

**Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP©) in  
Pennsylvania:**

# **Performance Improvement Guide for Juvenile Justice Stakeholders**

The EPISCenter represents a collaborative partnership between the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), and the Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, College of Health and Human Development, Penn State University. The EPISCenter is funded by PCCD and the PA Department of Human Services. This resource was developed by the EPISCenter through PCCD grant VP-ST-24368.



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## Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) – Performance Improvement

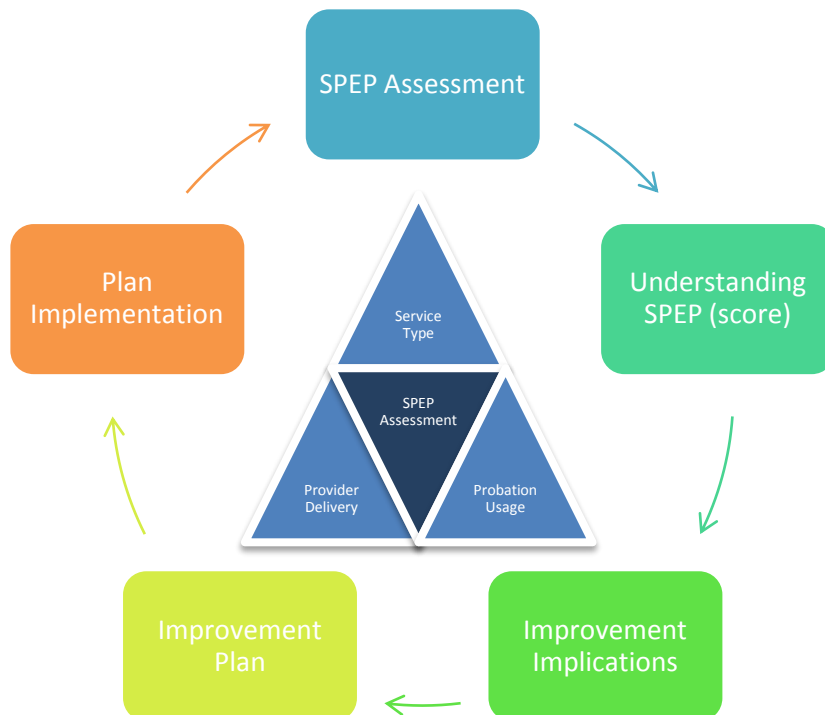
### Statement of Purpose

In support of Pennsylvania’s Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) mission and as an integral component of the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES), the assessment of services through the Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP):

- Strives to improve the quality of service delivery to juvenile justice involved youth;
- Assists in the matching of the right service to the right youth for the right amount of time;
- Focuses on services for moderate to very high risk youth;
- Engages service providers and juvenile probation in a collaborative effort to improve services through the flexible development of a performance improvement plan; and
- Recognizes that locally developed programs and their services can be equally effective as those supported by research.

The SPEP process is aimed at the continuous improvement of services for juvenile justice involved youth, reducing the likelihood of further delinquent or criminal behavior.

### The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol Lifecycle



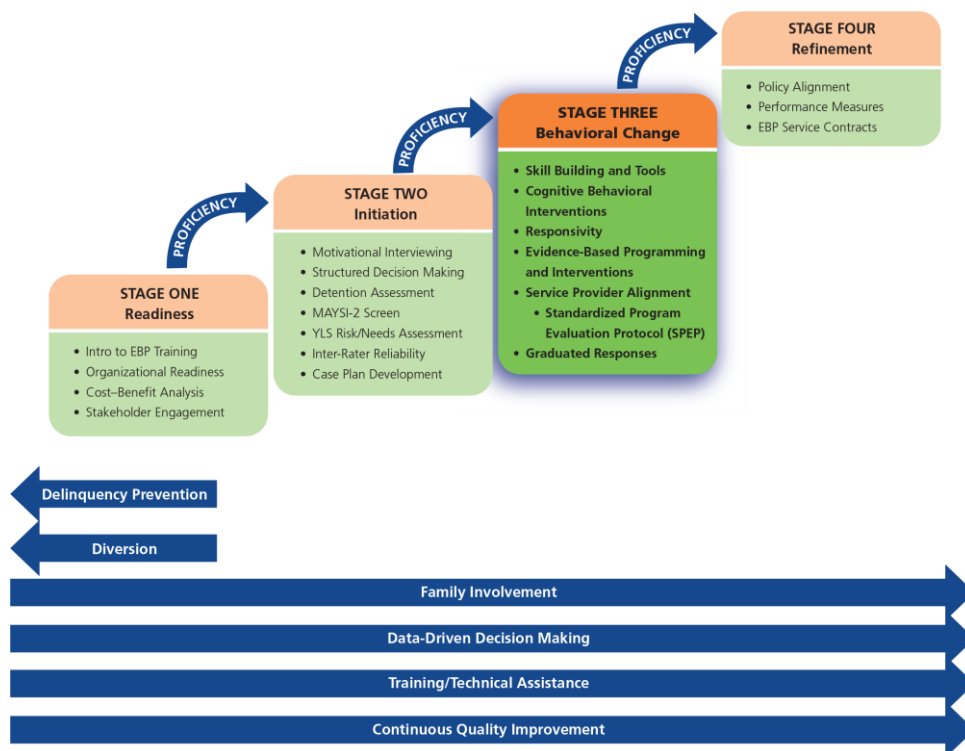
## Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) – Performance Improvement Background

Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) is the mission of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system, and therefore we must be attentive to the protection of the community, restoration of victims and the development of competencies of our youth. Through the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES), Pennsylvania seeks to implement strategies that are grounded in [evidence-based practices \(EBP\)](#) to assist stakeholders in achieving the BARJ mission.<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania formally launched the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES) in April of 2012 with the issuing of a monograph outlining the effort. The following Statement of Purpose included in the Monograph establishes performance improvement as a major component of the Strategy:

We dedicate ourselves to working in partnership to enhance the capacity of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system to achieve its balanced and restorative justice mission by:

- **employing evidence-based practices** with fidelity at every stage of the juvenile justice process;
- **collecting and analyzing the data** necessary to measure the results of these efforts; and, with this knowledge;
- striving to **continuously improve the quality** of our decisions, services, and programs.

The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) described in Stage Three, provides guidance in aligning service needs with quality local programming.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy. Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, April 2012, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.24.

While performance improvement activities are imbedded in all stages of the JJSES, this process focuses on the improvement opportunities that are identified by the application of the SPEP. This document serves as a guide to the basic concepts of performance improvement as well as the specific tools, protocols and resources for the SPEP performance improvement process in Pennsylvania.

In 2011, Berks County in partnership with the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, was selected as one of four national sites to participate in the Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project (JJSIP) at the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University. The goal of the JJSIP was reduction of crime and delinquency and improved positive outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system through the implementation of efficient and effective juvenile justice administration.<sup>3</sup> A component of the project included training and implementation of the SPEP in each selected site.

In 2013, staff from the [Evidence-based Prevention and Intervention Support Center \(EPISCenter\)](#), juvenile probation personnel and the [Department of Human Services' Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services \(BJJS\)](#) staff were trained to administer the SPEP. This expansion of the SPEP initiative included Allegheny, Bucks, Dauphin and Lehigh as additional pilot counties, joining Berks County in the administration of the SPEP.

In 2014, this team of trainees, (otherwise known as the SPEP Learning Community) worked closely with [Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute](#) to collaborate on the development of a SPEP performance improvement process, which is outlined in this document. Several of the SPEP Learning Community members begun a Train-the-Trainer program under the supervision of Drs. Gabrielle Chapman and Mark Lipsey and are qualified to train others to administer the SPEP.

**“It is always safe to assume, not that the old way is wrong, but that there may be a better way.” - Henry F. Harrower**

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Williams and Jeffrey Gregro, Berks County Juvenile Probation Chief and Deputy Chief; Presentation to the PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers / Service Provider Work Group, September 13, 2012.

## Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) – Performance Improvement

### Prioritization of Services for the SPEP Process

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For programs with multiple services, stakeholders should prioritize approximately 3 - 5 primary services to assess through the SPEP process. The assessment of every service through the SPEP can be cumbersome and time consuming. Often the recommendations that apply to the services that are assessed are applicable to other services offered by the same provider.

For the purposes of clarity and internal accountability, it is recommended that a performance improvement plan be developed for each service that went through the SPEP process.

**Example:** ABC Agency provides services matched to the following research based program types: cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), behavioral contracting, family counseling, and restitution/community service. The juvenile probation office and the service provider agreed that CBT and behavioral contracting will be evaluated through the SPEP once scored. The [Performance Improvement Team](#) develops separate improvement plans for both services.

When determining which primary services to assess through SPEP, the following three criteria should be considered:

1. The majority or most youth in the program receive the service
2. Service types that have the greatest potential for reducing recidivism
3. Service provider and stakeholder preference.

