TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION

Chapter 7

TURNING DATA INTO ACTION

SPECIAL THANKS

7

4

OBJECTIVE

EXPLORE THIS CHAPTER ONLINE

This chapter explains common gaps and challenges with using data in youth justice systems, how to use data currently available, and how to create more robust data systems to guide youth justice transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Data analysis is a powerful tool for transformation. Used thoughtfully, the right data can cast light on current system practice, illuminate the mandate for change, and direct leaders where to focus.

Data analysis is essential for measuring progress, keeping leaders accountable to the goals and values of transformation and determining the impact of changes made. Making sense of data and turning it into useful information for action begins with having a clear vision of the results the system should achieve and the many drivers that affect those results. Leaders working to transform a system are more likely to attract support and sustain momentum among partners if they can show how the new direction improves system and individual results. In addition, clarifying how changes in each part of the system are expected to contribute to better results is essential to choosing the data to be tracked and to using data to correct course when necessary and ensure continuous improvement.

Despite these benefits, however, most systems rarely take full advantage of available data to guide operations, inform strategic decisions or improve results. Most youth justice systems do routinely collect large amounts of data and may present them in tables, charts and graphs. And systems typically analyze and present raw numbers to meet standard reporting requirements and report on basic outcomes—e.g., recidivism. Yet few systems use the data they have to shape decisions and assess the impact of changes made.

Too many system leaders do not understand how their own systems really function, who they are serving, or how they are serving them, and so they don't fully understand how the system is performing on key results such as reducing the odds of future harm and improving youth well-being, equity and justice. Part of taking advantage of data and using it in a transformation process must be creating a data-driven culture throughout the agency; being curious about the data that is shared and asking questions to guide transformation toward key goals can help to shape a culture within the agency where data and information are seen as tools in advancing a larger vision. Through this process, staff can become better versed in what data is critical and why, how to solicit information, and what kind of analysis is important. Over time, these insights can help better inform changes, gauge success, sustain improvements, and adjust efforts as needed.

> **THIS CHAPTER OFFERS A FRAMEWORK TO HELP LEADERS UNDERSTAND THE BASIC DATA THEY SHOULD HAVE AVAILABLE AND HOW TO SET UP THEIR AGENCIES TO TRACK AND USE THIS DATA AS THEY DEVELOP THEIR PLANS FOR TRANSFORMATION, IMPLEMENT INNOVATIONS, MONITOR PROGRESS AND MAKE COURSE CORRECTIONS.**

This chapter offers a framework to help leaders understand the basic data they should have available and how to set up their agencies to track and use this data as they develop their plans for transformation, implement innovations, monitor progress and make course corrections. The chapter describes a team approach to generating and using relevant data, using the goals of transformation to guide data analysis, conducting analyses that turn data into actionable information, and presenting findings for transparency and consensus building among multiple stakeholders. Finally, the chapter addresses common problems that leaders may confront in building more robust data and information management capacity and offers strategies for both using currently available data as well as developing stronger capacity to collect and analyze data to move transformative change forward.

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

COMMON GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN YOUTH JUSTICE DATA SYSTEMS

Having accurate, reliable and useable data is essential for leaders to understand the current youth justice system and to drive transformation. To guide the transformation effort system leaders need to know:

- **How the current system operates**

- **Whom they serve.**

- **What the current outcomes are for youth** involved with the system.

- **Where disparities lie based on certain youth characteristics,** such as race or home community.

- **Which strategies are most likely to improve outcomes** for youth and for communities, centering youth well-being, equity, and justice as well as reducing harm.

Successful transformation efforts require the ability to conduct rigorous comparative analyses, interpret the data to understand system flaws and successes and present the data for accountability and strategic use among various audiences. Alongside committing to partnership, developing a shared vision, and staying accountable to the goals of transformation, a robust data system is an essential tool for transformation.

Although many youth justice leaders and systems today claim to be "data driven", few leaders or their management teams have accurate and comprehensive data, or know how to use data in a nuanced way to inform decisions about their work. Rather, most youth justice systems collect data to meet mandated federal, state and local reporting or regulatory requirements about financing and expenditures and compliance with basic educational enrollment, health and safety mandates. They report on raw numbers of youth at various points in the system with little analysis of outcomes for young people, the impact of various interventions or the experiences

of different young people in the system that might reveal disparities based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and other factors. Data relevant to results tend to be limited to system outputs (e.g., the number of young people receiving each type of intervention) and generic recidivism. Data on youth development outcomes that reveal the true impact of the system on youth well-being—such as educational attainment, mental health status and social and emotional skills—are rarely even collected much less analyzed.

