TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION

Chapter 4

DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION

SPECIAL THANKS

4

DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION

OBJECTIVE

EXPLORE THIS CHAPTER ONLINE

This chapter details the crucial step of creating a vision for youth justice that is shared by everyone involved, why this is key to any transformation process, and how to do so.

INTRODUCTION

Once system leaders recognize and take steps to center racial justice and equity and build partnerships with youth, families and communities, the next step is to develop a shared vision for youth justice transformation that incorporates the voices and priorities of all key stakeholders.

Developing a shared vision is critical, foundational work for transformation that. This chapter goes hand in hand with the chapters on *Building Public and Political Will for Change* and *Changing Organizational Culture to Align with Vision and Values*. The former focuses on building external and internal support for a shared vision for youth justice transformation, while the latter focuses on the work needed to prepare the system, its staff, and partners to implement the transformation.

Developing a shared vision begins with assembling leaders from all essential stakeholder groups into a body that is authorized and empowered to set a new course for youth justice. This includes system leaders from all decision-making agencies and authorities, as well as leaders of community-based, youth-serving organizations and impacted youth, family and community groups that are heavily affected by the public system's response to youth crime. As discussed in previous chapters, diverse representation is critical to charting a transformational path forward.

After assembling a diverse and representative group, it is important to establish a foundation for working together. This begins with building trust, then educating and bringing the group to a common understanding of the current functioning of the system, issues for reform and examples of transformation nationally that can serve as inspiration. Developing a shared vision then begins with identifying shared values and principles for a new system. Review of values, principles, vision and mission statements from aligned transformation efforts and reform groups can be helpful in developing a vision for youth justice that everyone can stand behind. Rather than an aspirational statement that fails to drive actual practice, it is critical to establish a vision that is alive, meaningful and relevant to implementation at every step. Leaders and allies should return to the shared vision regularly as a North Star by which to measure progress.

> **RATHER THAN AN ASPIRATIONAL STATEMENT THAT FAILS TO BEAR ON ACTUAL PRACTICE, IT IS CRITICAL TO ESTABLISH A VISION THAT IS ALIVE, MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT TO IMPLEMENTATION AT EVERY STEP. LEADERS AND ALLIES SHOULD RETURN TO THE SHARED VISION REGULARLY AS A NORTH STAR BY WHICH TO MEASURE PROGRESS.**

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the importance of bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a shared vision for youth justice. It then turns to indicators that leaders can use to assess their progress toward developing a shared vision. Clear action steps for organizing stakeholders and developing a shared vision for youth justice transformation follow. The chapter ends with a checklist of next steps to take in your jurisdiction.

IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZING STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP A SHARED VISION FOR TRANSFORMATION

Sustained success in bringing about any change in philosophy, policy or practice depends on developing a common vision for change and marshaling support and participation from most if not all those who will be affected by that change. Gaining support for youth justice transformation from all essential stakeholders and involving all relevant parties in developing a new vision can be especially challenging because responsibility for decisions within the existing system is dispersed over many different actors and agencies.

Reform efforts typically fail to develop successful partnerships between those working for change from *inside* the formal system and those working for change from *outside* the formal system, and stakeholders coming to the transformation table may have been excluded from past efforts. When considering the fundamental transformation described in this Guide, much authority and responsibility may shift to communities and it is essential that they are equal partners at the visioning and planning table. The 'Case for Transformation' outlined in the introduction to this guide goes further into depth about the shortcomings of current youth justice systems and argues that it is crucial to minimize system involvement of any kind for young people. Drastically shrinking the pipeline into the formal youth justice system not only shields those young people from the many harms associated with system involvement, but also supports the wellbeing of their communities. This type of deep transformation can only happen by partnering with the young people, their families and communities.

As described above, the youth justice "system" is actually a loosely linked network of separate institutions, agencies, stakeholders and other influential actors—inside the formal legal system and in the community. The stakeholders who are part of the network each have

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

system. Fully transformative change requires engaging the *entire* network and ensuring its active participation in shaping the new vision; broad ownership of the values and principles undergirding reforms; careful cultivation of partnerships and alliances across the network; and ongoing work to resolve problems and disagreements as they arise throughout implementation.

Those affected by the system, and therefore likely to be affected by deep reforms, include people who may not be part of the formal network of youth justice agencies. These include young people and their families; people who have been harmed as part of an offense committed by a young person; residents of neighborhoods experiencing high levels of crime; organizations representing youth, families and communities; youth-serving organizations in other systems, including education, behavioral health, and child welfare; and the general public. It is a fundamental matter of justice and equity to include the individuals and groups who are most affected by the system as among those with an authoritative voice in its transformation.

Clearly, as described in more detail in the chapter on *Partnering with Youth and Their Families*, the lives of young people can be entirely transformed by their experiences with the system. Their families can be forever changed as well. System *reforms* therefore can be immensely consequential for young people and families. Given the direct impact of these systems on young people and families, and their intimate knowledge of system practice, harms and other effects, their meaningful participation in designing and implementing system reforms is critical. Participating youth, families and community members hold unique understanding of how the system currently works, the harms it creates and its short- and long-term impact. They also have valuable insight into developing a vision that will be meaningful to the system's goals and desired impact on young people and community safety, while also improving system outcomes and holding the system accountable to that vision.

Those harmed by a young person's actions, as well as their families, can also be deeply affected by how the system responds and must have a voice at the table. In meetings and organizing efforts among residents of neighborhoods with high crime rates, addressing crime by youth and young adults is almost always among the most important issues identified. Communities have a significant stake in youth justice transformation, both in terms of day-to-day safety, and in the role they play toward improving the lives of young people, inside and outside of the system. Communities authorized with youth justice functions have the power to

shape the transformation of the system from the ground up—its vision, practices, and approach—and reshape the lives of young people involved with the system, their families and the community as a whole.

