STAFF REVIEW TEAMS

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One way to engage staff in the development and implementation of youth justice transformation—and facilitate organizational culture change in the process—is to create an ongoing staff review team with membership from staff at every level of the agency.

The review team will work with youth justice system leadership and youth, family, community and external agency partners to review and understand new youth justice policies, offer questions and input into practical implications of reforms, develop new protocols, procedures and tools needed for implementation and review the impact of reforms on an ongoing basis over the course of implementation. Such regular and structured staff investment into the recreation of the youth justice system is culture change in action—embedding staff in the process of change itself and investing staff with ownership in the changes made.

This Deep Dive includes a number of practical suggestions for how to create and structure a staff review team and is especially relevant to the culture change process detailed in *Changing Organizational Culture to Align with Vision and Values*:

- **The review team should include representation from executive staff, supervisors and front-line staff with a range of experience, from those who recently joined the agency to staff members who have been with the agency for years.** To the extent possible, it should also include representation from all of the other staff and departments which make up the agency, including behavioral health staff, kitchen staff,

members of the medical team, educators, and any others who have frequent contact with youth and might have perspectives, experiences and responsibilities that differ from front-line officers.

- **Staff members should have diverse backgrounds and experiences, and varying perspectives on reform.** An ideal team will include champions of reform as well as those who might be skeptical of system change, ensuring that the review team is not an echo chamber insulated from the myriad perspectives of the agency more broadly, but rather directly includes and addresses concerns that exist in various parts of the agency. Garnering the insight and collaboration of staff members who might not instinctively participate in the reform process can also help to cultivate buy-in with staff more broadly, especially if the staff on the review team are respected by other staff and viewed as informal leaders.

- **In order to ensure representation and capacity as well as efficiency and execution, the review team should include between eight and fifteen people, depending on the size of the agency.** Leaders will need to consider how to ensure equitable opportunities for staff to participate on the review team, the ideal makeup of the team and support for staff to balance their ongoing responsibilities and the review process. It is critical that staff engagement be viewed by frontline supervisors as an opportunity that is part of their assigned role and not as simply another additional duty. By building a team with diverse representation amongst staff, youth justice leaders can expand bandwidth for the review process while also building mechanisms for transparent, inclusive and participatory processes. Over time it may make sense to rotate the membership of the staff review team to include new voices and reflect changes in the agency, always ensuring diverse representation from across the system.

- **The review team might include family members, young people and community representatives, or it might collaborate consistently with teams of those groups, developed separately.** While collaboration with young people, families and communities is essential to policy and culture change inside any agency, as discussed further in the chapters on *Partnering with Youth and Their Families* and *Shifting Roles, Responsibilities and Resources to Communities,* there are some benefits to having each review team operate separately, at least some of the time, in order to discuss the fine-grained detail of each constituency's roles, responsibilities and concerns.

The staff review team might also collaborate with external experts and facilitators, such as a research center or a professional coach who has experience guiding youth justice agencies and jurisdiction culture change. These external partners can help to provide a more objective perspective from outside the agency, while offering a source of knowledge and expertise that agency leaders and staff can rely on throughout the system and culture change process. External partners can share nuanced insight and lessons from other jurisdictions that have implemented reforms, such as those highlighted throughout this Desk Guide. External partners can also help to remind leaders—as well as staff, young people, families, communities and other stakeholders—that system transformation is not a linear process but one with ebbs and flows, unforeseen challenges, successes and lessons to be learned along the way.

Instituting meaningful changes in a system that has been in place for generations is a process that takes years. External partners can remind leaders that this timeframe, while it may seem daunting, also offers an opportunity to build change cumulatively, seeing each reform as a step towards a broader vision. They can also help to guide the staff review team and the agency more broadly about what success looks like in the immediate, interim and long-term stages of reform; how to build realistic but also accountable metrics of progress; and how to respond to inevitable backsliding, resistance and crises. During challenging times especially, it is important to remember that culture change is a gradual and iterative process and that using values to guide responses to setbacks can develop building blocks on the path towards system transformation.

By building an internal review team made up of diverse staff members and partnering with external stakeholders with experience and expertise in system and culture change, youth justice leaders can form a brain trust to evaluate current systems, design and implement reforms and to lean on through the ups and the downs of reform. ■

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TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION