**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the Community Impact Panel (“CIP”) is to hold certain non-violent offenders (i.e. those convicted of shoplifting, public drunkenness, open container, trespassing, disorderly conduct, possession of controlled substance, etc.) more accountable for their actions by requiring them to interact with a panel made up of diverse community members including: business members/ employers, service providers, faith based organizations, victim/ victims family member, and community youth (ages 16 and older with parental consent).

For most non-violent criminal offenses, offenders are generally ordered to pay a fine monetarily or through their community service work. Those convicted of shoplifting are sometimes ordered to complete an online shoplifting prevention course, but the Court does not have any other mechanisms readily available to help these offenders understand how their actions affect their victims and the local community.

The Community Impact Panel creates a structured, positive outlet that will help offenders understand the impact of their crimes on victims and communities. The Panel also gives community members a forum to discuss the impact crime has on their lives and their businesses. Panel members will be encouraged to share their individual experiences or stories. Many offenders are unaware of the short-term and long-term physical, emotional and financial consequences their actions have on members of the community. The ultimate goal is to help the offenders develop respect and accountability for their actions.

**PROCESS:**

The CIP will convene at least six times a year in the courtroom located at the Vicksburg Police Department. Sessions will last no more than 1.5 hours and will be led by a trained facilitator. At least six panelists will be selected for each panel. A court services clerk as well as a VPD representative should also be present at each session.

Sessions will generally proceed as follows:

1. Introduction of Facilitator and Overview of Process
2. Introduction of offenders with each offender briefly talking about the offense and what led to him/her taking that course of action
3. After hearing from all of the offenders, the community members will talk about how these type of offenses impact the community. Community members will be advised to refrain from chastising or belittling the offenders.
4. The VPD representative will talk about what police officers are directed to do with regards to the particular offenses discussed at each CIP. The Court Services representative will be available to answer general questions about the court process as it relates to the Vicksburg Municipal Court.

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Facilitator:

* The facilitator is a community volunteer who has indicated an interest in serving in this capacity
* Facilitators will be required to attend a brief training session before working with the CIP
* The facilitator is responsible for setting the tone of the CIP by making sure that speakers abide by time limits and session guidelines.

Panel Volunteers:

* Volunteers are selected from a diverse group of community members including:  business members/ employers, service providers, faith based organizations, victim/ victims family member, and community youth (ages 16 and older with parental consent)
* Volunteers are contacted approximately 3 weeks prior to the panel date
* Selection is based on volunteer availability and panel needs
* Volunteers cannot have any pending criminal cases with the Vicksburg Municipal Court and may be subject to background checks
* Confidentiality agreements are required prior to participation
* Volunteers are expected to address the crime committed and impact it has on the community and offender

Offenders:

* Offenders must have admitted guilt to a misdemeanor offense
* Offenders may be court-ordered to attend at the time of sentencing
* Offenders may be participating in diversion programming and required to attend as a probationary condition
* Offenders may still be required to pay court costs and fines as directed
* The participation of offenders convicted of Domestic Violence or Simple Assault is within the court’s discretion depending on the underlying facts and circumstances associated with the case