Bringing a diverse group of responsible and impacted stakeholders together to envision a new system for youth justice may have its challenges. The group may not have worked together before and some members may carry mistrust of others based on their roles and experiences with the system. Members will bring different experiences and understandings of the system, its effects, harms and challenges. The preliminary work of gathering stakeholders to one table to develop a shared vision may therefore involve trust building acknowledgment of harm and past exclusion before all parties can work together to develop and implement a new vision. Investing in the cohesion of this group as a reform body with common goals and values is a worthy effort, as this group is essential to shaping and moving forward transformation.

Both to develop the most informed vision possible, and for legitimacy and broad buy-in for the vision, it is critical that all stakeholders begin together with a voice in developing the vision rather than leaving some to be consulted after the fact for approval. This effort will build the highest, most thorough vision, and support broad political will for its implementation. More detail on some aspects of this can be found in *Centering Youth and their Families.*

Youth justice leaders may initiate transformation, including working with partners to develop a shared vision for the future. The push for transformation may also come from legislative bodies, which may form commissions, workgroups and task forces. In many jurisdictions, young people impacted by the system, their families and their communities as well as advocates and community providers have organized to push for change, and have developed compelling visions for the future of youth justice. In all cases, youth justice leaders who are looking to transform the current approach should reach out to and engage these aligned groups, to learn from them and develop supportive partnerships. The indicators and action steps below speak to system leaders seeking to organize a new group, or to join with an existing strong and authoritative effort, to develop a shared vision for youth justice transformation.

MARKERS FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS IN DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION

A number of indicators point to the system's progress in developing a shared vision for youth justice transformation and lend clarity to next steps in this direction.

Indicators that system leaders have made progress in developing a shared vision for youth justice transformation include:

- ✓ System leaders have reached out to existing reform groups in the system and community to learn from their work, align efforts and build a coalition for transformation System leaders have reached out to community groups and leaders to participate in decision-making bodies developing youth justice policy and practice.

- ✓ Leaders have joined with an existing group with a broad and authoritative mandate for change or have organized a new, diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders impacted by the youth justice system to plan for transformation.

- ✓ Leaders have placed racial justice and equity at the center of transformation conversations and have engaged communities of color affected by crime and the system's response as key partners in reform.

- ✓ Leaders have reached out and begun to develop working relationships with young people impacted by the youth justice system and their family members and/or organizations advocating for or representing these groups.

- ✓ Leaders have developed a staff team to support the group planning for transformation and/or have hired outside help to staff the effort; leaders have engaged facilitators to build trust and shepherd conversations among the reform group.

✓ Leaders have worked with staff to generate data on current system operations and have demonstrated a willingness to share information about the system with their partners in transformation.

✓ Leaders have engaged young people, families and community members to share stories of their experiences with the system, its challenges and harms with the reform group.

✓ Leaders and partners have reviewed values, principles and mission and vision statements from other jurisdictions and aligned groups as examples for a new system.

✓ Leaders have worked with partners to draft a new vision statement and have linked the vision to necessary reforms in existing policy, programs and frontline practice.

✓ Leaders are communicating the new vision to broad audiences for buy-in and support.

Indicators that more work is needed to plan a shared vision for transformation include:

✓ System leaders have remained fairly isolated in their work; they have not connected with other reform groups to understand or align transformation efforts.

✓ Leaders have not explored the possibility of joining up with an existing youth justice transformation group or made any effort to create a new one.

✓ Leaders have not discussed racial justice and equity in transformation conversations or made efforts to engage communities affected by crime and the system as partners in reform.

✅ Leaders have developed no infrastructure for planning and implementing transformation, such as a diverse and skilled internal staff team or outside consultant group.

✅ Leaders have not generated data on current system operations or demonstrated transparency with information about the existing system; leaders have not engaged impacted young people, families and communities to share their stories about the system.

✅ Leaders and partners have not yet approached the development of new values, principles and mission and vision statements for the system; leaders have not considered how a new vision will drive reforms in policy, programs and frontline practice.

✅ Leaders have not reached out broadly to discuss and share the new vision for youth justice.

ACTION STEPS

To develop a shared vision for transformation, it is critical to bring together all stakeholders needed to inform and articulate that vision.

This includes everyone who is or will be affected by the system and involved in its transformation, from within and without the current system, including community leaders who will assume new roles and responsibility for youth justice administration, service provision and collaboration with youth and families. As discussed above, preliminary work to build trust, educate and create a shared understanding about the current system will be necessary to build a foundation for developing a shared vision. Moving forward, shared values, principles and mission and vision statements for a new system will be critical to guiding the transformation effort and holding the system and its partners accountable to change that is meaningful and is evident daily in policy, system operations and frontline practice.

The action steps below walk leaders through the process of developing a shared vision for youth justice transformation.

1. Establish or Join a Collaborative Partnership to Develop a New Vision
2. Build Trust & Shared Understanding with all Stakeholders
3. Define Shared Values, Principles and a New Vision
4. Ensure Mission Statements are Meaningful
5. Gain Support by Spreading Shared Vision

ACTION STEP 1

Create or Join an Existing Collaborative Authorized to Chart a New Course for Youth Justice

Transformative change of the youth justice system requires shared vision and commitment, dedicated collaboration and sustained effort from system leaders and key partners. Success rests on gaining both formal and informal legitimacy and authorization to take on the challenge of change and acquiring the participation of all stakeholders necessary to build momentum, plan and implement reforms. Establishing a working group or task force, or joining an existing collaborative partnership, provides an organized forum to build shared understanding about the system, develop a new vision for the future and work through the inevitable differences of perspective and interests to move forward a shared vision for transformation.

