The Driver Accountability Program

A Participant-Focused Evaluation of a New York City Alternative Sentencing Program

By Emily Sexton & Jeffrey Sharlein

Center for Court Innovation

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Executive Summary

Every year, traffic crashes injure tens of thousands of people on New York City streets, killing hundreds. Punitive responses to traffic violence, such as fines, fees, or incarceration fail to address the problematic driving beliefs that lead to unsafe driving. Moreover, such approaches frequently result in economic and racial disparities, furthering the historic and systemic harms caused by our justice system. The Driver Accountability Program, a project of the Center for Court Innovation, addresses both these crises, seeking to make our streets safer and our justice system more effective, equitable, and humane. Emphasizing reflection and accountability, the program aims to simultaneously reduce harm caused on our streets while also reducing the harm caused by the system that responds. Currently operating across six project sites in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island, the program is a 90-minute session offered to individuals with driving-related charges in New York City criminal court.

The current study evaluated the program through pre- and post-program surveys and participant interviews. The surveys measured changes in participants' driving habits and beliefs following the program. The interviews explored participants' feedback for the program as well as the perceived impact of the program on their driving.

Major Findings

Overall, this evaluation suggests a positive impact of the Driver Accountability Program. Participants' survey scores improved across both driving beliefs and driving habits measures, and most participants reported improvements in their driving following the session. Furthermore, those participants who were interviewed had generally positive feedback.

- **Program Participants** The majority of Driver Accountability Program participants reside in Brooklyn or Staten Island. Three-quarters of participants are Black or Latinx and 90% are male.

- **Charge Profile** Nearly all participants faced a misdemeanor- or violation-level charge. The most common charges include aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle, driving under the influence, and motor vehicle license violations. Other violations of the vehicle and traffic laws (VTL) and non-VTL charges make up 40% of charges.

- **Changes in Driving Beliefs and Habits** Mean scores for seven out of ten measures improved somewhat from the pre- to the post-survey. The driving beliefs index score improved significantly from the pre- to the post-program survey, suggesting safer driving beliefs following program participation. Survey results for the driving habits section of the survey show improvement in mean scores for 11 of 13 driving habits. The driving habits index score also improved significantly, suggesting safer reported driving habits following program participation.

- **Overall Program Impact** All participants who answered the question about whether their overall driving had changed since the incident that led them to the program responded in the affirmative. Eighty-five percent of responding participants attributed changes explicitly to the Driver Accountability Program.

- **Participant Perceptions** Overall, participants expressed positive program experiences. According to participant interviews, the most compelling program components include the "Drive Like Your Family Lives Here" video and the opportunity for group discussion. The video shows firsthand the impact of dangerous driving on victims and their families. Interviewees reported that hearing from and connecting with other participants promoted self-reflection and a feeling of being less alone.

Chapter 1

Introduction

While traffic crashes and fatalities have declined since the 1990s, both crashes and other vehicular incidents remain a major problem in New York City (Vision Zero 2021). Across the city, there were over one million traffic tickets issued annually between 2016 and 2020; approximately 65% of these tickets were specifically issued for unsafe moving violations.[1] In 2018, New York City saw a total of 62,764 traffic-related injuries and more than 200 traffic fatalities.[2] While there have been fewer traffic-related injuries in subsequent years, the number of traffic fatalities has recently increased again.[3] Dangerous driving behaviors such as driving while intoxicated, speeding, and failing to yield are the primary cause of these fatalities in New York City.[4]

Traffic safety has gained traction as a central legislative issue city- and statewide. Launched in 2014 and inspired by a similar successful campaign which started in Sweden and expanded across the globe, Vision Zero NYC is an initiative aimed at improving traffic safety throughout the city, with the goal of eliminating all traffic deaths by the year 2024 (Vision Zero, 2021). Initiative projects include speed cameras, increased enforcement of moving violations, city infrastructure changes, education, and awareness campaigns.

Low-income and BIPOC[5] communities are disproportionately affected by traffic injuries and fatalities (Morency et al. 2012). In addition, there are racial disparities in traffic stops—Black drivers are stopped more frequently than white drivers (Pierson et al. 2020). Overall, low-income Black and Latinx people are not only disproportionately injured, but also disproportionally ticketed and arrested in vehicular incidents across the United States.

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[1] Data from the Institute for Traffic Safety Management & Research's New York State Traffic Safety Statistical Repository. Retrieved from https://www.itsmr.org/TSSR/.

[2] Data from New York City Department of Transportation's Vision Zero View. Retrieved from https://vzv.nyc/.

[3] There were 244 traffic fatalities citywide in 2019, 242 in 2020, and 226 as of November 24, 2021. Data accessed through NYC Crash Mapper at http://crashmapper.org/#/.

[4] Data from the Institute for Traffic Safety Management & Research's New York State Traffic Safety Statistical Repository. Retrieved from https://www.itsmr.org/TSSR/.