The list of challenges to using data in youth justice systems is long and may feel daunting. Data that are easily available to system leaders are commonly outdated, irrelevant and/or inaccurate. The systems used to produce data may be very old, include many errors or blank spots, and/or use outdated definitions and terminology, or may not collect relevant data. Given the age of many data systems, for example, demographic categorizations are not up to date with current ways of thinking and categorizing—for example, offering only binary gender options (male and female), or limited categories of race—such that they cannot fully and accurately capture who they are serving. Many leaders themselves are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with using data or with creating analyses that can reveal problems and guide solutions. Few leaders and agencies have a skilled data person or team that is dedicated to analyzing and using data to shape the system. Existing staff may lack the technical training, expertise and experience to produce valid and reliable data on which to make decisions.

Further, no youth correctional system has all the data in-house that will be needed to assess youth experiences across the system. Because the youth justice system is actually a loose network of multiple public and private organizations—law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, probation, youth serving agencies, county detention centers, the public youth correctional agency, and so on—data are lodged in many different places, each with its own definitions and protocols for sharing data, with multiple barriers to bringing the data together to paint a coherent and comprehensive picture of youth pathways and experiences across the system. Some of these barriers include:

- **Lack of coordination**, cooperation, or even a common vision among the different parts of the system about which data can be shared and how it should be used.

- **Lack of common definitions of key variables**, such as recidivism, commitment status and successful completion of required interventions.

- **Lack of consistency** over time in how data are recorded such that leaders are unable to track trends.

- **Unresolved technical challenges** that prevent easy data sharing across systems or lack of a common database to track young people's experiences over time and across different parts of the system.

As a result, many youth justice systems today do not understand who they are really serving or how well they are serving them. With old and incomplete data sets, outdated terminology and a lack of comparative analyses systems generally operate and make decisions about young people without a nuanced understanding of the youth they are serving or how youth with various characteristics may be experiencing the system differently. As a result, systems may be unintentionally overlooking or harming specific populations that have long been harmed or marginalized by the system and by society (e.g., girls, LGBTQIA, Black, Brown and Indigenous youth, youth who are disabled, youth with mental health needs, etc.). Without an understanding of youth or ability to assess how different youth experience the system, systems are generally unaware of how they are applying various interventions, if there are disparities in practice, and to what extent those interventions are reaching or succeeding with youth, beyond generic measures of recidivism.

Building out a comprehensive information strategy that optimizes both in-house data and shared data across the system is an incremental and ongoing process, and it is important not to wait for the achievement of perfect data systems to get going with the work of transformation. Leaders and staff should focus on what's available currently and can be used now to inform and drive transformation, even as they work to build a more robust data and information management system over the long term. Fortunately, a number of jurisdictions have done this work and laid out a path for doing it, providing valuable experience with using data now to address current challenges and building more robust systems that turn data into transformative action.

Bringing data systems into the modern age so that they can inform leaders about current practice and measure the results of reforms and interventions is another essential focus of work for youth justice leaders taking on transformation. Assembling a capable staff team, assessing system data capacity and building overall capacity to ensure the collection of robust data, rigorous comparative analyses and meaningful and intelligible presentations are all important aspects of this work.

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS IN USING DATA TO GUIDE TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPING MORE ROBUST DATA SYSTEMS

MARKERS FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

Youth justice leaders approaching this work will find themselves at different stages of progress in understanding how to use data to guide transformation and having systems set up for this purpose. Some will have old data and outdated data systems, no knowledge of how to use data and no staff capable of conducting analyses relevant to transformation. Others will be further along in building a staff team and transforming their in-house and cross-system data capacity. This chapter aims to help leaders facing these various starting points when it comes to data collection and analysis for transformation. The indicators below are designed to help jurisdictions assess where they are in the process of using data to guide transformation and in developing more robust data systems, and what work remains to be done to collect useful data and set up data systems that will guide effective action and accountability for transformation.

Indicators that a jurisdiction has made significant progress in developing its data systems to serve transformation include:

- ✅ **Leaders have clearly outlined the goals of transformation** and worked with their data analysis teams to identify what data will be needed to understand current practice, how to implement the goals of transformation and how to measure success.

- ✅ **Leaders have assessed their own capacity for understanding data** and using it to guide system transformation.

- ✅ **Leaders have established internal data analysis team** or contracted with an external team that includes a senior

manager with deep understanding of critical policy and practice decisions, a skilled data analyst, a technical expert proficient in extracting and integrating data from multiple information systems and someone with the skills to create engaging visual presentations of the data for many audiences.

✅ **Leaders have worked together with their data teams to assess internal data management capacity** and to develop short- and long-term plans for using the data and for filling gaps and building more robust data capacity.

✅ **Leaders have worked with their data teams and key partners to develop a baseline case flow map of the current system**, identifying available and missing data.

✅ **Leaders have worked with the data team to identify a list of available data variables and a list of desired variables**, as well as a plan for acquiring the data or creating it, including qualitative data from youth, families and communities.

✅ **Leaders and data teams have worked together to understand the various types of comparative analyses that are useful to understanding current system practice**, needs and areas for transformation and the effects of transformation, including trendline analyses, cohort analyses and disaggregation analyses.

✅ **Leaders and data teams understand how to present the data visually for multiple audiences** to ensure use by various partners in transformation and widespread accountability to the goals of transformation.

✅ **Leaders have established an internal and/or external data dashboard** that keeps leaders, managers, and staff focused on key indicators of transformation and accountable to measureable change and achievable goals.

Indicators that a jurisdiction has more work to do in setting up data systems that will serve transformation include:

❌ **Leaders have not analyzed the current system or current population**; they may have significant gaps in understanding of the current system and of whom they serve.

❌ **Leaders are unaware of their own capacity for understanding or using data**. They are unfamiliar with using data or are uncomfortable using it and have taken few steps to educate themselves or build internal staff capacity.

❌ **Leaders lack staff capable of identifying data needed**, setting up data systems, conducting comparative analyses relevant to transformation and presenting data in visually intelligible and engaging ways.

❌ **Leaders mostly collect and use data for typical purposes of meeting basic youth justice reporting requirements**.

❌ **Leaders are unaware of the data that will be needed to understand the current system** or to drive transformation and measure success.

❌ **Leaders are unaware of the agency's current data management capacity, and of existing gaps in data**. There may be significant gaps in available or accurate data based on old and outdated systems.

❌ **Leaders have not engaged a process of understanding or developing data capacity for immediate use** in guiding transformation or longer-term data system development.

ACTION STEPS

The following steps provide specific guidance toward using data to guide transformation.

It is an essential responsibility of a youth justice leader pursuing transformation to become aware of their system's existing data capacity and to make the changes necessary to equip the system with accurate and useable data that will guide transformation. This will require building and working with a skilled data analysis team that knows how to collect, analyze and present data for transformation. While understanding how to use data to guide transformation and building robust data systems may feel like daunting tasks at the beginning, depending on a system's starting point there is a clear path to follow that can help a system leader to understand their current capacity, create a strong data team, analyze the current system as a starting point for transformation, build more robust data collection and analysis systems and bridges across the system and present data skillfully to inform the work of transformation and hold leaders accountable to achieving established goals.

Wherever system leaders find themselves in this process, the below action steps will guide them forward toward creating robust data systems and using data to guide transformation.

1. Build a Strong Data Analysis Team

2. Understand the Data Needed to Guide Transformation

3. Assess Current Data Management Capacity

4. Conduct Analyses to Guide and Measure Progress

5. Visually Communicate Key Findings

ACTION STEP 1

Build a Strong Data Analysis Team

The first step in using data to guide transformation is to ensure the technical capacity in-house to collect, analyze, use and present data to inform the transformation process. Leaders must first understand their own capacity for data analysis and self-examination, and then ensure that they have or build a strong team with data capacity.

In the short term, leaders may decide to rely on an outside group or individual expert to provide immediate technical capacity for data collection and analysis. Building internal capacity can take many months or even years. Collaborating with external partners and/or contracting with high capacity organizations may be necessary to ensure transformation efforts are guided by accurate data and to avoid losing momentum and opportunity for change.

