEARANCE RATES

Consider improving court date forms (such as citation, summons and release/bond forms) based on these same principles to further increase appearance rates and collect more contact information for reminders

See The Essential Guide to Court Reminder Programs for more information and examples of successful reminder messages.

Contact us at unwarranted@ideas42.org for questions or support in creating an effective court reminder program.