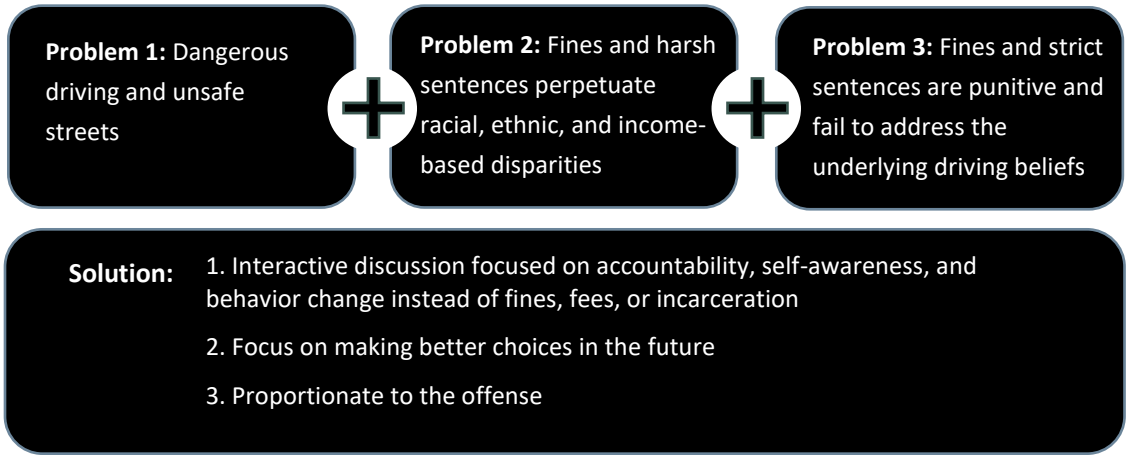
[5] i.e., Black, indigenous, and people of color.

According to a 2020 report, the driver's license suspension rate is two-and-a-half times higher in the ten New York City zip codes with the greatest density of people of color than in the ten zip codes with the highest concentration of white people (New York Law School Racial Justice Project 2020). Increasing policing, punishment-oriented legislation, and harsh sentencing surrounding driving has the potential to exacerbate existing disparities. Fines disproportionately impact those who are unable to pay and can lead to license suspension or arrest. License suspension, in turn, can impact mobility and, consequently, employment and childcare (Fines & Fees Justice Center 2021). The goal of traffic safety initiatives such as the Center for Court Innovation's Driver Accountability Program is to encourage education and reflection around traffic safety while minimizing punitive responses.

The Driver Accountability Program

The Driver Accountability Program is a one-session group intervention available to individuals arrested for driving-related incidents across New York City. The program draws upon the Vision Zero model, which emphasizes the importance of public education and individual accountability to combat dangerous driving and driving-related fatalities. The New York City program model is outlined in Figure 1.1 below. The goals of the program are to increase participants' awareness of their driving habits and beliefs, encourage reflection, and ultimately improve driving behaviors without imposing harsh fines and sentences.

Figure 1.1: The Driver Accountability Program Addresses Unsafe Driving without Punitive Measures that Increase Disparities



Center for Court Innovation staff created the Driver Accountability Program in collaboration with the Kings County District Attorney's Office, City Council Member Brad Lander, Transportation Alternatives, and Families for Safe Streets. The program was piloted in 2015 at the Red Hook Community Justice Center and expanded to the Staten Island Justice Center (2017) and Brooklyn Justice Initiatives (2018). Over the past two years, the program expanded to three more sites, Manhattan Justice Opportunities and Bronx Community Solutions (both 2020) and Queens Community Justice Center (2021), for a total of six sites operating across all five boroughs. In 2020, the program served over 2,500 individuals.

All sites offer services in both English and Spanish. If there are not enough participants to schedule a group session or if one-on-one translation is needed, staff provide individual sessions, following the same program curriculum and structure as the group sessions.

The curriculum for the 90-minute program has three main components:

1. **Driving Reflection Survey** Participants complete a survey, which asks them to reflect on their existing driving habits and beliefs, either prior to or at the start of the session. The survey was translated and adapted from two surveys utilized in Swedish traffic studies (Åberg and Rimmo 1998; Ulleberg and Rundmo 2002). During the session, participants share their answers and engage in group discussion regarding their own driving and dangerous driving more generally.

2. **"Drive Like Your Family Lives Here"** This brief video, created by Families for Safe Streets, Transportation Alternatives, and various City agencies, includes testimonials from people who have lost loved ones due to traffic crashes caused by unsafe driving. After viewing it, participants discuss their reactions. The video also provides a springboard for discussing the impact of participants' own driving on the community.

3. **Identifying Safe and Risky Driving Behaviors and Action Steps** Participants identify two to three of their own unsafe driving behaviors that they are committed to changing, as well as a safe counteraction (e.g., replacing rolling stops with full stops at stop signs). Participants work with facilitators to name concrete action steps they commit to using going forward based on the counteractions identified. Sample action steps might include looking both ways before turning left and scheduling enough time to arrive at a destination.

Beginning in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic affected caseload and programming for the Driver Accountability Program. Courts were closed, creating a backlog of cases across New York City and impacting program referrals (Feuer et al. 2020). Further, in accordance with health and safety protocols, programming was conducted virtually, through Zoom or by phone, beginning in March 2020. Programming continues to be virtual as of this writing.

Program Eligibility & Participant Demographics

The Driver Accountability Program serves English- and Spanish-speaking individuals, aged 16 and older, who are arrested and charged with traffic-related offenses such as reckless driving, driving with a suspended license, and driving while impaired/intoxicated. Participants with non-traffic-related charges may also be mandated to the program if their arrest resulted from a driving-related incident. Participants can enter the program as a condition of a guilty plea, or as a precondition for getting the charges reduced or dismissed.[6]

Top charges faced by program participants during the evaluation period (participants from November 2020 through September 2021) are shown in Table 1.1, along with participant demographics and program sites. Almost all cases are misdemeanor- or violation-level charges (87%). Participants are overwhelmingly male and Black or Latinx. Over half of participants took part in the program at Brooklyn Justice Initiatives; Staten Island Justice Center had the second largest volume.

