



Request for Information (RFI) Provision of Support Services



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Response Due Date: January 21, 2025



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION COMMUNITY COURT SERVICES

Issued By: City of Rome, NY

Submission Deadline: January 21, 2025

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PURPOSE OF THE RFI

The City of Rome is issuing this RFI to gather information from local not-for-profit agencies to determine their interest and availability in partnering with the City of Rome on the establishment of a Community Court program. Mayor Jeffrey Lanigan and his administration believe establishing a community court in Rome for non-violent code offenses represents a transformative step toward addressing the root causes of crime while fostering a healthier and more resilient community based on the following:

- Non-violent offenses often involve individuals who lack the financial resources to pay fines, leading to disproportionate consequences for low-income individuals.
- The imposition of mandatory minimum fines can contribute to cycles of poverty and hinder individuals' ability to reintegrate into society after minor infractions.
- Research has demonstrated that alternative sentencing options, such as community service, restorative justice programs, and counseling, can be more effective in reducing recidivism for non-violent offenders than monetary penalties.
- Removing minimum fines gives judges greater discretion to tailor sentences that fit the offender's specific circumstances, promoting fairness and justice in the legal process.
- Alternative sentencing options can relieve the burden on the judicial system by reducing the number of individuals facing incarceration for failure to pay fines and lowering court costs related to these cases.
- Implementing alternative sentencing options aligns with broader criminal justice reforms focused on rehabilitation and reducing unnecessary punitive measures, particularly for non-violent offenses.



- Providing greater flexibility in sentencing will help to alleviate the overcrowding of jails, decrease reliance on punitive financial measures, and promote a more equitable justice system.
- Addressing the root causes of non-violent offenses through non-financial penalties can lead to more positive social outcomes, including increased community engagement, better offender accountability, and enhanced public safety.

To streamline services and minimize repeated interviews for defendants, the City would prefer to have two individuals for the following roles:

- One agency to serve as the Case Navigator and be on site in the courtroom on all Community Court days and follow an individual's case to completion. The agency must also identify another individual to serve as the Case Navigator on-site if the permanent Case Navigator is unavailable.
- One agency to provide an Assessment Professional, either one or two individuals, capable of addressing mental health, substance abuse, housing, and employment needs. The Assessment Professional must specialize in at least one of either mental health or substance abuse. (No more than two assessment professionals as space is limited.)
- An agency can provide one or both the Case Navigator or Assessment Professionals positions or can propose one individual to work as part of an assessment team. The agency should be able to provide wrap-around support, including follow-up, community outreach, housing assistance, and transportation for court appearances.

The City is seeking responses from agencies interested in providing individuals to serve as a Case Navigator and/or Assessment Professionals on-site in City Court. The City is also seeking responses from agencies interested in providing services off-site related to individual treatment plans including:

- Mental Health Services
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Community Service Opportunities
- Educational Classes
- Community Outreach
- Housing Assistance
- Employment Services
- Health and Wellness Services
- Family and Social Support
- Legal Aid and Advocacy
- Transportation Assistance

INTENDED USE OF INFORMATION

This RFI is for information-gathering purposes only and does not constitute a formal solicitation or guarantee of a future contract. The City is exploring all possible partnerships and solutions.



BACKGROUND

The City of Rome, like many cities across the nation, faces a complex array of challenges that have led the current administration to pursue a community court model. Low-level offenses, such as littering, vandalism, unreasonable noise, park curfew violations, and other City Code violations, have become persistent issues that erode the quality of life in some neighborhoods. Often burdened by high caseloads, traditional courts struggle to address these cases swiftly or effectively, leaving the underlying causes of these offenses unaddressed.

Rome has also grappled with the social inequities that fuel these problems—poverty, housing instability, and substance abuse. These systemic challenges have long contributed to cycles of reoffending, particularly in areas where resources are scarce.

In recent months, the City has launched several initiatives aimed at improving safety and livability in neighborhoods most affected by these issues. However, the administration recognizes that real progress requires addressing not just the symptoms but the root causes of crime. By implementing a community court, Rome seeks to provide an innovative, localized approach to justice—one that emphasizes restorative practices, connects individuals to critical social services, and actively involves residents in the process of creating safer, healthier neighborhoods.

