

Asking the Right Questions

A core element of the Collaborative Defense Model is for providers to ask the right questions so they can begin to address their client's priorities beyond the criminal legal case. This is demonstrated by an intake process that thoroughly screens for enmeshed penalties at arrest and identifies social service needs that a client may have. This intake is distinct from a traditional intake interview conducted by public defenders in that it does not necessarily incorporate questions about a client's criminal legal proceedings. These questions serve, rather, to be incorporated into preexisting intakes or completed separately by support staff as supplements to a provider's knowledge of the client and to guide service delivery.

Goals of Intake

A comprehensive and effective intake is marked by a series of questions that elicit and develop actionable plans towards achieving the client's service goals. The staff member who first meets with clients, either attorneys or non-attorneys, should develop a clear understanding of a client's needs in order to identify service goals and discuss them with the client. Each intake will differ depending on the client's goals and a provider's unique style, but it is important to know how to guide the discussion to gain as much relevant information as possible.

Conducting the Interview

While there is no one roadmap for client service delivery, staff should understand the purpose of each intake and how and why to ask these questions delicately and effectively. An intake covers several sensitive topics, such as mental health history and immigration status. It is critical that staff build rapport in this initial engagement to facilitate the client's comfort and establish a trusting foundation upon which a working relationship can flourish.

Sharing with Team Members

Once the interview is complete, providers must be adept at conveying the information to the necessary staff to begin addressing the client's identified needs. While the interview itself is incredibly important, a mechanism to act upon what is covered plays an equally significant role in