**Example:** ABC Agency chose to evaluate their cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and behavioral contracting services. While family counseling and restitution/community service are also offered, not every youth they serve are in need of family counseling nor do they owe restitution. Therefore it makes sense to focus the SPEP assessment on the services that most or all youth receive, and that the research has shown have the greatest impact on recidivism reduction: CBT and behavioral contracting services (which includes the supplemental service of family counseling).

**“Until every youth who enters our system leaves a healthy, productive, law-abiding citizen, we have room to improve.” –Anonymous**

## Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) – Performance Improvement

### Performance Improvement within the Domains of SPEP

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As noted in the JJSES Statement of Purpose, we must strive for continuous quality improvement in service delivery (quality of service delivery), delivering the service in the appropriate amount (contact hours) and length of time (duration), and identifying the type of youth for whom delivery of the service is targeted; specifically very high, high and moderate risk level offenders (risk level of youth served). The following are some examples:

1. **Primary and Supplemental Service Types:** Several SPEP service types have qualifying supplemental services that enhance the primary service’s ability to reduce recidivism. Service type determines the recommendations related to amount of service (duration and contact hours). Where there is a qualifying supplemental service but the service is not provided, a recommendation may be made to include a supplemental service. For more information on service types and qualifying supplemental services see the [SPEP Service Type Fact Sheets](#).

**Example:** ABC Agency was identified as having a behavioral contracting service. In addition, they received credit for having family counseling as a qualifying supplemental service for this SPEP service type. Had ABC not provided family counseling as well as behavioral contracting, a suggested recommendation would have been to consider adding a family or other counseling component. For example, mentoring or remedial academic service as a qualifying supplemental service to support the behavioral contracting service.

2. **Quality of Service Delivery:** Services are rated low, medium or high for use in the SPEP and based on the following items:
  - **Protocol** - The existence and utilization of a program manual or an analogous written protocol that describes the intended service and the way it is to be delivered and documentation to verify that the manual/protocol is implemented as intended.
  - **Staff Training** - The staff who oversee and deliver the program directly to the youth, such as group leaders or therapists, have the licensure and credentials appropriate for providing the service and have also been trained in the particular program or service being delivered.
  - **On-Going Staff Supervision** - A procedure is in place to actively monitor adherence to the protocol and other aspects of quality of those providing the service. A related indicator is staff and management performance evaluations that are based, at least in part, on an assessment of service quality and consistent service implementation.
  - **Organizational Response to Drift** - Data is collected to determine the effectiveness of the service provided and used to enhance service delivery. Procedures or policies are in place and used to take corrective action when significant departures from the service protocol or lapses in quality are identified. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mark W. Lipsey, Ph.D. and Gabrielle Lynn Chapman, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, “Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP): A Users Guide,” May 2013, pg. 14.

All services are expected to strive towards continuous quality improvement and ongoing refinement of service delivery. Ultimately, the goal of SPEP is to reduce recidivism through consistent and high quality service delivery.

**Example:** One of the ABC services was evaluated as “high” in staff supervision but not “medium” in staff training. The provider may choose to focus performance improvement on staff training, but should be mindful of opportunities for improvement in the other aspects of service quality.

- 3. Amount of Service:** Amount of service is comprised of the total the number of contact hours (dosage) and weeks (duration) that each youth receives.

The Amount of Service is a shared responsibility between juvenile courts and service providers. A closer look at both dosage and duration by county juvenile courts/probation personnel and the service provider, may allow for an opportunity to positively impact recidivism by adhering to the dosage and duration as recommended by the SPEP for that service type. For targeted amount of service, see SPEP Service Type Fact Sheets.

**Example:** The format for ABC’s restitution/community service is 10 weeks at 4 hours per week. The research-based targeted amount of service for a restitution/community service program is 12 weeks and 60 hours. Juvenile court personnel and the service provider will want to examine the dosage and duration to more closely match the research-based targeted amount of service for this SPEP service type.

- 4. Risk Level of Youth Served:** Dr. Lipsey’s research reveals that on average, there are larger positive effects on recidivism with higher risk juveniles than with their lower risk counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania’s intent is to focus statewide efforts on administering the SPEP to services targeted for moderate, high or very high risk youth. Pennsylvania utilizes the [Youth Level of Service \(YLS\)](#) as their risk assessment instrument. Although services for low risk youth may be necessary and beneficial, they may not be prioritized for the SPEP process.

**Example:** ABC’s services are designed for moderate and high risk youth. They served 14 moderate risk youth and 1 high risk youth. Because the service is appropriate for high risk youth, improvement could focus on serving more high risk youth. This is an opportunity for the juvenile court and service provider to revisit the use of this service by targeting more high risk youth.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark W. Lipsey, Ph.D. and Gabrielle Lynn Chapman, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, “Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP): A Users Guide”, May 2013, p.i.



## Measuring Performance Improvement in Pennsylvania

The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP), developed by Dr. Mark Lipsey of the Peabody Research Institute, is a validated, data driven rating scheme of select services provided to delinquent youth. This rating scheme, based on a meta-analysis of over 700 studies, determines how well an existing program matches research evidence of that particular type of intervention in terms of the effectiveness for reducing [recidivism](#) among juvenile offenders.<sup>6</sup> The intent is to optimize the effectiveness of services by identifying where improvements can be made related to quality of service delivery, amount of service and risk level of youth referred to the service. For more information please refer to [Overview of Performance Improvement Concepts](#) in the Appendix.

### What is a SPEPable service?

A service identified through the SPEP classification process that can be matched to a research-based SPEP service type. Not all services are SPEPable. For more information on specific service types please refer to: [www.episcenter.psu.edu](http://www.episcenter.psu.edu).

In terms of effectiveness of programs to reduce recidivism, there are four key drivers. One of the key elements is service type. Services must be “classified or matched to one of the service types that have been identified in the research studies in the meta-analytic database on which the SPEP is based.”<sup>7</sup> Another aspect of effectiveness is the way in which probation utilizes the program or service. This could entail the level of risk of the youth referred to the program or the amount of time the youth is required (example: by court order) to participate in the program. The third key driver for recidivism reduction relates to the quality of the delivery provided. The combination of these four drivers leads us to the SPEP assessment score rating.

The SPEP process can be thought of as a service’s performance improvement lifecycle. The process is cyclical, which can be recognized in the external portion of SPEP Lifecycle graphic. Upon completion of the SPEP assessment, the [Performance Improvement Team](#) will meet to review the findings and suggested recommendations in the SPEP Feedback Report. Following agreement and understanding of the information contained in the Feedback Report:

1. The service provider (in consultation with juvenile probation staff when applicable) develops their performance improvement plan (on or about 30 days post Feedback Report Meeting). Service providers and probation may use their own performance improvement plan templates if their agency policy requires them to do so or the sample [PIP Template](#).
2. Performance Improvement Plans should include goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time framed, please refer to [S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Planning Form](#) located in the Appendix. Goals should address the suggested recommendations from the SPEP Feedback Report and be prioritized according to capacity and needs. For more detailed information on performance improvement concepts, please reference Overview of

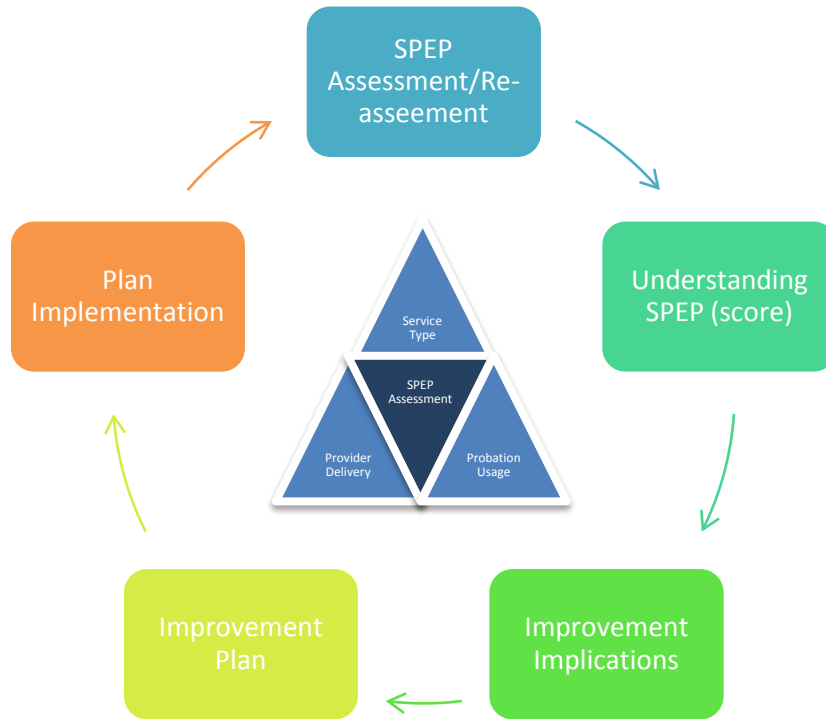
<sup>6</sup> Mark W. Lipsey, Ph.D. and Gabrielle Lynn Chapman, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, “Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP): A Users Guide”, May 2013, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Mark W. Lipsey, Ph.D. and Gabrielle Lynn Chapman, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, “Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP): A Users Guide”, May 2013, p.9.