The following steps will help leaders to build the capacity for rigorous data collection, analysis and presentation:

> ✓ **First, do an honest self-assessment of your own comfort with and ability to use data.** Knowing oneself in this respect is critical to understanding the need to build capacity in the agency to work with data. Many leaders will have limited knowledge, experience and/or skill in analyzing and using data to guide decisions and some may even have significant discomfort. This need not become a critical problem if leaders recognize their own limitations while recognizing the importance and power of using data in accomplishing their mission and goals.
>
> After assessing your own data capacity, assess what skills and abilities you have in-house at the agency in terms of a data analysis team. To engage with data for transformation youth justice systems must have dedicated data experts who can extract data from management information systems for both routine and special reports, skilled data analysts who can

interpret and explain the findings of these reports and staff that can create appealing and intelligible visual presentations of the data for multiple audiences. Most systems will be lacking in some of the capacity needed, as typically youth justice systems have only gathered and used data to report on basic requirements, as described above. Rare are systems that have utilized nuanced data capacity to inform and guide decisions.

Once leaders understand what skills they have and what they need to add, the next step is to build the team. A strong model for youth justice agencies is to assemble a team that includes:

▬ **A senior manager with deep knowledge of system operations and youth experiences.** This person should work with the rest of the senior team and others to develop an information agenda, identifying the most important questions and indicators that the senior team needs to track regularly that are relevant to decisions about policy, procedures and practice. The senior manager is a key strategic partner to the leader driving the transformation process, as they will shape the use of data to understand the current system, the needs for transformation and the success of the transformation process as it moves forward. This senior manager also carries the critical responsibility to act as a liaison to the senior management team and all relevant groups working on the transformation initiative.

▬ **A skilled data analyst who can perform statistical studies and knows how to present findings in accessible and understandable ways.** This person should have the capacity to analyze multiple data sets to provide insight into the questions raised by the senior team and translate data into actionable information relevant to system performance, key decision points and system results.

▬ **A proficient technical expert with experience in extracting data in various formats from the management information system.** This person should have the technical and interpersonal skills to navigate and negotiate access to data from the management information systems of other parts of the youth justice system.

▮▮▮ **Someone with the skills to create engaging and easy to understand visual representations of the data.** In addition to the tables and charts typically produced to analyze and present data, the team should be able to use graphic data analysis tools to create info-graphics, maps and other visualizations of data so that a wide range of stakeholders can understand how the system is currently operating and participate in its transformation.

As noted earlier, leaders may elect to rely on outside expertise to provide some or all of the technical capacities of the data team. The important exception is the role of the senior manager, which requires someone with deep experience and knowledge of the system's current operations as well as the goals and plans for the transformation effort.

In systems that already have data analysis staff, some of whom may have been with the system for years, there may be a phase of training and revisioning that will be critical for culture change, and for onboarding the data team as part of a new, diverse and multidisciplinary team organized for transformation. See chapters on *Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation* and *Changing Organizational Culture to Align with Vision and Values* for more information about reorienting and motivating staff toward the transformation effort.

ACTION STEP 2

Use Key Goals to Understand the Data Needed to Guide Transformation

Once leaders have established or contracted for data collection and analysis capacity they should review key transformation goals developed earlier in the process (see *Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation*) together with the data analysis team to clarify which data will be needed to understand the current system, what is working and what is lacking,

what changes will be made as part of transformation and how to measure progress in achieving transformation goals.

The following steps will help leaders to use the goals of transformation as a framework for choosing the data necessary to guide the process forward:

Review key transformation goals with the data analysis team. Transformation goals may have been set in part by leaders and then developed further and refined with a collaborative working group or task force, as discussed in the chapter on *Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation*. Members of the data analysis team may or may not have participated in that group, especially if they are newer hires. An important first step is to review the key goals of transformation in detail with the data team. It is critical that the data team understands the goals of transformation, as they will translate these goals into questions that can be answered by the data, query the data system for answers, analyze the data, understand where data gaps lie and how to develop the system further to get better answers and present and explain findings.