The following steps guide leaders in the development of a productive collaborative for change:

✓ **Reach out to existing committees, task forces or other groups focused on youth justice reform that may serve as forums to shape and implement a new vision** and assess whether any of these groups may provide an appropriate and authoritative forum for envisioning and planning for youth justice transformation. Many states and counties have launched task forces, commissions or workgroups to review youth justice systems and recommend reforms. In addition, most jurisdictions have standing committees and groups charged with monitoring youth justice and developing plans and proposals. In some jurisdictions, advocates have established coalitions of activists, young people who have been impacted by the system, their families and communities, and sometimes it is these groups that are holding the most complete and powerful vision for transformation. These existing groups and coalitions may either be able to host efforts to develop a comprehensive vision for transformation, or may serve as building blocks for creating an authorized forum responsible for planning and oversight of the transformation effort.

QUESTIONS TO ASSESS GROUPS IN YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM

- What is the mission of the group? What are its guiding values?

- What identities do members of the group occupy? What identities do members of the group occupy? Is there an awareness of how differences in perceived authority, power and influence can affect the culture of the group?

- What is the group's proven capacity and ability to take action? What is the previous impact of their work?

- What relationships does the group have with other changemakers and other stakeholders?

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of relying on an existing committee or task force versus advocating for the appointment of a new, special group to design and oversee implementation of reform. Existing groups may already have the right membership as well as administrative and financial resources to support the work. They may have established credibility and legitimacy across the stakeholder groups, and their findings and recommendations are likely to be received as trustworthy. On the other hand, existing groups may not include important stakeholders, including community representatives and the youth and families directly affected by the system; they may have a more limited scope or mandate; and they may be unlikely to consider transformative change, as the membership might have a vested interest in limiting reform to minor tweaks that don't realign resources or shift authority and responsibility. To move forward with an existing group, it is critical that this group have the vision, commitment, authority, mandate and diversity of representation necessary to move systemic change forward.

Creating a special task force or commission can bring new energy and attention to youth justice, especially if the membership is seen as having the knowledge, experience and responsibility to ensure that any reforms made genuinely improve the system and its outcomes. Establishing a new group provides an opportunity to bring on members representing voices that have not been heard in the past. A special task force or commission will have a single purpose and focus and can pull together a wide range of data and information to craft a compelling set of findings and recommendations. Yet creating a new body also has potential downsides. Setting up a new group takes time, and reform may be stalled until the group is formed and its work is completed. Staff and financial resources must be allocated, which can also delay start-up and progress. Members must be recruited, and need to commit time from their schedules, many of which are already overcrowded. Convincing participants that this process will be meaningful is another hurdle; unfortunately, most jurisdictions can point to a long history of special reports from time-limited task forces or commissions, all with similar findings and recommendations that failed to lead to action.

When deciding to move forward with a new collaborative for transformation, ensure the support of relevant authorizing entities. Depending on the leader, authorization may need to come from a cabinet secretary, the governor, the legislature, the presiding judge, the attorney general or others with legal authority to direct and oversee the individual system leader's work. Authorization may require more than approval from an individual system leader's superior. For example, full authorization may require approval and support from the governor, the chief judge and legislative leadership. Absent approval from these officials, the group may find it difficult to bring system stakeholders to the table who may otherwise be disinclined to join transformation efforts.

Gaining support may require educating the authorizing person or group through presentations about the current system,[1] existing harms and racial disparities mandating transformation (see Chapter 1, *Centering Racial Justice and Equity*),[2] summaries of data on costs and results (see Chapter 12), examples from other jurisdictions that are working toward transformation (noted

EXAMPLES OF TASK FORCES

While there have been many examples of jurisdictions creating a task force, committee, or collaborative to guide transformation, with varying success, it is important to note that the exact parameters will be different for every place. No two task forces will look the same, and successful elements (or lessons learned) can be taken from any of the many examples, past and present. As previously mentioned, the action steps and best practices from the Building Public and Political Will chapter will be crucial here, and it should also be noted that the same task force or group should be used for all the elements of transforming a youth justice system, and not recreated or duplicated at each step of the process.

Three jurisdictions which utilized a task force for youth justice transformation, with various successes, challenges, and lessons learned are:

Kansas [4]   Wayne County, Michigan [5]   Pennsylvania [6]

throughout this Guide)[3] and an overview of the collaborative work necessary to achieve success. The information provided in the next action step about educating an established collaborative may be useful to system leaders as well when educating authorities. The chapter on *Building Public and Political Will* provides additional suggestions and, depending on the jurisdiction's posture and the extent of existing buy-in from authorities and decision makers across the system, that building some public will may be necessary *before* organizing a collaborative for change and developing a shared vision.

Reach out to engage essential partners inside and outside of the formal system to build a collaborative working group for change. As discussed above, authority to make the kind of full-scale system changes envisioned in this Guide rests across multiple decision makers, so partnerships with leaders throughout the system will be needed to enact systemic change. This type of transformation further involves a significant transfer of responsibility and authority to communities, so genuine partnership with those who have been impacted by the system and those who will provide the services, supports and opportunities that will take the place of outside existing formal system structures is critical.

As mentioned above, considering how to leverage existing coalitions and collaborative tables organized by impacted youth, families, communities and advocates could be a good first step. Ensuring active and genuine partnership with young people, their families and their communities starts at the beginning of the process by seeking their support for moving ahead with and shaping that transformation, rather than waiting until a vision has been set and plans have been developed for implementation. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 above provide a number of strategies for engaging with youth, families and communities and inviting those stakeholders to join as partners in change.

CHECKLIST

STAKEHOLDERS RELEVANT TO DEVELOPING
A NEW VISION FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

At a minimum, leaders should proactively engage the following individuals and groups in joining a new collaborative for youth justice transformation and developing a shared vision. A number of additional related groups and allies will be further relevant when building support for that vision, as discussed in the final action step in this chapter and more fully in the chapter on Building Public and Political Will.

Stakeholders to be included in a collaborative to develop a shared vision for youth justice include:

- ☑ **Young people who have been impacted by the system** and their families, including victims of harm.