Figure 1.1 presents the breakdown of participants' ZIP code of residence; consistent with the program site break-down in Table 1.1, most live in Brooklyn and Staten Island. The Brooklyn and Staten Island project sites (Red Hook Community Justice Center, Brooklyn Justice Initiatives, Staten Island Justice Center) have been running the Driver Accountability Program for the longest amount of time and have greater capacity in comparison to the other project sites in Manhattan and the Bronx, which may explain the greater number of participants from these boroughs.

[6] Driving-related offenses include VTL 1212 (Reckless Driving); VTL 1192 (Driving While Intoxicated); VTL 511 and 509 (Driving with a Suspended or No License); AC 19-190 (Failure to Yield to a Pedestrian). The program can also be mandated in conjunction with other sanctions, such as community service, defensive driving classes, restorative justice circle discussions, or requirements to address a suspended license with the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Table 1.1. Charge, Demographic, and Site Information of Participants, November 2020 – September 2021

	N	625
Top Arrest Charges[1]		
Aggravated Unlicensed Operation (VTL 511)		40%
Driving While Intoxicated (VTL 1192)		11%
Motor Vehicle License Violation (VTL 509)		9%
Leaving the Scene of an Accident (VTL 600)		3%
Other VTL Charge[2]		13%
Non-VTL Charge		27%
Charge Severity		
Felony		13%
Misdemeanor		64%
Violation/Infraction		23%
Demographics		
Age[3]		
Average age		33 years
Age categories		
16-24 years		24%
25-54 years		70%
55+ years		6%
Gender[4]		
Male		90%
Female		9%
Other/Gender Non-conforming		<1%
Race/Ethnicity[5]		
Black/African American		48%
Latinx/Hispanic		27%
White		17%
Asian		3%
Other		5%
Site		
Brooklyn Justice Initiatives		52%
Bronx Community Solutions		13%
Manhattan Justice Opportunities		6%
Red Hook Community Justice Center		13%
Staten Island Justice Center		16%

[1] Data missing for 25 participants

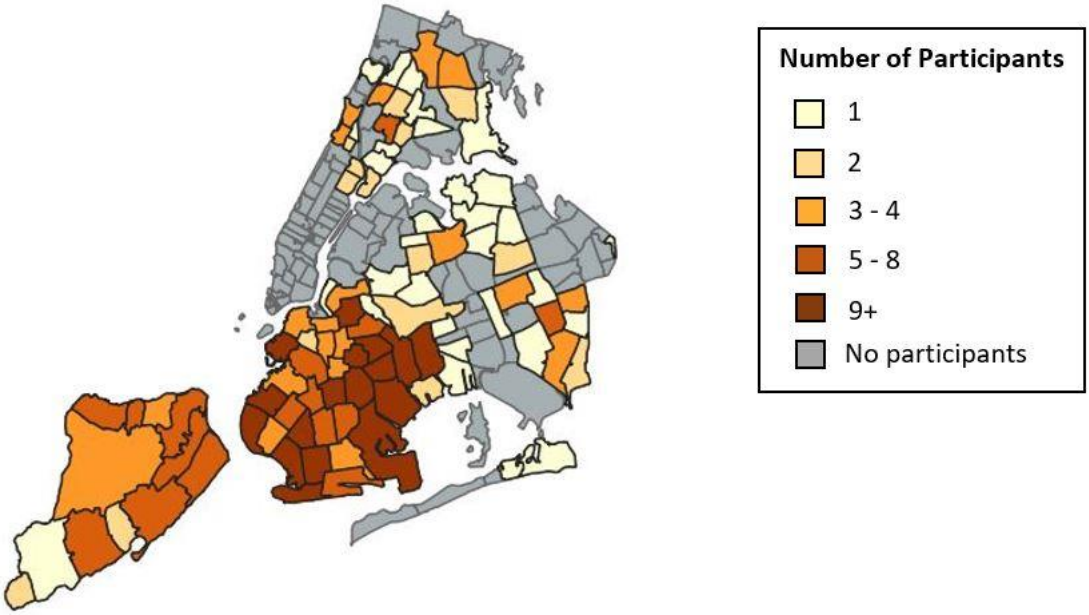
[2] VTL Charges represented by <3% of cases

[3] Data missing for 6 participants

[4] Data missing for 10 participants

[5] Data missing for 12 participants

Figure 1.2. November 2020 – September 2021 Participants Largely Reside in Brooklyn and Staten Island



The Current Study

The current study seeks to assess the effectiveness of the Center for Court Innovation's Driver Accountability Program on participants' self-reported driving habits and beliefs, based on responses to pre- and post-program surveys. Further, the study draws on interviews with participants to learn about their program experience. The study examines the following research questions:

1. **Increased awareness of dangerous habits:** Do participants report increased awareness of potentially dangerous driving habits 30 days following their session?

2. **Improved awareness of problematic beliefs:** Do participants report less problematic beliefs surrounding driving 30 days following their session?

3. **Program perceptions:** What do participants think of the program session components? What recommendations do participants have to improve the program for future participants?

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

The current study draws on data collected from participant pre- and post-surveys and post-program interviews. Surveys and interviews were conducted with individuals who completed the program from November 2020 through September 2021.

Surveys

Researchers utilized pre- and post-surveys to elicit information about driving habits and beliefs immediately preceding program participation and again 30 days following participation. The Driving Reflection Survey, described above as one component of the program curriculum, served as the pre-survey. Facilitators sent pre-survey links to scheduled participants prior to sessions or administered the surveys orally during sessions; data were collected from electronic surveys (i.e., via link) but not from oral surveys. The post-survey was nearly identical to the initial survey, with three additional questions about how the program affected participants, including one open-ended question. The researchers sent a reminder text to all program participants approximately two weeks following their session and sent a link to the post-survey approximately 30 days after their session. The researchers sent follow-up texts with the survey link one and two weeks after sending the post-survey link initially, to participants who had neither completed nor explicitly declined to take the post-survey. Surveys were available in both English and Spanish. A $10 electronic payment was offered to participants who completed the follow-up survey.