Performance Improvement Concepts. Essential aspects of what is needed in the plan can be found in greater detail in [Prioritization of Services for the SPEP Process](#).

3. Implementation of the Performance Improvement Plan. The Performance Improvement Team will hold progress updates (in person or by phone) known as, [Progress Update Meetings/Calls](#) on or about every 90 days following the development of the Performance Improvement Plan. The purpose of the updates is to discuss progress and provide assistance as needed. Technical assistance for service providers and juvenile probation partners may include [resource materials](#), training opportunities, consultation with other service providers, etc.
4. SPEP Re-assessment should occur following the implementation of the plan and the sufficient amount of time for a new [cohort](#) to complete the improved service. It is important to emphasize that the timeline for a SPEP Re-assessment may change based on the availability of resources to the service provider and the juvenile courts involved. Readiness for Re-assessment should include substantial completion of the goals within the performance improvement plan. Moreover, the cohort of youth selected for the Re-assessment should reflect the service as delivered post plan implementation; that is, sufficient time should have elapsed to allow for improvements to be made.

Performance Improvement Plans may include goals that address the addition of a qualifying supplemental service if applicable, improved service quality, delivery of a sufficient amount of the service and focusing services on youth with higher risk levels.



## Performance Improvement Process and Plan

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Following the administration of the SPEP, the [Performance Improvement Team](#) will meet to review the findings and recommendations in the [SPEP Feedback Report](#).

### SPEP Feedback Report Meeting

This meeting is scheduled to occur upon completion of the SPEP Interview(s) and the examination of Amount of Service and Risk Level of Youth in the cohort. This meeting will include:

- Presentation and discussion of the SPEP Feedback Report and recommendations for performance improvement.
- Overview of Performance Improvement Concepts.
- Overview of the SPEP Performance Improvement Timeframes and Protocols.
- Guidelines for developing the SPEP performance improvement plan.
- Establish a date for completion of the initial draft of the SPEP performance improvement plan. This draft must be developed within 30 days of the Feedback Report Meeting.

### SPEP Performance Improvement Plan

Juvenile probation and service providers may use their own format when drafting their SPEP performance improvement plan or they may use resources provided to them in the Appendix to develop their own plan. Performance improvement plans for SPEP should include the following items:

- **Basic program information** – This information can be retrieved from the heading located on the SPEP Feedback Report. It should include the name of the provider, the service, location, juvenile probation partners and the date.
- **Recommendations from SPEP Feedback Report** – Drawn directly from the SPEP Feedback Report.
- **Goal Area** – This entails a statement articulating the goal(s) the [Performance Improvement Team](#) has decided to work on. Goals should be responsive to recommendations in the Feedback Report.
- **Action Steps** – These are defined action steps necessary to complete a particular goal.
- **Person(s) Responsible** – The person(s) responsible for a particular action step.
- **Target Date and Date of Completion** – Estimated times for the completion for a particular action step and the actual date of completion.
- **Goal Progress Updates** – Approximately every three months, a written narrative summary of progress toward the completion of each goal. These summaries should provide the basis for the discussion of progress during each of the [Progress Update Meetings/Calls](#). These

timeframes are approximations and are flexible in order to meet the needs of the service provider and juvenile probation personnel involved.

### **Performance Improvement Plan Finalization Meeting or Conference Call**

The purpose of this meeting or call is to review and finalize the SPEP performance improvement plan. The SPEP performance improvement plan will be reviewed by the Performance Improvement Team to ensure that there is agreement on improvement objectives. Upon agreement, Progress Update Meetings/Calls will be initiated. Ideally, these meetings or calls will occur approximately every three months following the finalization of the SPEP performance improvement plan for a minimum of one year, if necessary. The purpose of the Progress Update Meetings/Calls is dual: (1.) assess progress toward the completion of the SPEP performance improvement plan and (2.) provide a formal opportunity for technical assistance, if needed.

