

Introducing JCAMP: A New Tool to Measure Your Court's Performance

ABA Center on Children and the Law

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Quick Overview

This judge's action alert highlights:

- Key aspects of JCAMP and its importance to judges and court professionals
- How the measures were developed
- Key areas the measures assess
- Lessons learned from sites that have field tested the measures
- How judges and court professionals can use the measures
- Where to find the measures and implementation guidance

Field Test Feedback

"JCAMP measures aligned with efforts to focus on and lift family voices. Implementing the measures built on prior work on quality legal representation and areas incorporated into CIP's five-year strategic plan."

Judges and court professionals involved in child welfare court improvement efforts will benefit from the *Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance* (JCAMP), a new tool for measuring court practices and performance in child welfare dependency courts. JCAMP can help you assess new aspects of your court's performance and areas of special interest or concern. JCAMP is designed to be easy to use and to complement existing court assessment efforts, such as the Child and Family Services Reviews, and court improvement project evaluations.

What are the JCAMP court performance measures? As a judge or court professional, why should I know about them?

JCAMP is a set of court performance measures that can help you understand and improve your court's practices and performance. The measures capture court-specific data that is critical to a well-functioning court. Designed to be easily integrated into practice and to target areas that are relevant to your court, they can be used to inform decisions about your court's functioning and improvement efforts. For example, measures that gauge how often parents attend hearings, the nature of their participation at hearings, and their perceptions of their engagement at hearings can yield rich data that can help the court make decisions about parent engagement efforts.

Who developed the measures and how were they developed?

The measures were developed by the JCAMP Project, an initiative of the Capacity Building Center for Courts, with funding from the U.S. Children's Bureau. The project included a team of legal experts, including judges, attorneys, and court administrators, who developed the measures through an intensive one-year process. The team reviewed research, standards, laws, and policies. They also asked for input from parents who had been involved in the system, people with lived experience as children or youth in foster care, people with lived experience as caregivers or relatives involved in child welfare, and race equity experts. This input helped ensure the measures were informed by people who directly experienced the child welfare system. Viewing the measures through a race equity lens helped ensure they capture data that are critical to a fair and just court system. An initial prototype for the measures was vetted by experts and pilot tested in four sites before arriving at a final prototype.

Field Test Feedback

“The court observation skills I’ve gained through this project are something I can use over and over again and are really important.”

What aspects of court practice does JCAMP assess?

The measures fall into five broad categories that are key to a high-quality child welfare court process:

1. **Family engagement**—how parents, children and youth, and caregivers are involved in their court hearings.
2. **Due process**—whether hearings are fair and ensure parties receive equal access to justice.
3. **High-quality legal representation**—what legal advocacy is provided to child welfare clients and indicators of attorney performance.
4. **Safety**—how court practices address, and parents perceive, the protection of children and youth from harm at all stages of a child welfare case.
5. **Permanency**—how court practices support legal relationships with safe, stable, nurturing families and how parents, children and youth perceive permanency efforts made by the court.

Within these five categories, the measures assess three key aspects of court functioning:

1. **Court process**—what happens in the court process, before, during, and after court.
Examples: Who showed up at court? How long does it take between court events? Are there continuances, why, and how many?
2. **Professional practice**—the activities of judges and attorneys.
Examples: What are judges doing in hearings? What is being discussed in the court process? What are attorneys doing in/outside of court?
3. **Family experience**—how families experience and perceive the court system.
Examples: Did the parent/youth feel engaged in the court hearing? Were they notified of the hearing? Did they feel their attorney advocated for them? Did they feel they were part of case planning?

Related Resources

The measures and supporting documents are available [online](#).

A [Quick Start Guide](#) includes a JCAMP Measures Quick Reference List that lists each measure by one of the five topical categories.

Full descriptions of the measures are found in [Volume I: Measures](#), organized within the five topical categories by subcategory (court process, professional practice, family experience).

[Volume II: Implementation Guide](#) helps you implement the measures and use the data through six steps (forming a team, selecting and formalizing measures, etc.). For each step, the implementation guide describes the step and its importance, key considerations, relevant activities, insights from individuals with lived experience and race equity experts, and lessons learned from the sites that field tested the measures.

[Volume III: Implementation Toolbox](#) includes implementation tools that align with the six implementation steps outlined in the Implementation Guide.

[Volume IV: Technical Guide](#) includes profiles of each measure, variables to consider, options and instructions for data collection, related measures, and supporting research.

[Volume V: Background and Research](#) shares the research and standards related to each category of measurement as well as why each measure is important to the field.

Have the measures been tested by court professionals? How have they been used?

Four sites—three court improvement programs (CIPs) and one tribe—field tested the JCAMP process and measures.

- One site used the JCAMP measures to develop a needs assessment for an existing project on quality representation and hearing quality that used court observation and surveys to gather information.
- One site also used the JCAMP measures to develop a needs assessment and baseline data for a preexisting project.

Field Test Feedback

“Reviewing practice measures related to case planning helped team members consider changes to their own practice by seeking additional case planning information during hearings.”

- One site used the JCAMP measures as part of an effort to evaluate the impact of its recently completed parent attorney standards.
- The tribe used the information as baseline to understand their current practice and to explore practice changes over a five-year period.

The experiences of the field test sites allowed the measures to be tested in a variety of settings and helped refine the prototype for the JCAMP measures. Insights from the test sites are included throughout the Implementation Guide with lessons learned and advice for each implementation step. For example, in the team creation step, study sites shared thoughts on who to include on the team, how to structure teams, and the frequency and focus of team meetings.

How can judges and court professionals use JCAMP?

Key opportunities to use the measures include:

- Conduct a needs assessment for a court project.
- Gather data and information to inform decision making in an area of interest.
- Gather data to assess if your court is meeting its mission, goals, and objectives.

- Evaluate a court practice, process, or project.
- Establish baseline information to understand aspects of court practice (e.g., what legal representation looks like, what hearing quality looks like).
- Contribute to Court Improvement Program discussions about the Child and Family Services Reviews.
- Gather data to inform legislative and policy priorities.
- Incorporate family experience measures to ensure perspectives of parents and children are given equal weight as the professionals in the court system.

Will support be available to help courts use the measures?

The JCAMP team is working on a plan to roll out the measures to the field and provide opportunities to learn about them. As part of that roll out, the JCAMP team will provide consultation and technical support to help courts identify needs and goals, think through measurement strategies, and address individual needs. (For more information, contact Dr. Alicia Summers, Director of Research, Capacity Building Center for Courts, alicia.d.summers@gmail.com)

Field Test Feedback

“Using JCAMP is an ongoing process. They are measures that can and should be used over and over again.”

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