A total of 625 individuals participated in the program during the data collection period; of these, 20% completed an electronic pre-survey and were included in the analysis. Though the Driving Reflection Survey is a required part of the program, many participants who were sent the survey link did not complete it. Additionally, the survey was conducted orally as part of the group session for most of the study period at Staten Island Justice Center and Brooklyn Justice Initiatives and for the whole study period at Red Hook Community Justice Center. Thirteen percent of program participants during the study period (n=80) completed the post-survey. Table 2.1 shows the breakdowns by program site for program participation, electronically-recorded pre-survey responses, and post-survey responses.

Table 2.1. Survey Respondents had a Large Representation from the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Island

	% of all Participants	% of Pre-Survey Responses	% of Post-Survey Responses
N	625	123[1]	80[2]
Brooklyn Justice Initiatives	52%	15%	44%
Bronx Community Solutions	13%	26%	13%
Manhattan Justice Opportunities	6%	24%	10%
Red Hook Community Justice Center	13%	0%	10%
Staten Island Justice Center	16%	35%	23%

[1] Site data missing for 7 participants

[2] Site data missing for 2 participants

The surveys included two primary domains: participants' beliefs about driving behaviors and their driving habits. The ten questions in the driving beliefs section had participants rate their thoughts on specific driving behaviors on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Beliefs addressed in this section include speeding, checking license and insurance status, and thinking about the possibility of injuring or killing another person or oneself while driving. The 13-question driving habits section asked participants to rate how frequently they engage in specified behaviors on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Habits addressed in this section include speeding, rolling through stop signs, breaking traffic rules, driving while distracted, and driving under the influence. See Appendix A for the full list of survey questions in these domains.

We compared pre- and post-survey responses on both individual items and domain index scores (i.e., driving beliefs index and driving habits index) to see whether beliefs and habits shifted from just before the program to 30 days following it. Where necessary, we reverse-coded scores so that lower scores indicate safer beliefs and habits across all items. Researchers planned to match pre- and post-survey data by individual-level identifiers (i.e., participant-provided contact information) for a paired sample analysis; however, data discrepancies between the survey samples resulted in an insufficient matched sample. Instead, we used aggregate data from the pre- and post-surveys, conducting one-sample t-tests in SPSS to compare mean values from the pre- and post-survey responses. We grouped open-ended responses from the follow-up survey and analyzed them thematically.

Interviews

Researchers conducted structured interviews with ten program participants. Interviews included questions regarding participants' driving experience, past driving habits, program experience, feedback on the program, and perceptions of program impact. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and ranged from 20 to 45 minutes in length.

Interview participants were recruited from the pool of all program participants aged 18 and older. Following the program session, facilitators informed participants of the opportunity to participate in an optional interview; program facilitators passed the names and contact information of interested participants on to the researchers. Although Driver Accountability Program participants from all five evaluation sites were invited to participate in interviews, individuals from only two program sites—Bronx Community Solutions and Red Hook Community Justice Center—opted to be interviewed. Thirty program participants expressed initial interest in the interviews. Of these, ten completed interviews; 16 did not respond to researchers' outreach attempts, two missed scheduled interview appointments and did not respond to further outreach, and two were no longer interested after finding out more about the interview. Interviews were offered in both English and Spanish; a total of nine interviews were conducted in English and one in Spanish. A $35 electronic payment was provided to each participant in exchange for their time and contribution. All interviews were conducted virtually and recorded via Zoom.

The researchers used a deductive coding approach to analyze interview responses. We created a codebook based on the sections of the interview protocol, including introductory questions on driving habits and beliefs, curriculum feedback, overall program impact, general experiences driving in New York City, and experiences interacting with driving systems in the city (e.g., Department of Motor Vehicles, police). We then coded the interviews according to these categories as appropriate; emergent themes were coded inductively. We relied on MAXQDA software to facilitate the coding process.

Chapter 3

Changes in Driving

This chapter presents survey and interview findings pertaining to changes in self-reported driving beliefs and habits, as well as interviewees' perceptions of program impacts.

Driving Beliefs

Results in Table 3.1 (top half) show that the mean scores for seven of the ten driving beliefs questions improved (i.e., decreased) somewhat from the pre- to the post-program survey. Most of these changes are relatively small in magnitude; four are statistically significant: (1) Driving 5-10mph over the speed limit is not a big deal; (2) It is okay to speed if traffic conditions allow me to; (3) It is okay to roll through a stop sign as long as I don't see anyone there; and (4) It is important to make sure that my license and insurance are in good standing before I drive. The mean scores for the questions pertaining to driving through yellow lights and thinking about the possibility of injuring or killing another person or oneself while driving were *worse* at post-test; however, this may stem from the fact that participants learned from the program session, so their answers show more self-reflection at post-survey. The change in the driving beliefs index score also reflected a statistically significant improvement between the pre- and post-tests toward safer driving beliefs.