- ☑ **Leaders and residents of communities of color** with high rates of system-involved young people.

- ☑ **Policy makers in the executive and legislative branches.**

- ☑ **Law enforcement agencies.**

- ☑ **Judges and other court personnel.**

- ☑ **Prosecutors and defense attorneys.**

- ☑ **Probation officers.**

- ☑ **Correctional administrators and staff.**

- ☑ **Other public system agencies** that intervene in the lives of young people and their families, including schools, child welfare agencies and mental health agencies.

- ☑ **Nongovernmental health and human service provider agencies and community-based organizations** that accept referrals and provide services to youth.

- ☑ **Advocates,** including organizations representing the interests of communities, diverse racial and ethnic groups, survivors of crime, youth and families. ■

Assemble a staff leadership team to support and move forward the work of the collaborative and the transformation process. Motivated system leaders are often visionaries, but necessarily have limited time for the day-to-day work involved in system assessment, engagement of key stakeholders and implementation of reforms. Leaders need dedicated and skilled staff teams behind them to create and monitor workplans, assemble needed data and other information, keep up communications with all relevant parties and track reforms. Staff teams may be entirely inside the leader's agency, should budgets and human resources allow, including a Chief of Staff or Deputy Director that oversees a team of essential planning, research and implementation staff. Alternately, the leader may choose to partner with an outside policy reform agency to staff the collaborative working group and organize the implementation process.

ACTION STEP 2

Build Trust and a Shared Understanding of the Current System and Need for Transformation, with a Central Focus on Racial Justice and Equity

Once a system leader has gained the necessary authorization to take on transformation and has invited and organized all pertinent stakeholders into a collaborative for change, the next step is preparing that collaborative to work together to develop a shared vision for the system. This work involves building trust among the diverse members of that group; educating the collaborative to develop a shared understanding of the existing system and identifying both the need for transformative change and the opportunities for a new system that relies more on community leadership and resources, and less on formal system structures.

The first step after assembling a collaborative is to build rapport and a foundation of trust upon which shared transformation can be built. As discussed in the chapters on *Centering Racial Justice and Equity, Partnering with Youth and Their Families*, and *Shifting Roles, Responsibilities and Resources to Communities*, youth, families and community members whose lives have been affected and often harmed by crime and the system's response to crime are likely to bring with them histories of abuse, racism and trauma tied to their experiences with the system. It will take some work to both address those harms sufficiently to allow for planning and empower members of impacted groups to have an equal voice at the table in developing a shared vision and moving it forward. A restorative justice facilitator may be useful for early meetings to create space for voicing past and existing harms, acknowledging those harms and building trust to move forward together. It can be challenging to take time for this restorative work when timelines feel short and members of the collaborative are eager to get to the work of envisioning and planning transformation. But taking the time for group restoration and healing is itself an example of transformation and centering racial equity, ensuring that all voices are heard and that the group enters into a leveled playing field. This work will cultivate a more cohesive working group up front, which will save time for more effective visioning and planning later.

Following some of these foundational conversations to help build relationships within the group, begin to develop a shared understanding of the current system. This will include sharing data and findings from recent assessments, as well as inviting members of the working group with direct system experience to share their experiences directly. Ultimately, combining these different types of information – data and narrative stories – can be a useful and impactful way of highlighting how the system is or is not living up to the values and vision stated and how it can be transformed to do better. As stated in earlier chapters, these purposes are: (1) Decreasing the odds that a young person touched by the system will go on to commit additional and/or more serious offenses; and (2) Increasing the odds that a young person touched by the system will achieve success and satisfaction as they mature into adulthood. Leading with data and an explanatory narrative relevant to these two core outcomes can tie discussions of a shared vision for youth justice to a results-based accountability frame. For

example, a system's data on recidivism rates for young people who have experienced institutional confinement may challenge the assumption that incarceration is necessary and effective in protecting community safety. Likewise, a system's data on developmental outcomes for young people who have experienced institutional confinement may raise fundamental questions about the impact of incarceration on educational achievement, mental health, employment and family formation. Hearing from folks who have experienced youth incarceration, either directly or via loved ones, can provide tangible examples that are suggested by such data. Exploration of these data and existing practices may then promote discussion of community-based alternatives that have been demonstrated elsewhere with promising results.

✅ **Highlight existing data and narratives on racial and ethnic disparities in system practice to center racial justice and equity in the mandate for change**. To reveal racial and ethnic disparities, system leaders can share disaggregated data for each of the major decision points of the system. As discussed in the chapter on *Racial Justice and Equity*, research over decades and across multiple jurisdictions clearly documents racial inequities at every decision point of the system. Even when their circumstances and the seriousness of their alleged offense are similar to their white peers, youth of color, especially African American and Native American youth, are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be detained, more likely to be adjudicated, more likely to be removed from family and more likely to be committed to institutional incarceration. Presenting this data will underline racism perpetuated by the system and can help stakeholders understand the essential unfairness and injustice of the current system and motivate them to take action to address the structural inequities.

Because decisions about individual young people are so often inherently driven by subjective judgments, understanding the implicit and explicit bias of decision-makers at every level is critical to creating a more equitable system. As discussed in Chapter 1, research has documented how explicit as well as unconscious bias affects subjective judgments about age, risk and culpability of youth charged with offenses, which can lead to more punitive decisions against young people of color. Digging into the history

of the system's impact on different racial and ethnic groups, and on different communities, will help to deepen understanding of the drivers of the disparities in the system's data and potential solutions. A shared vision for the future depends on an honest recognition and acknowledgment of the injustices of the past and the forces that sustain inequities into the present. Again, young people themselves, their families and their communities can help deepen understanding of these forces for all stakeholders, as well as provide perspectives and ideas about what needs to change to achieve equity and justice in the transformed system.

