

*Innovations in Criminal Justice Summit III
Program Summaries
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San Francisco District Attorney's Office Neighborhood Courts Program



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Program Start Date: 2011

Website: <http://www.sfdistrictattorney.org/index.aspx?page=178>

Description: Neighborhood Court (NCT) is a pre-charging diversion program for non-violent misdemeanors that emphasizes community participation and restorative justice. San Francisco District Attorney (SFDA) prosecutors review misdemeanor cases to identify those that are legally sufficient and eligible. Potential participants are contacted by the SFDA and provided with information about the program, their legal rights, and program's requirements. While participation is voluntary, the individual must take responsibility for their role in the incident. If a candidate fails to respond to the invitation to participate, opts out, fails to appear at court, or fails to complete their directives, the case is returned to traditional court.

During NCT sessions, a panel of volunteer "adjudicators," trained in restorative justice and problem solving, hears cases at one of ten Neighborhood Courts located throughout San Francisco's police districts. There are no prosecutors or defense counsel present. Supported by staff from the SFDA's nonprofit partners, panels of three or four adjudicators hear each case to dialogue with the participant, assess the harm caused by the incident, and issue "directives" to address the harm to the victim, the community, and the participant. If a participant completes these directives, the case is discharged and they are provided with tools to expunge their arrest records.

A NCT participant's case can often be completed within weeks, before the time they would have appeared for arraignment. By keeping low-level offenders out of the system and keeping convictions off their records, NCT works to prevent collateral consequences and acts to remove an obstacle to a participant's meaningful participation in the community. NCT can also lead to significant savings of time and money for criminal courts and the agencies that work in them.

Criminal Justice Partners: The San Francisco District Attorney's Office, Superior Court, Police Department, the Public Defender, the San Francisco Diversion Project, Community Boards, and other social services providers.

Evaluation/Research: The program is part of an ongoing National Institute of Justice impact study of prosecutorial diversion programs.

Implementation Guide: [Click Here](#)