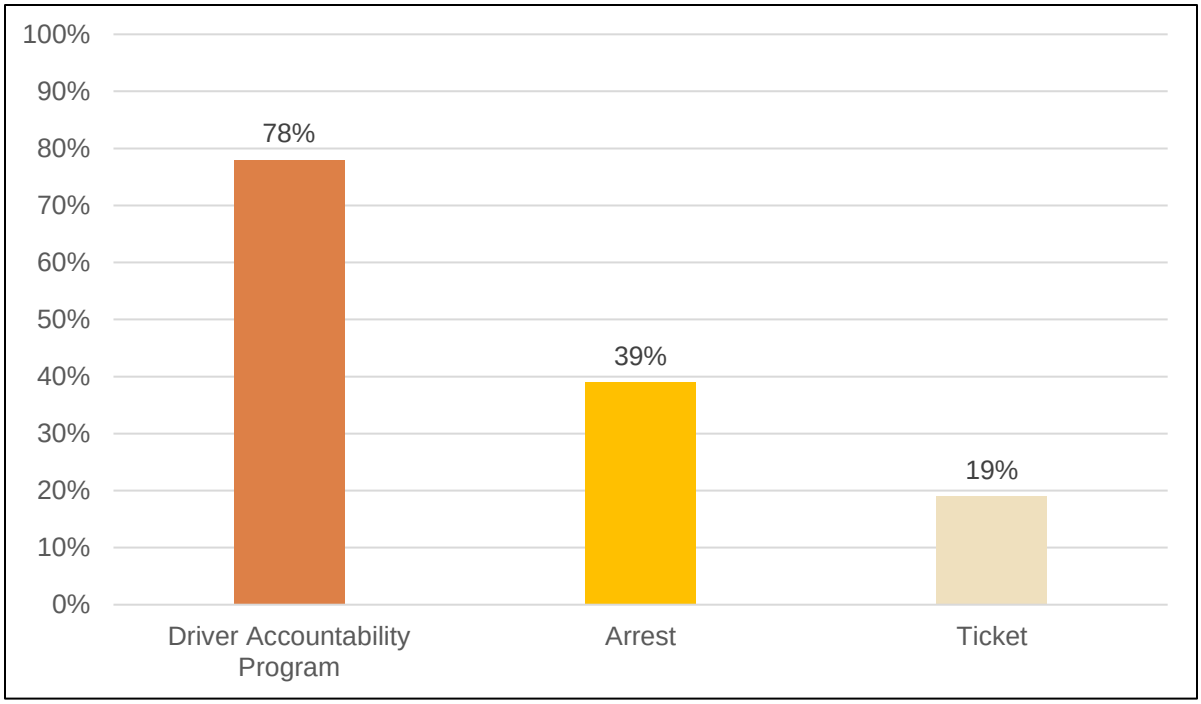
Driving Habits

Results in the lower half of Table 3.1 reflect an improvement in mean scores for 11 of the 13 safe driving habits questions. Six of these improvements reach or approach statistical significance, including the questions regarding speeding, driving through yellow lights, multi-tasking while driving, drinking and driving, and driving without a valid license. Likewise, the change in the driving habits index was also statistically significant, representing overall improvements in reported driving habits. It is possible that some of the changes towards less safe driving habits as indicated by the survey results are actually the result of increased awareness of unsafe driving habits as a result of the program session.

Respondents to the post-survey were also asked whether their overall driving had changed since the incident that led them to the Driver Accountability Program. All participants who answered this question (91% of post-survey respondents) reported that their driving had changed. Participants who believed their driving had changed were asked what led to those changes: the Driver Accountability Program, the arrest, or the ticket (respondents could

select multiple responses). Of the 73 participants who believed that their overall driving had changed, most (78%) attributed at least some of that change to their participation in the program (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Most Participants Believe their Driving Changed and Attributed at Least Part of that Change to the Program (N=73)



All ten participants who participated in post-program interviews reported entering the program with at least one risky driving habit, though most (70%) felt that they were generally cautious and/or had minimal risky driving habits. The risky habits reported by interviewees include driving under the influence, speeding, and aggressive driving.[7] All interviewees felt that the program helped them to engage less in risky driving.

With regards to drinking and driving, one interviewee stated, "I mean, I got a DWI, so that's definitely a risky driving habit…other than that, I always wear my seatbelt, I always checked everything before I left. So, I was really cautious about that, but I did drink and drive."

[7] These are the risky behaviors reported by interviewees during the interview. The interviews are not linked to survey data or participant records, so there is no way of determining for certain what behavior(s) led each interviewee to the program. It is possible that the behaviors noted here do not reflect the full array of risky behaviors that led them to the program.

Interviewees who reported a history of drinking and driving reported that they reduced or stopped this behavior following their arrest or ticket.

Interviewees who drove over the speed limit discussed how the program made them reflect on and change this habit.

> I think that I was a bit—not too irresponsible, but there were many things I didn't know before I enrolled in the program. For example, the speed limits around the city. I didn't know that the speed limits had changed. I hear stories…taking the time to sit down and listen to stories of other people…make 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.

Another interviewee added that while they wouldn't describe speeding as "risky," they are more aware of their driving speed since taking the class.

> I don't think they were risky habits…But 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.

Similarly, those who had previously engaged in habits such as aggressive or distracted driving reflected on the impact the program had on those behaviors:

> [During the program] you talk about your everyday driving, you talk about your experiences that you have on the street driving, the way pedestrians move, the way the bikes move, road rage, all that type of stuff. It helps you; it gives you a little nugget in your head that reminds you, every time you see something or you're going to do something that you're not supposed to do, it kind of reminds you of, listen, this could happen, just be more cautious in your driving habits.

