

Qualitative Study of Probation and Parole Home and Field Contacts



After many discussions with practitioners and policymakers, we have not found consensus on what constitutes a home visit, or what components could contribute to effective supervision. *We are looking for state agencies, or agencies within states, to volunteer to participate in a qualitative investigation of the components of home and field contacts.* The goal of this study is to work toward defining distinct home and field contact types, and to better understand the role of probation and parole officers in their communities. Activities for this study include: 1) focus groups with officers and in-depth interviews with supervisors/chiefs to determine the agency's actual and ideal practices for home and field contacts; and 2) a brief on-line qualitative survey of supervisees and community members served by each agency (i.e., probation officers' collateral contacts, such as partners, friends, family, and neighbors of supervisees), to demonstrate the role of the probation and parole officer in communities as they carry out fieldwork. In some agencies, we will also explore the possibility of implementing a brief Checklist for all officers to complete after each field contact over a defined time period to gather additional information about field contact types and activities.

Officer Focus Groups

Our overall research question for the focus groups is what do officers do during home and field contacts? Topics on the focus group guide include the goals of home and field contacts, components/activities of home and field contacts, locations of home and field contacts, interactions that take place during home and field contacts, and how officers think the community perceives them and home and field contacts. We would like for all of the officers in each agency to participate, but participation will be voluntary and we will obtain informed consent from all officers who choose to participate. We anticipate that we will hold 2-3 focus groups with small groups of 5-10 officers in each group. Staggering the focus groups throughout the day will allow officers to participate at a time that is most convenient for them and will facilitate participation. We will conduct focus groups in person at each site's office. Participation is voluntary and there will be no repercussions for declining to participate. Officers will not be compensated for their participation.

Supervisor/Chief Interviews

We will conduct one brief semi-structured interview with up to two supervisors or chiefs per site. These interviews are intended to complement the officer focus groups and will focus on the goal of home and field contacts from an agency/policy perspective. Participation will be voluntary; supervisors/chiefs will not be compensated for their participation.

Supervisee and Community Member Survey

We will implement an on-line survey using Fluid Surveys, a web-based secure survey application. The survey is brief and adopts a user satisfaction framework by asking participants about their attitudes towards, perceptions of, and experiences with home and field contacts. We will ask officers for their assistance in distributing the fliers to their supervisees and collateral contacts. We will also leave fliers at the site offices and distribute fliers at local community centers at each site. Community participation is completely voluntary and cannot affect the relationship between the officer and their supervisees or collateral contacts. There will be no incentives provided to officers or the agency for assisting with recruitment, and there will be no incentives provided to community members for participating.

If your agency is interested in participating in this study, please contact:

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