

Washtenaw Equity Partnership (WEP) Court Process Subcommittee

August 3, 2022 5:00-6:30 pm

Meeting Notes

Attendees:

Deb Labelle (Co-chair)
Judge Kuhnke (Co-chair)
Joe Summers
Dick Soble
Nimish Ganatra
Tara Dhanraj Roden (Vera)
Alex Roth (Vera)
Megan Siwek (Vera)

- Goal of meeting: provide subcommittee members with an update of where Vera is in the research process and what is still to come. Discuss next steps and how to engage people moving forward.
- Updates by priority area.
 - Restorative Justice – Vera team members have done extensive literature review on this topic. Working to condense into summary of key information to share with the subcommittee. Met with a Judge to discuss the peacemaking court and connected with prosecutor's office to gather more information about restorative justice program.
 - Subcommittee member question asking if research includes coming up with models for Washtenaw to consider. Vera team member stated that research includes best practices and models for Washtenaw to consider.
 - Specialty Courts – Vera team members have completed an extensive literature review. The Vera team has also received some data from the Circuit Court's Treatment Court that includes general information about referrals, acceptances, and completion rate broken down by race, age, and gender. Vera has contacted the coordinators for four other specialty courts in the County to see if they can provide similar data to review.
 - Racial Disparities in Bail – Vera is not certain if the team will be able to obtain data to answer Washtenaw specific questions. Vera reached out to the court administrator of the 14A District Court and she stated their system would not be able to run a report of all bond amounts. She put Vera in touch with DMC (which runs the JIS system) and they are determining if a broader data set can be pulled. If Vera is unable to obtain specific data, Vera will still conduct research on disparities in bail generally and on national best practices for Washtenaw to consider.
 - Racial Disparities in Sentencing – Most questions within this priority area will be answered with data provided by the circuit court. Vera analysts have cleaned and combined the two datasets received and are currently working on analysis. Vera will also see if DMC is able to pull any data about district court sentencing.
 - Vera team member asked for clarification within the sentencing data between Cobbs agreements and sentencing agreements. Subcommittee member stated that a Cobbs agreement is when the judge tells the defendant what sentence s/he is inclined to impose and the defendant enters a conditional plea on that basis, while

a sentencing agreement is where the prosecution and defense work out a plea agreement, the judge says whether s/he is inclined to go along with the negotiated sentence, and the defendant enters a conditional plea on that basis. With either one, the defendant is generally able to withdraw his or her plea if the judge imposes a harsher sentence than the one discussed (with some exceptions).

- Vera is in the process of researching PSIs and reviewing Michigan policies. Vera spoke with local stakeholders to gain insight as well.
 - Vera has also submitted a formal research proposal to access MDOC data. Subcommittee member recently obtained MDOC data for another project. This subcommittee member requested to see Vera's research proposal to determine if there is overlap between the two projects and relevant MDOC data they can share with Vera. Another subcommittee member inquired what Vera will do with MDOC data. Vera team member stated if data is obtained within the next month the Vera team aims to analyze the data for the project. If not able to receive MDOC data at all or in a timely manner, Vera would provide recommendations in the final report on what data is needed to answer questions from this project.
- Subcommittee member asked about timeline for completion of this project. Vera team member stated that research summaries related directly to this subcommittee will be shared over the next few weeks with subcommittee members. The WEP co-chair will also send out a slightly adjusted timeline to the entire WEP shortly. Vera team member highlighted the minor date changes that WEP members will see in the upcoming email.
 - Vera team member asked the subcommittee how they would like to receive updates on the research moving forward. Subcommittee members stated they would like the entire subcommittee to receive research summaries as well as full literature reviews that have been complete. Vera team member will email them to the subcommittee and save them on the shared Google drive. Subcommittee members would like to meet to discuss feedback to research.
 - Next subcommittee meeting to be rescheduled to September 15 at 5:15pm.