Draw attention to the abusive conditions associated with institutional incarceration. To do this, system leaders can share national data and examples of mistreatment and harsh conditions for youth held in these institutions, if local data is unavailable. Abusive conditions of confinement have been documented in more than 75% of states.[7] These abuses include physical and sexual assaults, improper use of restraints resulting in injuries, indiscriminate use of pepper spray and other chemical irritants and the use of lengthy solitary confinement. Court cases have also revealed lack of adequate health and mental health services, and failures to provide basic education and/or special education services to eligible youth.

EXAMPLES OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSIVE CONDITIONS

- A 2009 Department of Justice investigation finds Lansing Residential Center, Louis Gossett Jr. Residential Center, Tryon Residential Center, and Tryon Girls Center in violation of constitutional standards in the areas of protection from harm and mental health care.[7]

- The Justice Department opens a statewide investigation into the conditions in the five secure juvenile correctional facilities run by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department.[8]

- A 2016 federal study finds increase in allegations of child sexual abuse by staff in juvenile detention facilities.[9]

As a contrast to the harms and failures of a more correctional approach, and to inform a shared vision for transformation, highlight what is possible based on examples of transformation from other jurisdictions, including proven and promising elements of a community-based, family-focused and youth-centered continuum of services and supports. Perhaps the most common objection to the idea of ending institutional incarceration of young people is concern that there are no effective, pragmatic alternatives. While these objections typically center on the need to protect public safety, they also reflect skepticism that young people's needs can be met adequately if they remain in their communities.

To respond, lay out a prototype of a full continuum of services and supports, drawing from research and experience on what works to reduce recidivism and promote positive youth development. As an initial step, compile and share written and web-based resources that tell the stories and present the results of reform efforts from around the country.[10] Early meetings can include presentations that summarize these experiences, including review of data from other jurisdictions, and where possible, presentations from leaders of successful transformation efforts describing their work, descriptions of the results they've accomplished, and examples of obstacles they faced and how they resolved them.[11] Hearing directly from people who have embarked successfully upon system transformation can help participants believe that transformation is really possible and understand how to achieve it.

ILLUMINATING WHAT'S POSSIBLE: EXAMPLES OF NEW CONTINUA FOR YOUTH JUSTICE THAT INSPIRE TRANSFORMATION

To educate a collaborative for youth justice transformation, illustrate the elements of a full continuum that can support better outcomes for young people and community safety than the current, correctional approach. As an example, a full continuum to present to a collaborative might include the following elements:

- Prevention and early intervention approaches focused on improving child well-being and pathways to opportunity, beginning with prenatal and early childhood supports and continuing throughout children's development.

- Interventions to defuse and resolve family and peer conflict before it escalates into a physical confrontation

- School-based models that work to improve the overall school climate and reduce reliance on suspension, expulsion or other exclusionary methods

- Restorative Justice models in the schools and in communities, to divert as many youth as possible from any contact with law enforcement or the formal youth justice system

- Probation services based on positive youth development principles, replacing the typical system of a long list of generic conditions, compliance surveillance and sanctions with a limited number of needs-based achievements, incentives and support.

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

✓ Community-based supports, such as Youth Advocates Program, Credible Messengers and other mentoring and wrap-around programs.

✓ Supportive services for families, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy as well as peer-to-peer networks of parents helping parents and young people helping young people.

COMMUNITY RE-INTEGRATION

EXAMPLES:
- Family Integrated Transitions
- Case management
- Reunification programs

PREVENTION

EXAMPLES:
- Tutoring programs
- Team sports
- Skills training programs

OUT OF HOME TREATMENT

EXAMPLES:
- Therapeutic Communities (*residential substance use disorder treatment*)
- Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care
- Wilderness Programs

EARLY INTERVENTION

EXAMPLES:
- Assessment center or services
- Restorative Community Conferencing
- Mediation

YOUTH, FAMILY, & COMMUNITY WELLBEING

EXAMPLES:
- Multisystemic Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Shelter care/Emergency shelter services

EXAMPLES:
- Alternative schools/ specialized educational programs
- Outpatient substance abuse programs
- Aggression Replacement Training

INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

INTERVENTION

LOW

MEDIUM

HIGH

Graphic adapted from the Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law's report *Place Matters: Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood.*

There are a number of jurisdictions nationwide that have created diverse continua of support for young people as part of a transformed youth justice system, which include all or many of the above elements. These include:

Wraparound Milwaukee

Wraparound Milwaukee, which serves over 1,600 families annually in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and has an average daily enrollment of 1,050 youth and their families. The outcome goals of Wraparound Milwaukee are measured through specific success indicators established by the program stakeholders (family, child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, and education). These include increases in family satisfaction, child permanency, better school attendance, improved clinical functioning, and decreased recidivism. Wraparound Milwaukee is directed by Brian McBride.[12]

Coordinated System of Care

Louisiana's Coordinated System of Care (CSoC), which creates a single point of entry for families of children who have complex behavioral health needs and are either in or at risk of being in out-of-home placement (e.g., group homes, juvenile detention facilities, residential treatment centers) by combining resources of the State's four child-serving agencies: Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Education, Department of Health and, Office of Juvenile Justice.[13]

Wraparound

Wraparound, which works with the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services and Los Angeles County Probation Department to provide youth and families with support services to maintain emotionally and behaviorally challenged children with their family and communities in the most normative and least restrictive environment. Wraparound focuses on keeping children at home with their families and in their local communities.[14] ■

Going a step further, consider taking the whole collaborative or a representative group to visit one or more jurisdictions that have implemented transformative change, to witness these programs in action. While no state or city system has fully and successfully implemented all aspects of the 4Rs of transformation—reduce, reform, replace, reinvest (outlined in Chapters 9 through 12)—an increasing number of places have had sufficient experience with elements of transformation to offer examples and lessons that can help guide others. Where this is not possible given existing time or resources, or as a preliminary step, system leaders can also encourage teams of stakeholders to attend conferences where other jurisdictions share their experiences and offer lessons they've learned over time. Jurisdictions should also be sure to check out what is happening in their own backyards--in their own city or state--especially what is being run by organizations operating in neighborhoods and communities currently impacted by incarceration. Too often, leaders can overlook or miss good work happening at home that can be built upon and investigating and talking to people at home can reveal solutions already being generated from communities themselves that could be strengthened or expanded.