Working with the data analysis team, use the goals of transformation to determine the data you will need to understand the current system, your current youth population and what is working to support youth well-being, what changes need to be made as part of the transformation process and what progress has been made with these changes and their success in better serving the goals of the youth justice system.

Understanding the current system through the lens of transformation will require looking at a number of variables related to youth flow through the system, disaggregating the data to understand the experiences of different types of young people moving through the system (for example, looking at the experiences of white youth and youth of color to understand disparities), and considering the types of results that are relevant to transformation— such as youth well-being, measured in a variety of ways, as compared with more typical recidivism measures. Some questions that are useful to ask in this process include:
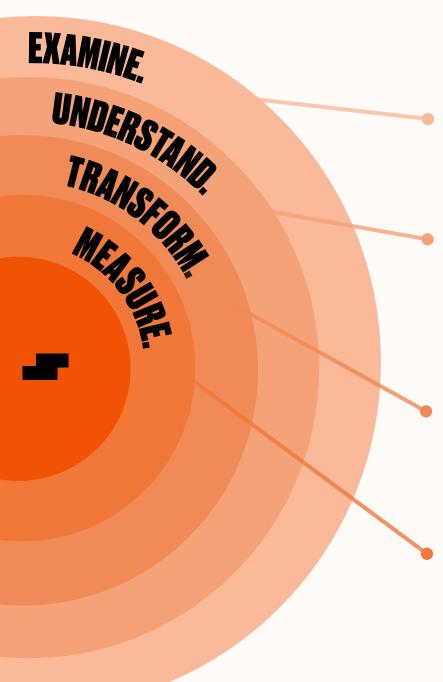
What are our transformation goals? What does a transformed system look like, and what are the key benchmarks or variables that represent success?

What do we need to know about the current system and the young people we are serving to understand what is working and what needs to change?

What will we need to know along the way to measure the progress of transformation? What are the outcomes for youth that will indicate success?

What data are currently available to answer these questions? What data are available from other systems that we may be able to access? What data are unavailable, and what can be collected or created?

For example, a key transformation goal may be to increase the diversion of young people at the front end of the system (among police officers, prosecutors, and probation) so that all low-risk young people are diverted from the system entirely. Leaders would first want to understand current diversion levels in the system and potential bottlenecks—that is, where and why certain young people are being diverted and others are not. To do this, they would want to look at the numbers and percentages of young people being diverted by police officers, prosecutors, and probation officers. They would then want to look at the populations of youth being diverted and not being diverted by offense level, any risk assessment information available, and various demographic factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity and geographic location to understand whether some young people are being diverted more than others.

They may find, for example, that especially younger youth are diverted less, or girls, or Black and Brown youth, or youth in certain geographic areas, which will raise more questions to be answered and flag populations to address that may increase diversion. New programs might need to be added for certain populations of youth, such as younger youth or girls, or in certain communities where they are lacking. Bias might need to be addressed in the

system to increase the diversion of youth of color. Later, once reforms are made, leaders will want data to measure the success of these changes, such as how diversion levels increased among certain populations of youth over time and how this affects the total number and percentage of youth diverted.

EXAMINE.
UNDERSTAND.
TRANSFORM.
MEASURE.

HOW TO HARNESS DATA TO TRANSFORM DIVERSION

Examine the Numbers.
Examine current diversion levels in the system, the numbers and percentages of young people being diverted by police officers, prosecutors, and probation officers.

Understand the Context.
Look at the populations of youth being diverted and not being diverted by offense level, any risk assessment information available, and various demographic factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity and geographic location to understand whether some young people are being diverted more than others more than others.

Transform the Process.
Using this data, implement new programs for certain populations of youth, such as younger youth or girls, or in certain communities where they are lacking. Take steps to address bias in the system to increase the diversion of youth of color.

Measure Progress.
Measure the data of the success of these changes, such as how diversion levels increased among certain populations of youth over time and how this affects the total number and percentage of youth diverted.

The framework of transformation will help the data analysis team to more clearly understand what questions will need answers and what data will be needed both to understand the current system in the context of transformation and to measure the progress and success of transformation as changes are made. The next step addresses in detail the process of assessing the system's data and information management capacity.