The vision for Rome's community court is clear: a justice system that is responsive, equitable, and deeply invested in the well-being of its citizens.

With all of the above in mind, the City laid the groundwork for Community Court on September 25, 2024, when the City's Common Council unanimously approved legislation to remove mandatory surcharges and minimum fines for non-violent offenses. This first step enables the courts to focus on alternative sentencing, such as community service or participation in educational, counseling, diversionary, or treatment programs that benefit offenders and the community alike. This initiative sets the stage for a model aimed at addressing the root causes of offenses while strengthening public safety and community trust.

The City will be able to provide up to two small office spaces in Rome City Court to carry out the required work and assessments on site at the time of the Defendant's appearance in Court.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

What is Rome's Community Court?

A Community Court is a specialized judicial model designed to handle code violations. The court incorporates restorative and rehabilitative practices, offering defendants the opportunity to



address underlying challenges—such as mental health issues, substance abuse, or housing instability—through tailored services and interventions.

Why is a Community Court Important?

Community Courts represent a shift from punitive to restorative justice. By addressing the root causes of offenses, they reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and restore trust in the justice system. Importantly, these courts also promote economic development by fostering a safer, more vibrant community.

GOALS OF THE ROME COMMUNITY COURT

Building a Stronger Community Through a Community Court

The establishment of a community court in Rome represents a transformative step toward addressing the root causes of crime while fostering a healthier and more resilient community. Unlike traditional courts that often emphasize punitive measures, a community court focuses on rehabilitation, restoration, and problem-solving, offering vulnerable individuals a second chance to contribute meaningfully to society.

Addressing Root Causes

Many offenses in our community stem from underlying issues such as addiction, mental health struggles, homelessness, and unemployment. A community court provides immediate, onsite access to services like substance abuse counseling, mental health support, job training, and housing assistance. By addressing these root causes, the court helps individuals overcome the barriers that often lead to repeated offenses.

Reducing Recidivism

An alternative sentencing approach has been shown to significantly reduce recidivism. When individuals receive the support they need, they are less likely to re-offend. This not only benefits the individual but also decreases the burden on the criminal justice system and reduces taxpayer costs associated with incarceration.

Strengthening Public Safety

A safer community is one where individuals have the resources to lead stable, productive lives. By redirecting vulnerable individuals to support services instead of jail, community courts break the cycle of crime and allow law enforcement to focus on serious threats to public safety.



Restoring Trust in the Justice System

For many, the justice system can feel impersonal and punitive. A community court demonstrates a commitment to fairness and humanity, restoring trust and fostering a sense of justice that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment.

Promoting Economic Development

When individuals are empowered to reenter society as contributing members, the local economy benefits. Gainful employment, stable housing, and reduced reliance on public assistance lead to a more prosperous community overall.

A Model for Future Growth

Rome's community court can become a model for surrounding areas, showcasing the power of collaboration between the judiciary, social services, and the community. By investing in people and prioritizing solutions, Rome positions itself as a forward-thinking city dedicated to innovation and inclusion.

This initiative sends a powerful message: everyone deserves a chance to turn their life around, and by helping individuals, we help the entire community thrive.

ELIGIBILITY

The Community Court will apply only to City of Rome Code of Ordinances violations. These violations are divided into Building and Property Violations and Quality of Life Violations. Examples of these violations and other eligibility criteria are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is provided to give context as to the types of violations that will be eligible for alternative sentencing within the Community Court.

- Building and Property violations
 - Structural
 - Garbage debris and scrap materials
 - Unlawful camping
 - Junked Vehicles
- Quality of life Violations
 - Dogs/Animal Control violations
 - Unreasonable Noise
 - Littering
 - Scavenging
 - Shopping cart thefts
 - In park after curfew
 - Unlawful burning
 - Occupying boarded and/or posted buildings



- Unauthorized dirt bikes and/or other unlicensed motorized methods of transportation
- First-time or low-risk repeat offenders.
- Willingness to participate in the program.
- Exclusion of defendants with a history of violent or severe criminal activity.

ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING EXAMPLES

Community Service:

- Assign meaningful projects that benefit the community.
- Partner with local nonprofits, schools, or city departments for opportunities.

Educational or Vocational Training:

- Job training, educational programs, or financial literacy courses.

Therapeutic Interventions:

- Substance abuse counseling or rehabilitation programs.
- Mental health treatment with licensed professionals.