Clearly, jurisdictions vary in important ways as to how their systems operate, as well as their political, financial, social and legislative context. An approach or program that works well in one setting may not be a good fit for another. Reform efforts for a system that gives the youth corrections department authority over decisions about matters such as program placement, movement, conditions for release, length of stay and so on will be very different from those for a system that requires judicial review and approval for these decisions. Youth justice systems in some states are managed primarily at the state level, while systems in other states are managed primarily at the county level and still other systems are more mixed (e.g., with pre-adjudication detention and some diversion and treatment programs managed by counties, while the state manages youth prisons). There are many other differences from one system to the next, and strategies and approaches cannot simply be lifted and replicated from one place to another.

to another. Nevertheless, learning about innovations in other places can be extraordinarily helpful in building consensus about reform in the leader's own jurisdiction, as well as demonstrating to everyone what's possible.

ACTION STEP 3

Develop Shared Values, Principles and a New Vision for Youth Justice

Leaders from within and outside of the formal system who are participating in a collaborative working group will have now taken a critical look at current practice and needs for system transformation and reviewed examples of transformation from other jurisdictions. They can now begin to work together to build consensus on the values and principles that define a new vision for their youth justice system. Engaging all stakeholders in deep discussion about values and principles can create a shared understanding of the new direction, and a commitment to ensuring that the implementation and operation of the transformed system aligns with those values and principles. Understanding shared values and principles is also a helpful step in developing a vision that all stakeholders can relate to and stand behind.

The following steps are relevant to developing shared values, principles and a shared vision for a new system of youth justice:

✓ **First, work together to explore a collective understanding of the purpose of the youth justice system**, including reviewing stated system goals, as well as goals set forth by systems that have engaged and progressed in transformation processes. The first step to developing a shared vision for a new system is knowing what that system hopes to achieve. It can be illuminating to review how other, more transformed systems have framed their goals, which themselves can reveal core values that differ from a more

conventional, correctional approach, such as: youth, family and community partnership, respect for human dignity; trauma-centered approaches; racial equity; etc.

To build consensus on core values and principles for a transformed system, review existing descriptions of the values, principles, mission and vision of the youth justice system. Review values, principles, and statements from advocates and groups of youth, families and communities whose lives have been affected by crime and the system's response to crime. Work with the collaborative to develop values and principles that are essential to a transformed system. It can also be helpful to review values and principles that have been developed by other jurisdictions that have progressed with transformation, and other aligned groups (see Sidebar). Then the group can work together with the help of a facilitator to narrow the list down to the most essential values and principles. These discussions among a collaborative, while sometimes tedious, can expose fundamental differences in how stakeholders from different parts of the system and community network approach youth justice, and lead to productive resolution of tensions among competing values and principles. These efforts will also be the beginning stages of translating those values into behaviors and practices, while also aligning the overall vision for change to those values.

Consensus values and principles developed by a collaborative should become touchstones for assessing current and proposed policies, practices and programs including more specific visions for specific parts of the system. For example, if a core value is helping young people develop and thrive as adults, programs that achieve improved developmental outcomes should have higher priority than those that don't achieve positive outcomes.

EXAMPLES

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

As an example of values and principles, this Desk Guide envisions a future for youth justice that rests on:

- Racial equity
- Youth-centered, family-focused, community-based responses to youthful behavioral problems and offenses
- Complete diversion from the system whenever possible
- Services and supports that promote positive youth development
- Avoiding reliance on the youth justice system as a back-up for failures in other youth and family serving systems
- For the very small number of youth requiring out-of-home placement, programs that are small, evidence-based, homelike, and located close to the young person's home.

After developing a list of guiding values and principles, move on to write a new mission and vision statement for a transformed youth justice system. Review existing vision or mission statements as captured in legislative language and public agency mission statements in light of the agreed-upon values and principles. As with developing lists of shared values and principles, engaging stakeholders in reviewing and revising existing statements about mission and vision can clarify important tensions and differences in priorities and values. Resolving these differences can serve as essential touchpoints as the reform effort matures and grows. Some of the most creative and compelling visions for youth justice have been created by young people, their families, community activists and other advocates. Sample vision and mission statements generated by other systems taking on transformation can serve as inspiration. As with developing shared values and principles, a skilled facilitator can be helpful in ensuring that all voices are heard, in recognizing points of common ground, and in moving the group toward shared mission and vision statements that all can agree upon.

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS FOR A NEW YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

- We aim to honor and strengthen community self-determination; reduce (and eventually eliminate) dependence on the juvenile justice system; and keep youth safe at home and supported by the capable hands of their own communities. (Albuquerque Justice for Youth Community Collaborative)[15]

- We are rooted in our cultural differences and seek diverse perspectives. We recognize that both historically and presently, certain communities are targeted and harmed by systemic oppression, discrimination, and prejudice. We work to ensure our strategies and actions promote diversity, equity, and justice, based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, language, national origin, immigration status, system involvement, socioeconomic status, and the multitude of intersections thereof. (Impact Justice)[16]

- We envision a world where the response to youth who get in trouble with the law is developmentally appropriate, free of racial and ethnic bias, and focused on building strengths that help youth avoid further involvement with the justice system. (Center for Children's Law and Policy)[17]

- We seek to end youth imprisonment entirely by establishing a new national consensus against imprisonment of kids in favor of investments in community programs that can put kids on track to success. To achieve a tipping point, we are working to build a critical mass of states to make this shift away from incarceration and towards investing in youth in their communities. (No Kids in Prison)[18]

ACTION STEP 4

Ensure that Vision and Mission Statements are Meaningful to Practice and Implementation

Formal vision and mission statements can make bold, aspirational claims about system goals. Too often, however, these statements fail to translate into day-to-day practice as experienced by youth, families and communities across the system. For example, youth justice system mission statements routinely refer to rehabilitation and care as core purposes of the youth justice system, along with ensuring public safety and offender accountability. Yet too often, the system's day-to-day operations and functioning reflect a punitive approach rather than any semblance of the care or rehabilitation described in these formal mission statements.

