

Driver Accountability Program

The Driver Accountability Program is an innovative response to driving-related offenses that seeks to improve traffic safety and increase accountability among dangerous drivers. The program is rooted in principles of restorative justice, self-reflection, and self-empowerment. With support from New York City Council, the Center for Court Innovation operates the program in all five boroughs, playing a critical role in reducing systemic harms caused by fines, criminal convictions, and incarceration.

The Driver Accountability Program is available to individuals who are charged with driving-related offenses in Criminal Court. It serves as an alternative to fines or jail, or as a pre-condition of dismissal or reduction in charges for vehicular offenses such as reckless driving, driving while intoxicated, driving with a suspended license, and failure to yield to a pedestrian. The program curriculum was developed by the Center for Court Innovation with input from a working group that included Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, Families for Safe Streets, Transportation Alternatives, elected officials, and other stakeholders. Launched in 2015, the program has since served over 3,500 participants citywide.

The Curriculum

The 90-minute group session takes a restorative approach. Rather than sitting through a lecture, participants actively engage in exercises and discussions guided by a trained facilitator. After a brief introduction, participants complete a questionnaire that requires them to rate and describe their driving beliefs and behaviors, prompting them to engage in meaningful self-reflection. Participants are then asked to share their answers, which are used as a framework for a broader discussion about what constitutes dangerous driving and why.

A critical component of the program is incorporation of the victims' voice. Participants watch

"Drive Like Your Family Lives Here," a video that includes testimonials from those who have lost loved ones to traffic violence. Facilitators then lead a discussion about the video and the importance of thinking more broadly about one's place on the roads and broader community.

In the latter part of the session, participants are required to identify two to three driving behaviors that they are committed to changing. Participants identify concrete steps they can take to effectuate those changes. The goal is to empower the participants to become agents of their own change, making it more likely that they will follow through and hold themselves accountable in the future.

Impact

The Center for Court Innovation's research department published a participant-focused evaluation of the program in February 2022. The evaluation measured program impact through a comparison of participant self-reported surveys at the start of, and 30 days following, the program session, as well as in-depth interviews. Researchers are also examining program impact through an ongoing recidivism analysis, which will be published in an addendum to the report.

Based on feedback from those who completed the follow-up survey, 91 percent reported that their driving behavior had changed, and 78% of respondents attributed this change directly to

the Driver Accountability Program. When asked to share what they found most useful about the program, participants cited the dialogue and open conversations about their driving behaviors, identifying steps they can take to change, and hearing from those who have been victims of dangerous driving.

Participant Feedback

- « *Taking the time to sit down and listen to stories of other people...makes you reflect and think that you have to be a bit more careful, that there are people on the street, and that they have nothing to do with your time.*
- « *I will remember to think of the other people and that we have significant responsibility in handling the vehicle safely as part of a community.*
- « *There were moments when I was driving and I didn't notice that I had gone from 25 mph, which is the speed limit, and I had reached 30 or 35 mph without realizing it. And now after the program, I check my speedometer more often. I look at the signs that are on the street.*
- « *The course impacted the way I think and the way I view driving. Learning from my peers' experience and the reasons why they were in the class was eye opening. I realized how often I didn't think of the more serious consequences of driving, and I will try to be more careful in the future because I don't want to hurt anyone and wouldn't want anyone hurting my kids while driving.*

For More Information

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