Table 3.1. Mean Scores Showed Improvement in Driving Beliefs and Habits

	N [1]	Pre-Survey Mean 123	Post-Survey Mean 80	Change in Mean
Driving Beliefs				
Driving 5-10mph over the speed limit is not a big deal.		2.36	1.89	-0.47***
It is okay to speed if the traffic conditions allow me to.		2.08	1.82	-0.26**
It is okay to roll through a stop sign as long as I don't see anyone there.		1.78	1.25	-0.53***
It is okay to accelerate through yellow lights.		1.51	1.55	0.04
Left turns are more dangerous than right turns *(reverse coded).*		2.80	2.63	-0.17
It is okay to multi-task while driving.		1.33	1.24	-0.09
It is okay to drink before I drive, as long as I am feeling okay.		1.24	1.16	-0.08
It is important to make sure that my license and insurance are in good standing before I drive *(reverse coded).*		1.52	1.31	-0.21**
While driving, I often think about the possibility that I could injure or kill someone *(reverse coded).*		3.01	3.08	0.07
While driving I often think about the possibility that I could get injured or killed *(reverse coded).*		2.98	3.04	0.06
Driving beliefs index score [2]		**2.06**	**1.89**	**-0.17*** **
Driving Habits				
How often do you exceed the speed limit by 5-10mph?		2.25	1.83	-0.42***
How often do you pass the car in front of you when it is driving at the speed limit?		1.76	1.70	-0.06
How often do you drive too close to the car in front of you (tailgate)?		1.33	1.25	-0.08
How often do you drive through a yellow light as it is about to turn red?		1.86	1.61	-0.25**
How often do you drive through a red light when no one is around?		1.07	1.04	-0.03
How often do you roll through a stop sign without making a full stop?		1.31	1.20	-0.11+
How often do you ignore pedestrians/cyclists when you believe that you have the right-of-way?		1.09	1.10	0.01
How often do you break traffic rules because you see others doing it?		1.19	1.18	-0.01
How often do you break traffic rules in order to get where you have to go faster?		1.33	1.23	-0.10*
How often do you get annoyed or angry at other drivers and act upon this feeling?		1.44	1.39	-0.05
How often do you multi-task while driving (i.e. texting, calling, eating, checking GPS, etc.)?		1.50	1.38	-0.12*
How often do you drive after having a few drinks, because you think you're okay to drive?		1.12	1.13	0.01
How often do you drive without a valid license?		1.61	1.19	-0.42***
Driving habits index score [2]		**1.45**	**1.32**	**-0.13*** **

+p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Note: Answers were scored on a Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree in the Beliefs section and 1=Never to 5=Always in the Habits Section.

[1] Data is missing for three or fewer cases across all survey items.

[2] Index Scores represent an average of the component questions.

Chapter 4

Program Feedback

This chapter highlights participant feedback taken from survey responses and interviews. Participants were asked to provide feedback on specific program components (i.e., survey, video, safe vs. risky driving habits exercise, identification of action steps, group discussion) as well as the overall pacing and facilitation of the session and the quality of the information shared. Participants were also asked to identify their top takeaways from the program as well as any recommendations for improvement. Finally, those who participated in interviews were asked about their overall driving experience.

Driving Reflections Survey

The programmatic purpose of the baseline survey was to spark participants to reflect on their driving beliefs and habits prior to the session. Six out of ten interviewees reflected positively on the survey; the remaining four were neutral: "Some of the habits and behaviors you don't even realize you're doing. I mean like taking the survey…it's an eye opener."

Suggested improvements for the survey included the addition of open-ended questions on both the pre- and post-survey to promote reflection, critical thought, and engagement with the survey.

"Drive Like Your Family Lives Here" Video

Nearly all interviewees (90%) reported that the video had a strong impact on them, prompting them to reflect on how their actions impact others. In open-ended questions, two survey respondents identified the video as the most impactful component of the program.

> [The video] helped me a lot and it made me a more cautious driver. Especially with the example of the family where you had to imagine that one of your relatives was driving the other car…whenever I am driving down the highway, I look around, and I look at the person driving next to me and I say, he could be my uncle, or the lady next to me could be my aunt.

Some participants also noted the informative aspect of the video.

> That was the most impactful because we saw how 25 miles an hour saves lives and 45 miles an hour could kill somebody, and there were little kids that died because of speeding and texting… I think the video is one of the biggest parts of the program.

One participant suggested updating the video to include more recent examples or statistics of crashes, injuries, and fatalities in New York City.

Safe versus Risky Driving Habits

This curriculum component was intended to help participants reflect on specific risky habits and take steps towards safer driving habits. Most interviewees (70%) responded positively. For example, one interviewee expressed the feeling shared among several participants that this exercise led to increased self-reflection and subsequent intentionality in driving. The identification and naming of risky driving habits was reported by several to bring increased awareness and intentionality to their driving, thus promoting driver safety. In contrast, two interviewees wished this exercise was clearer, reporting some confusion.

Action Steps

Part of the program has participants identify concrete action steps they will take to become safer drivers. Half of the interviewees responded positively to this exercise, reporting that it helped them identify ways to be safer on the roads; several others did not recall this section.

> [The action steps have you] reflecting on the ways you always have to be aware of what is going on in the street and that there are options…I shouldn't drive this way…I can do other things with the options that I am hearing from the other people.

Group Discussion

Eight of the ten interviewees noted the benefits of the group component of the program. Some mentioned the importance of gaining others' perspectives from the group discussion: "Everybody in general tends to have a biased opinion but when you're able to hear everybody's opinion you're able to see it in a different way."

Another participant mentioned feeling less alone after hearing others' similar experiences.

> Since the accident I've changed my driving ways, but this program…let me know that I'm not the only person that's been going through this, there are other people out there that are going through it. And it's helped me to think about….it reminds you that you're not alone in this.