Without constant attention, given the racist history of youth justice systems and the legacy of practice and culture ingrained over the long history of incarceration of young people, system decisions and operations can come to reflect a heavier emphasis on punishment ("you did harm and you must suffer to pay the price"), deterrence ("others will know they will be punished for doing harm and so will be less likely to commit crime") and incapacitation ("we're protecting the community by keeping you locked up") over rehabilitation. Despite rhetorical references to rehabilitation and treating the whole child, the system can fail to provide even the minimum level of care and support necessary for positive youth development, long-term success and even safety.

The following action steps will help ensure that vision and mission statements developed for a new system translate into meaningful action in reform and practice across the system:

✅ **Create specific goals and visions for each of the major steps and decision points of the system that are tied to overarching system mission and vision statements.** Taking the time to translate mission and vision statements into the relevant work that happens at each system point can both give direction to practical reform

system, as well as serve as a guidepost for accountability in ensuring that implementation is aligned with the new, shared vision. It is worth the group's time after developing a shared vision to translate that vision into action steps, goals and visions for each point of practice, including goals to shrink the existing system and rely more upon community organizations as the leaders of youth justice care and responsibility. Quantitative goals that utilize existing data and state clear metrics for transformation can be useful in holding the system accountable to measurable change.

Maintain the collaborative structure to monitor implementation and hold the system accountable to its new vision. This work is discussed further in later chapters on implementation. As with each of the action steps discussed in this section, leaders will learn a great deal by continuing to reach out to a diverse group of stakeholders in the system and community network. In particular, young people and their families, as well as the advocacy organizations that represent them, are likely to be the most important sources of feedback, and, as noted above, they may have already developed compelling and important vision statements about the future of youth justice in the jurisdiction and have new and innovative ideas about how to achieve them.

ACTION STEP 5

Communicate the Shared Vision to All Audiences that are Needed to Support It

Developing a shared vision for transformation among a task force or working group is the first step in setting a new, collaborative direction and marshaling a diverse platform of support for moving toward a new youth justice system. However, given the breadth of the youth justice system, the many agencies involved in its administration, the potential transfer of responsibility to communities, and the many people, organizations and

communities that it affects, it is necessary to spread that vision, and gain buy-in for it, among a broader coalition of stakeholders. While the full work required to build public and political will for transformation is explored in-depth in Chapter 5, the final step in developing a shared vision—that is, the preliminary work to share the new vision developed, communicate it to relevant audiences, and gain support—is explored here.

Develop messaging and dissemination strategies surrounding the new vision for youth justice transformation that are targeted to the most relevant audiences needed to support change. These audiences include legislative and executive branch officials who are likely to influence the direction and progress of the reforms; staff and providers currently delivering services to the young people involved with the youth justice system; the broader youth justice system network, including judges, probation officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement and other public and private agencies who may be affected by changes in policy or practice, such as child welfare, education and child mental health; the network of advocates and activists who include youth justice and similar issues as part of their agendas; and young people, their families, and leaders from their communities. Members of the collaborative that developed the shared vision, and other aligned leaders and groups, can develop unique messages to reach these groups and can act as powerful ambassadors for the new vision among the audiences with whom they hold the most credibility.

Reach out to the groups and influential individuals that are likely to support transformative change to share and spread the new vision. In considering a communication strategy to generate support for the new vision for youth justice, the collaborative can consider rank ordering groups and influential individuals by the degree of their support for transformative change. For example, some groups or individuals might be labeled as "champions" of change, because they are actively working to bring change about; others might be labeled "supporters" because they have publicly endorsed change, while "persuadables" might have a track record of supporting similar reforms but have not voiced a position on this issue. Identifying those who are likely to support reform, and the reasons for their support, will help prepare ways to frame communications about the new vision, and identify credible

advocates for reforms. It's also important to consider and reach out to "unlikely allies", which might include victims' rights advocates, prosecutors and members of the law enforcement community. They can become powerful voices for reform, and are much less likely to actively oppose reform if they have been included in conversations early on.[19]

Reach out to the groups and influential individuals who are likely oppose transformative change actively. Consider rank ordering groups and influential individuals by the degree of their opposition to transformative change. For example, some groups or individuals might be labeled "committed opponents" because they are actively working to oppose proposed changes and/or working to move the system in a more punitive, restrictive direction. Others might be labeled "challengers" because they have voiced concerns about reducing institutional incarceration and related reforms, while "skeptics" might have a track record of questioning similar reforms but have not voiced a position on this issue. Identifying those who are likely to oppose reform, and the reasons for their opposition, will help prepare ways to frame communications about the new vision, and to respond to questions, concerns or criticisms raised by opponents.

Reach out to agency staff at all levels to communicate the new vision and its rationale. When proposed or rumored change carries the probability of impact on staff workload, responsibilities, compensation, opportunities for advancement and employment itself, resistance is inevitable. Rumors and misinformation— sometimes deliberately spread by those who oppose or fear the reforms—will compete with attempts to build support for the reforms. However, the more these stakeholders are included in the development of visions and ensuing plans, the better for morale and support. Leaders should reach out early and often to unions or other organizations that represent staff to share visions for transformation, solicit their input, and keep them informed of plans as they evolve.