ACTION STEP 3

Assess the System's Current Data Management Capacity and Create a Baseline System Map

The following steps will guide leaders and their data analysis team in assessing and developing a plan to maximize data and information management capacity:

✅ **First, work with the data analysis team to assess the data that are currently available in-house and across the system.** What data are available that are relevant to the goals of the transformation initiative? How reliable and accurate are the data? Do the data enable analysis of how youth move through the system at each decision point? Is it possible to disaggregate data to understand more about the young people the system is serving and different youth experiences based on unique characteristics, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity or home community? Is it possible to understand how resources are currently used, including detention, incarceration, other placement facilities and community-based services and supports? Does the system have data on how long youth are staying in these programs and the key outcomes for youth experiencing various system pathways and system and community programs? The Tips for Systems Leaders section below goes into further detail about the types of data that data teams and leaders will want to review to understand the system's current data capacity and paint a clear picture of current practice.
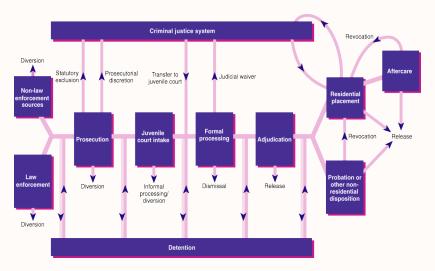
Next, assess the data available for each decision point in a case flow map. Creating a case flow map will usually require pulling representatives together from all parts of the system. The collaborative working group established during the visioning process will serve well for this work, with the addition of the data team. Completing such a mapping exercise is an excellent opportunity for all partners to learn how the system works and creates an opportunity to hear and learn from staff at all levels and all parts of the system, as well as youth, family and community partners. The exercise can help leaders and their partners discover and correct any misunderstandings or biases they have about how the system operates and build a new understanding from the ground up.

Completing the map is helpful in documenting all critical decision points, documents, assessments, forms and reports that the system uses or produces related to youth's journey through it. The result should be a visual representation that explains in graphic format the various paths a young person may travel from their first contact with the system to their exit, including the numbers of youth moving through each part and path.

Example of a Case Flow Map

From the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquincy
Prevention (OJJDP) Statistical Briefing Book

This exercise will pinpoint the key data points available to understand the system as well as where the data actually reside. Leaders will find that some important data are easily accessible, although the databases may need to be reformatted to allow merging with other databases to allow analysis. Other data points may be buried in databases that are rarely accessed for information and may contain large amounts of missing data and/or inaccurate data. Still other data may be only available in paper files, making collection, aggregation and analysis very difficult. As leaders work with other stakeholders to gain access to data they should ensure consistent definitions of key terms, variables and processes. While leaders may not need to complete this map for each and every process prior to taking any action toward transformation, they should at least begin the mapping work for the key processes that will be the focus of change efforts.

Work in partnership with the data analysis team, staff, youth, families and communities, as well as other youth justice agencies to develop a "data development agenda", i.e., a longer-term plan for building capacity to collect and analyze additional data relevant to transformation. This agenda will likely include gaining access to data held by other systems, establishing strategies to collect data that is not currently available and developing new data sources, including qualitative reports from youth, families and staff experiencing the system. Narrative accounts from youth and families, collected in surveys, focus groups, observations and through other methods such as participatory action research (see further discussion in the Tips for System Leaders section below), is critical to developing a full understanding of the current system and its impact on youth and families that goes beyond what raw numbers can reveal.

The data development agenda should also identify "fugitive data", i.e., data that are collected by hand and/or stored only in paper records and therefore not easily accessible for aggregate analysis. Moving relevant data from paper records to the organization's automated information management system should be a high priority target for improving analysis and decision-making.

WHICH DATA SHOULD YOU TRACK?

Typically, systems collect quantitative data—data that can be measured and reported in raw numbers. Less often, systems collect qualitative data—narrative reports of system experiences and functioning. Both types of data are essential to understanding how the system operates and its impact on youth, families and communities. While each youth justice system is different, quantitative information is usually more readily available. Nevertheless, both sources of data will likely require further development as part of a longer-term data development agenda.

Quantitative Data

Leaders should ask the data analysis team to review the following key performance measures relevant to the system's dynamics and case flow. Where relevant, the data should include the number and percent for each category and trends over time (see the sidebar on the next page for a list of categories).