Housing and Employment Assistance:

- Secure transitional housing for homeless defendants.
- Connect defendants to workforce development programs.

EXAMPLE CASE WORKFLOW

1. Ticket/Arrest/Referral: Non-violent offender is identified and referred to Community Court.
2. Initial Assessment: Needs are evaluated by Case Navigator.
3. Hearing: Defendant appears in Community Court, sentencing plan is approved.
4. Program Enrollment: Defendant begins alternative sentencing program (e.g., rehabilitation, community service, educational program).
5. Monitoring and Support: Case Navigator tracks progress, provides assistance, and reports to the Court.
6. Completion: Upon successful completion, charges are reduced, dismissed, or expunged.



TYPES OF COURT CASES

The City regularly deals with two types of cases: Quality of Life Violations and Building and Property Violations. Each will be addressed on its own scheduled days to allow for consistent representation by all parties.

QUALITY OF LIFE COURT SERVICES REQUIRED

Schedule: The Quality of Life cases will be heard in Rome City Court on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month from 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM for hearings and trials as necessary.

Public Defender

In a community court, the public defender plays a vital role in ensuring justice, fairness, and equitable treatment for defendants. Community courts are problem-solving courts that address underlying issues (like substance abuse, mental health, or homelessness) contributing to criminal behavior. The public defender provides legal counsel to indigent defendants (those who cannot afford private representation) to ensure their constitutional right to a fair trial.

1. They advise clients on their rights, the charges they face, and the potential outcomes of their cases.
2. The public defender advocates for these rehabilitative solutions over punitive measures when appropriate.
3. They will work with judges, prosecutors, social workers, and community service providers to develop comprehensive solutions that address the defendant's needs while also considering public safety.
4. The public defender ensures that any agreements, such as diversion programs or plea deals, are in the client's best interest and obtained voluntarily.
5. They monitor compliance with court procedures to prevent coercion or unfair treatment.
6. Public defenders tailor their approach to each case, understanding the individual's circumstances and advocating for personalized outcomes that support the client's long-term success.

Case Navigator

The Case Navigator will play a bridge-building role, connecting defendants to life-changing resources while ensuring accountability. Their work is pivotal in achieving the community court's mission of fostering rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and improving public safety.



1. **Court Liaison.** Case navigators act as liaisons between the defendant and community resources to determine immediate needs, including housing, healthcare, mental health, substance abuse, employment, educational opportunities, and community service.
2. **Individualized Sentencing Plans.** Work with appropriate agencies to develop new and/or ensure that existing treatment plans for each Defendant are followed.
3. **Transportation Assistance.** Ensure that providing agencies are coordinating/providing assistance with transportation to appointments, community service, educational classes, etc.
4. **Monitoring Progress.** They track the defendant's compliance with their court-ordered plan, ensuring they attend appointments, complete programs, and meet deadlines. They provide the court with regular progress reports highlighting successes and any challenges.
5. **Providing Support and Encouragement.** Case navigators offer emotional support and practical guidance to help defendants navigate the complexities of the court system and their recovery journey. They help defendants build confidence and take responsibility for their actions while reinforcing positive behavior.
6. **Collaboration with Stakeholders.** Case navigators work closely with judges, public defenders, prosecutors, and service providers to ensure all parties are informed about the defendant's progress and needs. They may advocate for adjustments to the plan if challenges arise, ensuring that solutions remain realistic and achievable.

Assessment Professional

The Assessment Professional will be required to provide on-site assessments in several areas on all Quality of Life Court days.

Mental Health Assessments

A comprehensive evaluation process used to identify an individual's mental health conditions, assess their impact on the individual's behavior, and determine the relationship between those conditions and their involvement in the criminal justice system. The purpose is to develop tailored interventions that support the individual's well-being, reduce criminal behavior, and promote rehabilitation.

Substance Abuse Assessments

A structured evaluation used to determine the extent and impact of an individual's substance use on their physical, mental, and social well-being, as well as its relationship to their involvement in the criminal justice system. The goal of this assessment is to identify the presence of substance use disorders, understand the individual's treatment



needs, and develop appropriate intervention strategies to support recovery and reduce recidivism.