Overall Session Quality

Interviewees were asked about the pacing and facilitation of the session and the amount of information shared. Nearly all (90%) felt that the session was well-paced: "I was able to get information and also talk to [the facilitators] about it. I was also able to ask questions, and they were open and answered questions as well." "The rhythm was very good. They took the time to listen to the questions we asked. They gave us very clear information and it was also very direct…they didn't interrupt us, and they allowed us to express ourselves."

All ten interviewees rated program facilitation positively, noting that facilitators were helpful and knowledgeable.

> There were times where I didn't understand a certain thing, and I would ask [the facilitators] to reiterate, and they did that…I was able to actually have a conversation with these two people. It wasn't a session where I just sat there and just listened throughout the whole session. They let me talk as well.

Six of ten interviewees commented on the amount of information shared, and all rated it favorably. Participants commented that the information included was "precise" and "direct." "It's perfect because…they didn't feed you too much information or too little information, they fed you what was important, what was impactful."

Top Takeaways

Survey respondents were asked to identify the key takeaways or most meaningful program components. Responses largely fell into four categories:

- The opportunity to discuss experiences with other participants during the group discussion;
- Reinforcement or reminder of traffic rules;
- Awareness of the risks of some common behaviors (e.g., distractions, speeding); and
- The potential impact of dangerous driving behavior, particularly the impact of traffic crashes and fatalities on children and loved ones like their own.

All interviewees felt the program would be of benefit to others; six recommended that *all* drivers would benefit from the course.

> [I] would like to see more people in these programs. I'd like to see these programs offered at the DMV. I think there should be advertising at the DMV for people to take the program before they get their license. It would be very beneficial to have programs like

these and learn about the ways that drivers fail and mistakes you can make so that they don’t make them.

I think everybody should [take the course], even people that haven't been through DWIs or hurt somebody or have traffic violations. I think everybody could benefit from it, not just people that are in trouble. Everyday people can make mistakes, it's not just drinking and driving…it’s being distracted, and, you know, accidents happen, and I think people being more aware can save a lot of detrimental things happening.

General Driving Experience

Interviewees were asked about general experiences driving in New York City and interacting with driving-related systems such as the DMV and police. This section was more exploratory than other portions of the interview, intended to examine emergent themes across participants. Interviewees were generally relatively experienced drivers, with an average of at least five years of driving experience. Three even drove for work purposes. Two interviewees mentioned difficulties with construction and roadblocks when driving.

Sometimes you’re just so used to going on a two-way street, and from one day to the next it’s just a one-way, and you wind up basically committing a traffic violation because the sign is brand new, and you don’t pay attention to that. I think the DMV should announce sign changes somewhere…Sometimes they just change things, and we don’t even know.

Three interviewees mentioned difficulties in communicating with the police during traffic stops, such as anxiety about police interactions or aggression from officers. Another three interviewees stated that they were unsure of the processes surrounding license and registration renewal, which can lead to legal trouble.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The Driver Accountability Program is a one-time 90-minute session that aims to provide an alternative to fines, fees, and incarceration for drivers with low-level driving charges in New York City. The current study evaluated the program across the five active project sites through participant interviews and pre- and post-program surveys. This chapter highlights some overall study findings, provides recommendations for future programming, and reflects on study limitations and strengths.

Overview of Findings

Survey results reveal a significant shift toward safer beliefs and habits in the areas of speeding, running through yellow lights, rolling through stop signs, distracted driving, breaking traffic rules to get somewhere faster, and driving without a valid license. More than three-quarters of participants felt that their driving behaviors changed since their ticket or arrest, as a direct result of the program. Additionally, interviewees reported learning important facts about driving—such as speed limits and injury and fatality statistics—that led them to plan changes to their future driving behaviors.

Participants generally found little fault with the program curriculum and facilitation. Participants liked the video and found it to be engaging, informative, and emotionally impactful. Hearing the stories of individuals in the video and others in the course reminded many participants of how their driving habits can affect or harm others. Based on the interviews, the group discussion was one of the most valued aspects of the course, as it allowed participants to learn from and relate to others with similar driving experiences. The ability to share with and relate to others is a particularly important part of the curriculum intended to promote individual accountability and encourage reflection and learning.

Other aspects of the curriculum, including the survey and the safe versus risky driving habits exercise, were generally reported to be less impactful, but were still viewed as important in encouraging reflection and awareness. Lastly, the majority of interviewees found the facilitation of the course positive, and very few had criticism of the program structure, pacing, or facilitation. Most interviewees appreciated the course and found it to be impactful. Following the course, interviewees expressed a sense of individual accountability and an intention to shift towards safer driving behaviors.

Where the Program is Heading

The Driver Accountability Program continues to expand throughout the city. In 2021, the Center for Court Innovation received additional funding from the New York City Council to expand to a sixth program site, Queens Community Justice Center-Jamaica, ensuring that defendants in every borough of New York City have access to the program. The expansion to Queens is particularly important because Queens had the highest number of traffic-related fatalities of any borough in the city in 2020, with 83, and the second highest number in 2021, with 53 (NYC Crash Mapper, 2021).

Lastly, the Center for Court Innovation received additional funding to implement a program specifically for driving-related cases resulting in serious injury or death. This restorative justice program, Circles for Safe Streets, will bring drivers together with victims and surviving family members to work toward healing, accountability, and repair. The program has been in planning stages and staff are actively working on referrals; it will be piloted in early 2022 in Brooklyn and Manhattan, with a plan for future expansion to all boroughs. Circles for Safe Streets builds on the Driver Accountability Program's efforts to increase safety within the city through education and accountability, with an added element of healing and restoration for all participants. Given the continued programming based on the existing program model coupled with this expansion, the findings and recommendations from the evaluation are particularly salient.