Reach out to the groups and influential individuals who are not currently actively engaged or informed about the need and prospects for change. Many of the groups or individuals who could play a key role in promoting or opposing reform may not have engaged in any depth with the issues. Yet, they may be called upon to approve or vote on the changes, or to allocate resources, or to play important roles in implementing the changes. Champions who are seen by these groups or individuals as credible representatives of their own experience and responsibilities are more likely to be accepted as trusted messengers. For example, judges are likely to see other judges as more knowledgeable about the judicial role than an advocate who has never been a judge. Thus, cultivating and supporting champions in each of the stakeholder groups and enlisting them to reach out to their peers can yield great benefits in moving toward a shared consensus on a new vision.

Below is a high-level summary of next steps to take in your jurisdiction to develop a shared vision for youth justice transformation:

✓ **Create or join an existing collaborative authorized to chart a new course for youth justice.** Reach out to existing committees, task forces or other groups focused on youth justice reform that may serve as forums to shape and implement a new vision. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of relying on an existing committee or task force versus advocating for the appointment of a new group to design and oversee implementation of reforms. When deciding to move forward with a new collaborative, ensure the support of relevant authorizing entities. Educate authorizing entities with presentations about the current system, including harms and racial disparities mandating transformation. Reach out to engage essential partners inside and outside of the formal system to build a collaborative working group for change, including community partners, youth and their families. Assemble a staff leadership team to support and move forward the work of the collaborative.

✓ **Build trust and a shared understanding of the current system and need for transformation, with a central focus on racial justice and equity.** Work with a facilitator to build a foundation of trust in the group. Develop a shared understanding of the current system and the need for change by sharing data and findings of recent system assessments. Invite the direct experience and stories of impacted youth, families and communities and system staff. Focus on the two purposes of the youth justice system and how the system is or is not

NEXT STEPS

is not meeting its goals. Highlight existing data and narratives on racial and ethnic disparities, and an understanding of the effects of racial bias, to ensure racial justice and equity is a central element in the mandate for change. Draw attention to the abusive conditions associated with incarceration. To inform a shared vision for transformation, highlight examples of transformation from other jurisdictions, including proven and promising elements of a community-based, family-focused and youth-centered continuum of services. Invite leaders of successful transformation efforts to describe their work and results. Conduct site visits to other jurisdictions where possible.

Develop shared values, principles and a new vision for youth justice. Explore a collective understanding of the purpose of the youth justice system, including stated system goals and goals set by systems that have progressed with transformation. Review existing descriptions of the mission and vision of the youth justice system, and draw upon examples of values, principles, mission and vision statements set by other jurisdictions, advocates, and groups of impacted youth, families and communities. Work with the collaborative to develop new values, principles, mission and vision statements for the youth justice system that reflect the priorities inherent to transformation. Engaging stakeholders in reviewing and revising statements about mission and vision can clarify important tensions and differences in priorities and values. A skilled facilitator can be helpful in ensuring that all voices are heard, recognizing points of common ground, and moving the group toward shared mission and vision statements that all can agree upon.

Ensure that vision and mission statements are meaningful to practice and implementation. Create specific goals and visions for each of the major steps and decision points of the system that are tied to overarching system mission and vision. Translate mission and vision statements into the relevant work that happens across the system and day-to-day with youth and families. Quantitative goals that utilize existing data and state a measure for transformation can help hold the system accountable. Maintain the collaborative structure to monitor implementation.

Communicate the shared vision to all audiences needed to support It. Develop messaging and dissemination strategies surrounding the new vision for youth justice that are targeted to the most relevant audiences needed to support change. These include legislative and executive branch officials; staff and providers; judges, probation officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement and other public and private agencies, such as child welfare, education and child mental health agencies; advocates and activists; young people, their families and leaders from communities. Members of the collaborative can act as powerful ambassadors for the new vision among the audiences with whom they hold the most credibility. Reach out to groups and influential individuals that are likely to support transformative change, including unlikely allies, those likely to oppose transformative change to share and spread the new vision. ■

CHAPTER RESOURCES

Race equity and inclusion action guide **VISIT LINK ↗**

Positive youth justice: Framing justice interventions using the concepts of positive youth development **VISIT LINK ↗**

Promoting a new direction for youth justice: Strategies to fund a community-based continuum of care and opportunity **VISIT LINK ↗**

Designing Youth Diversion & Development in Los Angeles County **VISIT LINK ↗**

Place Matters: Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood **VISIT LINK ↗**

A New Vision for Youth Justice: Insights from Hampton Roads Communities **VISIT LINK ↗**

1 See the Annie E. Casey Foundation's presentation on the implementation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) in Harris County, Texas

2 See Milwaukee County's presentation on strategies to address disproportionate minority contact

3 See the Los Angeles County Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study for approaches to juvenile justice reform as enacted in Los Angeles County

4 See Kansas Juvenile Justice Task Force's Report on Juvenile Offenders

5 See County Leadership in Juvenile Justice Reform: Wayne County, Michigan

6 See Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force's final report

7 See more on conditions of confinement data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Sentening Project

8 See the 2009 Department of Justice findings letter regarding four New York juvenile facilities

9 See the Department of Justice's 2021 press release announcing their investigation into conditions at five juvenile facilities in Texas

10 See Equal Justice Initiative's report on a federal study that reveals increases in the rate of sexual abuse allegations in state, local, and private juvenile detention facilities

11 See Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force's meeting presentation and agenda

12 See a preliminary presentation from Indiana's Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force

13 See Wraparound Milwaukee's report on the effectiveness of the wraparound model in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

14 See Louisiana's Coordinated System of Care (CSoC)

15 See Tessie Cleveland Community Services Corporation's Wraparound program

16 See La Plazita Institute for Albuquerque Justice for Youth Community Collaborative's mission statement

17 See Impact Justice

18 See Center for Children's Law and Policy

19 See No Kids in Prison

20 See Fair and Just Prosecution, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and National Center for Victims of Crime

ENDNOTES

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TAKING ON
TRANSFORMATION