






The North Carolina Court Appearance Project

The Outsized Impact of Court Non-Appearance

While most people attend their court hearings, missed appearances contribute to system-wide inefficiencies and case backlogs, use additional law enforcement resources, inconvenience victims and witnesses, and can result in an arrest, time spent in jail, and/or a suspended license for the person charged. However, data and experience suggest that most missed court appearances are for low-level offenses and may be due to systemic barriers, such as lack of transportation or inability to take off time from work. Deliberate policies can address these barriers, ensure public safety, and improve efficiency.

Phase I: Policy Development

In August 2021, diverse stakeholder teams from New Hanover, Orange, and Robeson counties began exploring policy solutions related to promoting court appearances and developing better responses to non-appearances. Using local court and jail data, teams reflected on court procedures and identified key areas for improvement. The strategies they crafted are summarized in the table below. Additional details can be found in the [Phase I Project Report](#).

	Help people understand and remember the need to appear	Text message reminders; palm cards to accompany citations; forms that are easier to read and understand
	Address barriers to appearance	Transportation assistance; virtual appearance options
	Make court more user-friendly	Hearings scheduled in smaller time blocks; walk-in hours; services for high-need groups; shorter disposition times
	Build community trust	More diverse court personnel; regular community engagement
	Reduce collateral harms	Fewer unnecessary orders for arrest; license restoration services; updating state laws

Phase II: Implementation & Engagement

Phase II begins in Summer 2022 and has three goals. First, the project teams will work to execute priority policy initiatives from Phase I. This work will generate tools to inform implementation efforts in other jurisdictions. Second, through conferences, webinars, and other events, the project teams will share their work with stakeholders across North Carolina and the country. This effort will begin with a webinar in the Fall of 2022, providing attendees with information about court appearance and highlighting strategies they can implement in their communities. Third, we'll launch an online court appearance policy toolbox, allowing stakeholders everywhere to access "off the shelf" model tools and templates to promote court appearances and improve responses to non-appearances.

The work of the NC Court Appearance Project is supported by the [School of Government Criminal Justice Innovation Lab](#) (The Lab) and [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#). For more information, contact [Ethan Rex](#), Lab Project Manager.