Recommendations

1. **Continue program evaluation; draw on findings to inform ongoing programming.** The current evaluation draws on program participants' perspectives to assess program effectiveness and understand participant experiences. Further evaluation will shed additional light on program outcomes. Specifically, a recidivism study with a matched comparison group will draw on administrative data to determine the program's impact on future court involvement for dangerous driving incidents. Researchers are currently in conversation with partners to obtain data to conduct these analyses; the intention is to analyze information about a subset of Driver Accountability Program participants and a comparison group alongside each other. The addendum report with these analyses will include consideration of the limitations of recidivism analyses—in particular, the racial and class disparities in who comes into contact with the justice system (Butts and Schiraldi 2018).

2. **Continue to prioritize the group aspect of the course.** Many participants specifically noted the benefits of the group discussion portion of the program. Based on the responses the researchers recommend that, consistent with the program model, group sessions be scheduled whenever possible rather than individual sessions. In addition, program facilitators should continue to encourage all participants to engage in the group discussion, given how fruitful and informative many interviewees found the discussion to be when all individuals participated.

3. **Review program curriculum based on participant feedback.** Although there were not many recommendations for program improvement from survey and interview participants, certain aspects of the curriculum, such as the "Drive Like Your Family Lives Here" video, had more of an impact on participants than other components. Some participants expressed that the survey and safe versus risky driving habits exercise were not memorable, and one participant expressed that the exercise was confusing or not explained well. Facilitators should make sure to clearly explain the program exercise instructions and its purpose in the program overall. Program staff might benefit from engaging participants further to determine what makes the video and group aspect of the course so engaging, and incorporate feedback to make other curriculum components equally engaging to achieve maximum program impact.

Study Limitations

One major limitation of this evaluation is the small sample size, for both the surveys and the interviews. The survey data were negatively impacted by a data collection error at two program sites, resulting in minimal pre-program data at these sites and a subsequent inability to match pre- and post-survey data by individual-level identifiers (i.e., participant-provided contact information) for a paired sample analysis. Furthermore, there is a lack of generalizability of results given that some sites relied heavily on oral Driver Reflection Surveys. These data issues have been addressed in ongoing survey efforts. Although the pre- and post-survey data show changes in participants' driving over time, the survey sample lacks a comparison group. Without an appropriate comparison sample, researchers cannot conclusively attribute differences in driving to the program.

The small interview sample size due to recruitment challenges poses another evaluation limitation. The interview sample is also limited due to uneven recruitment across sites. We were able to interview participants from only two program sites, with the vast majority of interviewees (nine out of ten) coming from a single site. This limits the cross-site generalizability of interview findings. Furthermore, there is additional potential for selection

bias in interview recruitment due to the voluntary nature of the interviews. That is, the individuals that chose to take part in the interviews may have had different experiences with the program than the general program population.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the Driver Accountability Program was remote for the entirety of the evaluation period. The program was designed to be conducted in person and adapted to be conducted virtually. Program staff quickly adapted to virtual programming, but evaluation results and sample size may differ from the what may have been achieved from in-person programming. Additionally, remote programming may have contributed to the low pre-survey response rate; during in-person programming these surveys are completed by all participants at the start of the program session.

Study Strengths

A major strength of this evaluation is the focus on participant experience and voice, which provided participants an opportunity to make their voices heard and improve the program for future participants. Both the surveys and interviews centered on participant perceptions, and interviewees were eager to share their experiences with the program.

Furthermore, this study is the first evaluation of the multi-site Driver Accountability Program and can provide a framework for future evaluations of this program and dangerous driving interventions more generally. As the program continues to expand throughout the city, evaluation results can help inform valuable programmatic changes.

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Appendix A

Driving Reflection Questions from Pre- and Post-Surveys[8]

The following questions are intended to guide you in assessing your driving beliefs and habits. Your answers will not be shared with any court parties, nor will they have any impact on your case.

Driving Beliefs

These questions have to do with your current driving beliefs. Please read each question and answer honestly. You can skip a question if it makes you uncomfortable.

Driving 5-10mph over the speed limit is not a big deal.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is okay to speed if the traffic conditions allow me to.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is okay to accelerate through yellow lights.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is okay to roll through a stop sign as long as I don't see anyone there.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

Left turns are more dangerous than right turns.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is okay to multi-task while driving (i.e. texting, eating, checking GPS, etc.).
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is okay to drink before I drive, as long as I am feeling okay.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

It is important to make sure that my license and insurance are in good standing before I drive.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

While driving, I often think about the possibility that I could injure or kill someone.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

While driving, I often think about the possibility that I could get injured or killed.
□ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Uncertain □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

[8] The questions in Appendix A are the shared Likert-scale questions asked in both the pre-survey and post-survey.

Driving Habits

These questions have to do with your current driving habits. Please read each question and answer honestly. You can skip a question if it makes you uncomfortable.

How often do you exceed the speed limit by 5-10mph?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you pass the car in front of you when it is driving at the speed limit?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you drive too close to the car in front of you (tailgate)?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you drive through a yellow light as it is about to turn red?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you drive through a red light when no one is around?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you roll through a stop sign without making a full stop?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you ignore pedestrians/cyclists when you believe that you have the right-of-way?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you break traffic rules because you see others doing it?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you break traffic rules in order to get where you have to go faster?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you get annoyed or angry at other drivers and act upon this feeling?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you multi-task while driving (i.e. texting, calling, eating, checking GPS, etc.)?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you drive after having a few drinks, because you think you're okay to drive?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always

How often do you drive without a valid license?
□ Never □ Rarely □ Sometimes □ Often □ Always