Housing Assessment

An evaluation to determine an individual's current housing status, needs, and barriers to stable housing. The goal is to connect individuals with appropriate housing resources to address homelessness, housing instability, or unsafe living and improve outcomes for the individual and the community.

Community Service Assessment

A structured evaluation process that identifies an individual's capacity, skills, and needs to match them with meaningful and appropriate community service opportunities. This assessment ensures that community service aligns with the court's objectives, the individual's rehabilitation goals, and the needs of the community.

Education and Employment

Conduct an assessment of the Defendants' educational background, job skills, and career aspirations and work with academic institutions such as BOCES to help them achieve their General Education Diploma.

Crisis Intervention

Agencies should be available 24/7 to respond to crises with individuals they are providing services for and coordinate immediate support to prevent further setbacks. i.e. substance abuse relapse or housing loss

BUILDING AND PREMISE COURT SERVICES REQUIRED

Schedule: The Building and Premise cases will be heard in Rome City Court on the 2nd Thursday of each month for hearings and trials as necessary, from 1:30 PM – 4:00 PM.

The Court handles several cases where the defendant needs assistance with code compliance, representation, and/or funding. The following are the requirements on these days in Court.

- Code Officer present in Court
- Pro-bono legal representation for those who qualify
- Referring qualifying homeowners to programs that can provide funding assistance, such as ARPA, CDBG, Home Ownership Center, Ramps and Rails, etc.



FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

The City has not identified funding sources for this initiative and will rely on the efficiency, experience, and commitment of its partners. Upon achieving initial success, the City intends to collaborate with its partners to secure sustainable funding. Potential funding sources may include:

- Grants: Apply for state or federal funding, including justice system innovation or behavioral health grants.
- Public-Private Partnerships: Seek financial support from local businesses and foundations.
- City Budget Allocation: Dedicate resources to support initial and ongoing program costs.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The City will evaluate the program's effectiveness using information provided by the Case Navigator and/or the Court system, including:

- Recidivism Rates: Monitor re-offense rates among participants.
- Participant Outcomes: Track employment, housing stability, and treatment completion.
- Community Impact: Measure improvements in neighborhood safety and resident satisfaction.
- Cost Analysis: Compare costs of incarceration versus alternative sentencing.

SUBMISSION

Agencies must complete the RFI Submission Form to be considered.

Questions

Please send all questions via email to krogers@romecitygov.com. Answers to all questions will be made available via the City's website at www.romenewyork.com.

Submission Timeline

RFI Release Date: 12/16/2024

Questions Due: 12/23/2024

Answers by: 1/10/2025

RFI Responses Due: 1/21/2025

RFI Review: 1/22/25 – 2/3/2025

Partner Selection Announced: 2/4/2025

Start Date: 3/1/2025



THANK YOU

Thank you for your interest in our Community Court initiative. We look forward to learning more about your organization and hope to utilize as many partners as possible to achieve our goals and objectives.



COMMUNITY COURT RFI SUBMISSION FORM

Please complete and submit this PDF form and any supporting documentation by January 21, 2025.

Agency Information

Agency Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Services Provided (Check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Defender | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case Navigator | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Wellness Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Family and Social Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service Opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Aid and Advocacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Advocacy |

Experience and Efficiency

What is your organization's mission? _____

What populations do you serve? _____



Describe your agency's relevant experience: _____

Describe your proposed approach to deliver services efficiently: _____

Partnership and Collaboration

How would you work with other stakeholders, including the court, public defenders, and community organizations? _____

Innovative Approaches

Do you have innovative practices, tools, or technologies that could enhance the community court's effectiveness? _____

Capacity and Scalability

How many individuals can your organization serve? Are your services scalable? _____

Monitoring and Evaluation

How do you measure outcomes and ensure program effectiveness?

Funding Capacity

Can your agency contribute financial resources or grant support? Yes No

If yes, provide details: _____



Location

Community Court is located in Rome City Court, and we will provide services to potentially vulnerable populations, many of whom will likely be from Rome and who have limited transportation capabilities. If you are not located in Rome, how do you propose to provide services to those in Rome? _____

Additional Suggestions/Resources

List any additional services or resources your agency can offer: _____

The City of Rome looks forward to your response and appreciates your interest in partnering on this transformative initiative.

Attachments or Appendices

Include any supporting materials you feel will be beneficial to the review committee.