### **Accessing technical assistance**

Assistance with the performance improvement plan can be accessed at any point in the SPEP process through the EPISCenter JJSIS as well as others with expertise in continuous quality improvement. Progress Update Meetings/Calls can be used to identify and develop resources, assist with the facilitation of collaborative relationships between service providers and juvenile probation departments.

The Progress Update Meetings /Calls will continue until the SPEP performance improvement plan is fully implemented. Upon completion of the Plan, the Performance Improvement Team will develop preliminary plans for the Re-assessment of that service and/or SPEP of another service.

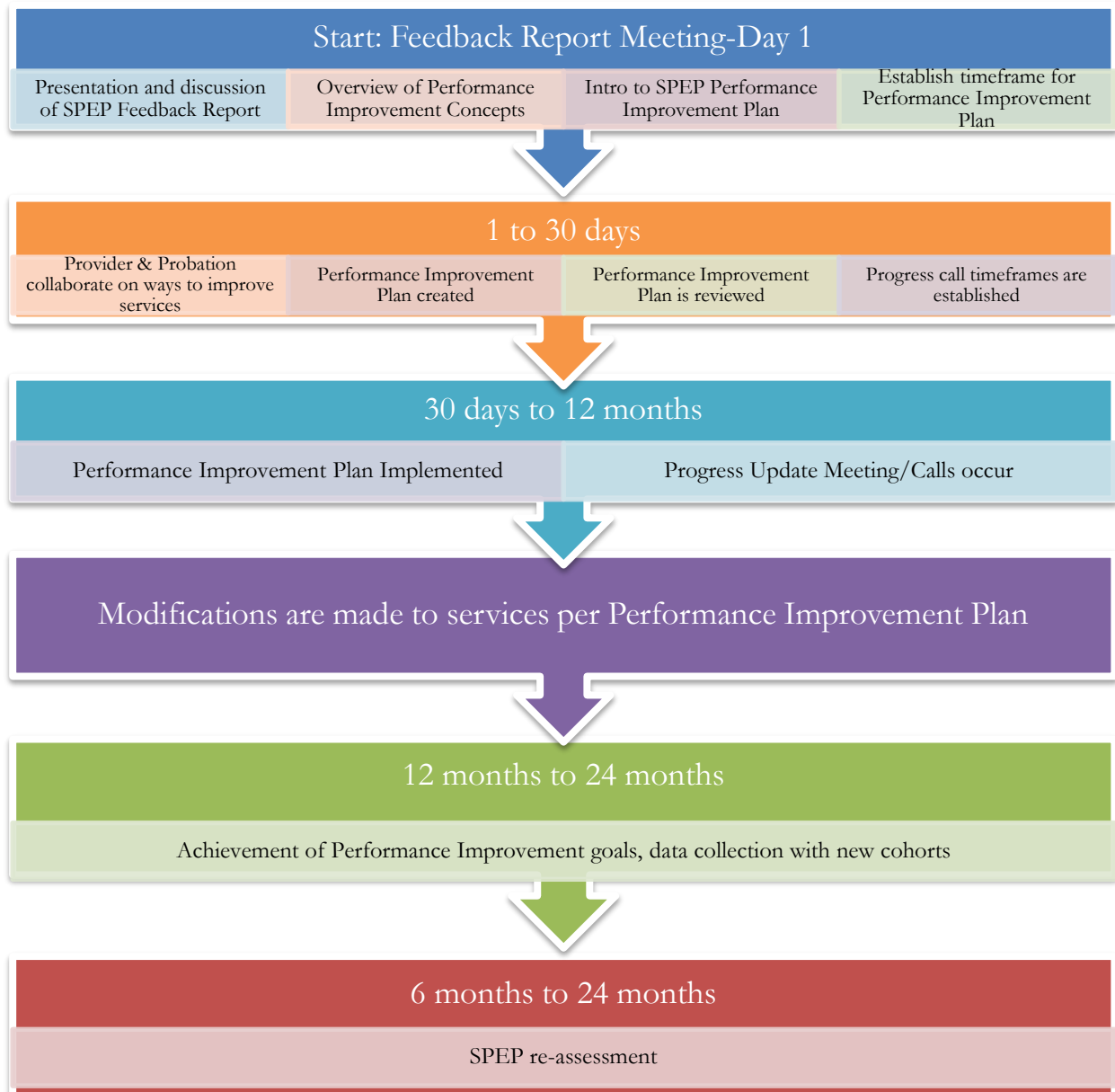
**“To accomplish great things we must first dream, then visualize, then plan...believe...act!”**

- Anatole France

## Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) – Performance Improvement

### Performance Improvement Process Timeframes and Protocols

The [Performance Improvement Team](#) will meet on or about 30 days following the presentation of the [SPEP Feedback Report](#). Additional time will be given if a service provider is unable to meet within those timeframes as a result of their need to obtain approval from within their organization before selecting a performance improvement plan template.