In addition to the data on population flow and system efficiency, system leaders should ask the data analysis team to review data on current results for each element of the system, including:

- **Recidivism** – re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration as a youth or adult, tracked over five years
- **Violations of probation** (technical and new offense)
- **Youth outcomes** (educational, employment, health, mental health), tracked at least while the youth is under supervision and ideally over five years post-exit from the system
- **Allegations of abuse** or poor conditions in all programs
- **Performance data** for individual programs and program types,

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

such as percentage of referrals rejected, percentage of youth who exit before completion, pre/post measures of impact, educational, work readiness and other positive youth development outcomes, youth/family satisfaction surveys and youth/staff safety surveys and recidivism

☑ **Program fidelity** – particularly for evidence-based programs

Many systems will need to invest in developing capacity to collect, analyze and interpret data bearing on the results of the system's interventions. While transformation efforts should not be delayed while capacity is built, leaders should ensure that tracking and reporting on system results is a high priority for the data development agenda.

Qualitative Data

As they build out the data development agenda, leaders should establish regular, systematic processes for gathering information and feedback from young people who experience the system, their families and members of their communities, as well as youth justice staff, leaders and partners from other youth-serving agencies. These efforts should include formal surveys and group forums as well as interviews and other individualized conversations.

This qualitative information is essential to gaining a much clearer picture of the young people the system is serving, their experiences in the system, current system failures and opportunities for transformation that will improve success.

QUANTITATIVE PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO REVIEW

- ■ Arrests by categories of offense
- ■ Sources of referrals or complaints
- ■ Diversion activities by police and prosecutors; probation adjustments
- ■ Formal filings
- ■ Detention admissions
- ■ Detention overrides
- ■ Detention lengths of stay
- ■ Adjudications by category of offense
- ■ Dispositions, including orders of probation, community programs and out-of-home placements (secure and non-secure)
- ■ Time analysis for key processes, such as lag time between:
  - ○ Admission to detention and court hearing
  - ○ Filing of complaint and adjudicatory hearing
  - ○ Court orders and service provision
  - ○ Placement and return to community
- ■ Assessed risk levels (if applicable)
- ■ Analysis of the system's ability to match available services and supports to the needs and strengths of young people and their families
- ■ Analysis of any patterns in decisions that override system policies and/or recommendations based on formal assessment of risks and needs
- ■ Analysis of the use of out-of-home placement due to lack of family-focused and community services
- ■ Waiting lists or other indicators of lack of service capacity
- ■ Reliance on out-of-state or other distant resources
- ■ Capacity and utilization rates of available services and supports
- ■ Admissions and lengths of stay for all services

Speak to Young People & Their Families

Speaking directly with young people and their families offers critical information and insights not only into their own needs and strengths but also about the gaps and barriers within the system. This process also signals to everyone in the system that leadership is committed to actively seeking feedback from youth and families, understanding the needs and circumstances of youth and providing the highest standard of care. Direct outreach can take place in organized group forums such as town halls and focus groups and in one-on-one conversations and interviews.

Conduct Surveys for Feedback

Periodic surveys can provide leaders with feedback on a wide range of issues including whether young people and families understand how the system works, their rights and responsibilities, opportunities to register concerns and complaints, ideas on ways the system can be improved and conditions of confinement. The results of these surveys should be shared with those who respond to the survey, staff and other system stakeholders and the general public.

Regularly Visit & Observe Facilities

For leaders who oversee facilities, particularly secure facilities, making regular announced and unannounced visits to facilities is crucial in understanding the day-to-day experience of young people in the agency's care. Spending time observing and talking with youth and staff individually and in small groups can be helpful, particularly when it includes sitting in on key parts of the day such as school, recreation and groups. Time visits to occur at varied times, including weekends and evenings.

Reach Out to Other System Actors

System leaders should also work to understand the experiences and perspectives of key youth justice system partners, staff and other youth-serving agencies. This requires regular and ongoing discussions with judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement officials and peers from other agencies, including child welfare, mental health, substance abuse and the school system. Routinely sharing data with these stakeholders can help leaders gauge their reactions and solicit input for future decision-making.