## Glossary

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### **Cohort**

A group of 10 or more youth (the larger the cohort the better) who have received the service within a specified time frame, but are no longer receiving the service. The time frame selected must exceed the amount of time the service provider delivers the service in its entirety.

### **Evidence-based Practice**

Applying what we know in terms of research to what we do in our work with youth, their families, and the communities in which we live. It is the progressive, organizational use of direct, current scientific evidence to guide and inform efficient and effective services. It is through the use of research evidence and the demonstration of outcomes that Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system can achieve and confirm the effectiveness of its BARJ mission.<sup>8</sup>

### **Performance Improvement Team**

Includes a representative(s) from the county juvenile probation office, service Provider, EPISCenter Juvenile Justice System Improvement Specialist, and/or EPISCenter contracted consultant.

### **Progress Update Meetings/Calls**

The meetings/calls between the service provider, probation and the EPISCenter Juvenile Justice System Improvement Specialist, and/or EPISCenter contracted consultant.

### **Recidivism**

A subsequent delinquency adjudication or conviction in criminal court for either a misdemeanor or felony offense within two years of case closure.<sup>9</sup>

### **Resource material**

Items needed i.e., spreadsheets, templates, and written protocol examples.

### **SPEP Fact Sheets**

Descriptions of the SPEP Primary and Supplemental Service Categories that are used to best match a service.

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<sup>8</sup> Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy. Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, April 2012, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Justine Fowler, Rebecca Anderson, Linda Bender, and Tom Green, Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, “The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Recidivism Report: Juveniles with a 2007 Case Closure”, April 2013, p.2.

**SPEP Feedback Report**

Also known as: The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) Review and Recommendations. The document created after that SPEP Service Classification Interview, Quality Measures Interview and data collection for Service Amount and Level of Risk that includes; the Basic Score and POP Score along with Summary Recommendations and Baseline Findings.

## Appendix

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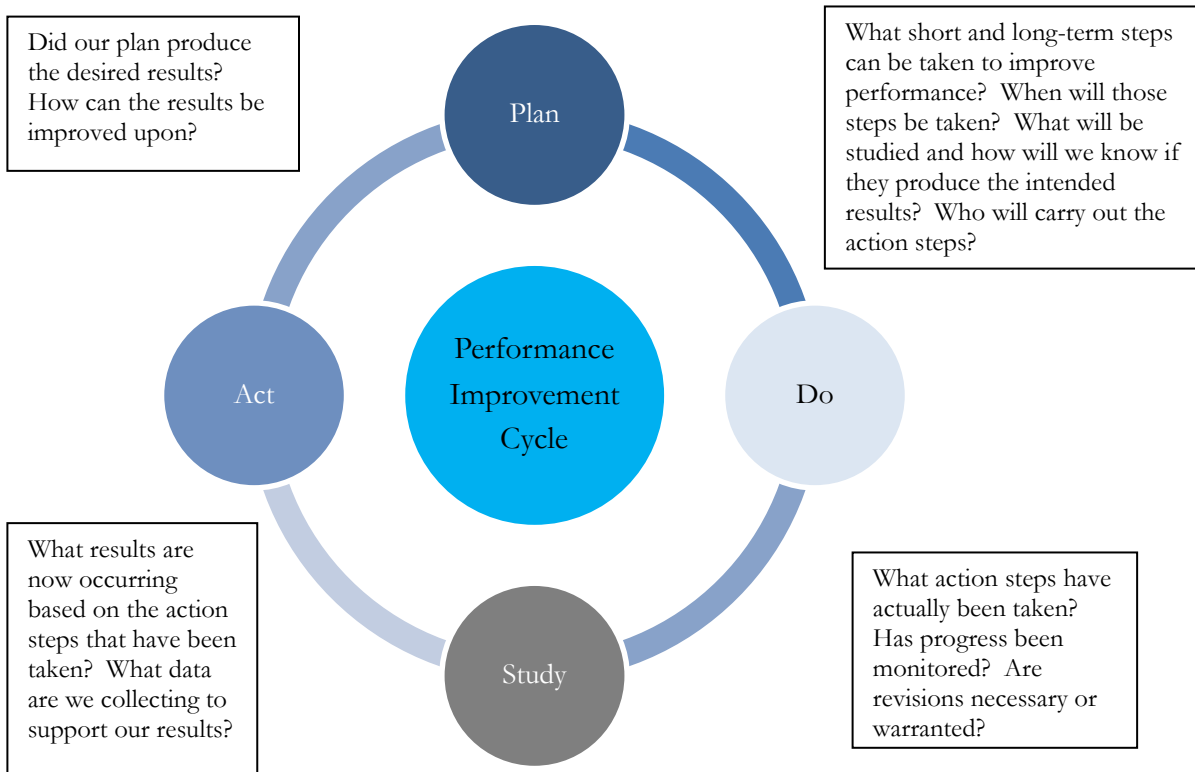
### Overview of Performance Improvement Concepts

Service providers and juvenile probation officers may be familiar with the concepts of performance improvement and have likely implemented performance improvement processes and practices within their organizations. The purpose of this overview is to ensure a common framework of understanding among all stakeholders in the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES).

- **What is performance improvement?**
  - A cyclical process of assessing performance, making improvements and assessing results to achieve the best possible outcomes
  - A primary focus on the development and/or refinement of systems and processes that lead to improved outcomes, not a focus on individuals
  - Driven by data
- **Critical elements of successful performance improvement systems**
  - Leadership commitment and involvement
  - An organizational culture that values the open examination of performance and welcomes participation from all levels of the organization in the performance improvement process
  - Data collection systems
  - Communication systems that keep everyone informed and involved
  - An organizational culture in which the pursuit of excellence is a core value
- **Is there a standard model?**
  - Although there are different models of performance improvement, the “Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)” cycle of performance improvement is a commonly used model and presented below as an example:
    - **Plan:** Identify the plan to improve a particular aspect of organizational performance. Involve all stakeholders and establish clear goals. Identify baseline data used to measure improvement.
    - **Do:** Implement the plan.
    - **Study:** Determine if the plan is working. Assess the data.
    - **Act:** Revise, modify and implement as necessary. Determine how to achieve optimal improvements.



## Plan, Do, Study, Act Performance Improvement Model<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/qi/toolbox/print/pdsa.pdf>

## S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Planning Form

Writing clear performance improvement goals can enhance an organization's ability to achieve desired results. A commonly used model for the development of performance improvement goals is known as S.M.A.R.T.<sup>11</sup> The S.M.A.R.T. Model is recommended when developing performance improvement goals based on the recommendations and findings found within the [SPEP Feedback Report](#).

**S.M.A.R.T.** is an acronym for:

- **Specific** - Goals should be simplistically written and clearly define what you are going to do. Answers the questions; who? and what?

**Example:** Develop a written protocol of the service delivered with weekly lessons describing the subject matter, how to facilitate the lesson and the materials needed.

- **Measurable** - Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. Answers the question, how?

**Example:** Workgroup will meet weekly to complete a minimum of one lesson a week for a predetermined number of weeks. Monthly review meetings will be held by workgroup and leadership to assess progress made to adjust deadlines as needed.

- **Attainable** - Goals should realistic; they should be challenging but be defined well enough so that you can achieve them.

**Example:** Weekly lessons will be assigned to workgroups that can adequately distribute the workload in order to meet deadlines. Workgroup members will be given additional time to complete assignments, when needed, due to their normal responsibilities. Leadership will meet bi-weekly to measure the progress and ensure that the workgroup has adequate time and resources to meet the deadline.

- **Relevant (results oriented)** - Goals should be aligned with current tasks and measure outcomes, not activities.

**Example:** Completion of a written protocol with weekly lessons is the outcome. Progress made towards this outcome is measured by the number of weekly lessons completed rather than the amount of time and resources spent on the outcome.

- **Time framed** - Goals should be linked to a timeframe that creates a practical sense of urgency, or results in tension between the current reality and the vision of the goal.

**Example:** Progress regarding the written protocol will be measured weekly to ensure the target date while considering other activities. Responsibilities of workgroup members may be delegated to ensure that the target date for the written protocol is met.

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<sup>11</sup> Doran, George T. "There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives." *Management review* 70.11 (1981): 35-36.

## SMART Goal Planning Form<sup>12</sup>

Specific – WHO? WHAT?

Measurement/Assessment – HOW?

Attainable/Achieve – REASONABLE?

Relevant – EXPECTED RESULT?

By

Timed – WHEN?

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <http://hrg.stanford.edu/documents/SMARTGOALSTemplate2012.doc>