These presentations should be framed as opportunities for system-wide improvement rather than an attempt to place blame or dodge responsibility. Staff from all levels and agencies of the youth justice system will have valuable insights as well. Frequent direct contact is essential both to improve understanding of how the system really operates on the ground and to build staff understanding and support for changes in structure, culture and operations.

Regularly Review Case Files

In addition to soliciting direct feedback in this way, leaders should regularly conduct an in-depth review of a sample of cases to ground themselves in current case processing practices as well as the fit between youth needs, placement and service decision-making processes and outcomes, and available programs. Review protocols such as the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs)[1] can also provide valuable insight into a system's culture. For instance: *Is the language staff use in their documentation strengths-based? Are families seen as partners, assets, adversaries, or irrelevant?* Reviews should include an examination of case files and history of the youth's involvement with the system, case presentations by frontline staff working with the youth and family, and conversations with the young person, family and other agencies working on the case.

Include Communities Through Participatory Action Research

A next level step of this work is to integrate young people, families, community members, staff and partners directly into the research and data development agenda through inclusive research methods such as Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is an approach to action research that emphasizes participation and action by members of communities affected by the research; in PAR, researchers and participants work together to understand a problem and change it for the better. In the context of youth justice, the clients and staff of the youth justice system engage with researchers directly on inquiries about how the system is operating, what is and isn't working and where change is needed. For example, in the Vera Institute of Justice's Restoring Promise initiative, which creates housing units grounded in dignity for young adults in prison,

More information, examples and resources on Participatory Action Research and other participatory processes can be found in the chapter on *Centering Youth and their Families.*

young people's experiences were in facilities at the beginning of the initiative and over time after implementation of the initiative, related to specific goals.[2]

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data can provide system leaders and partners with critical information about gaps in existing services when assessed alongside the needs of young people in the system and their families. This gap analysis is especially important when trying to understand system failures, such as a significant uptick in secure custody or other out-of-home placement, or an increase in the number of youth failing to complete probation or other programs, and how to respond with system changes as part of the transformation process. ■

Even as leaders gain access to important data not currently available, the work of transformation can move forward with whatever existing data is immediately available. Leaders can pursue two concurrent timelines relevant to data use and development:

- **First, learn what data is currently available**, and use that data—however imperfect, and acknowledging its limitations— to understand current system practice and plan for and guide transformation.

- **Simultaneously, develop and move forward a longer-term data development agenda with staff and key partners**—including youth, families, communities and other agencies—that identifies the additional information they would like to know about the system but currently lack in available or reliable data. For example, many systems will want to know more about various outcomes pertaining to youth well-being—information about youth mental health while in programming and longer-term outcomes related to family functioning, youth engagement, education, employment and civic engagement. Collecting this information for analysis will involve developing new data collection methods, such as periodic surveys while in care and longer-term follow-up interviews with youth, and information management systems that can track and organize this information for analysis.

Given the urgency for reform, this is a clear example of not letting the perfect—the ideal data and most complete understanding of the system— get in the way of the good—the data that are available now and can be used to move things forward. Analyzing what's already available and complementing that analysis with essential qualitative methods—surveys, focus groups, interviews and observations—should be a foundational step in forming the vision for change and in galvanizing support. The first priority is to use the data that are available to guide the transformation effort, even as the longer-term work to collect and analyze additional data gets underway.

ACTION STEP 4

Conduct Analyses to Understand the System, Guide Transformation and Measure Progress

Data analysis is not an end in itself. Data analysis should spur questions about why things are changing or not, and opportunities for improving performance and results.

Summary data on youth justice (and other public systems) are too often presented as simple descriptive statistics focusing on the basic question of "*how many?*": how many youth arrests, how many court findings, how many admissions, how many discharges, etc. Reports might also sometimes include data on "*what types,*" or demographic variables such as race, age and gender. While useful for providing a snapshot of the system's basic processes and functioning, these descriptive statistics provide little insight into assessing system performance, shaping policy or making management decisions.

Developing useful insights about the system and moving from statistical data to actionable information—requires analysis. And analysis depends on placing these data into some comparative context. One of the most basic yet important questions in finding meaning in data is "*compared to what?*" Entire books, multiple graduate level courses and advanced degrees are devoted to this question. For the purposes of this Desk Guide, however, we encourage system leaders to quickly develop some fairly straightforward and relatively easy-to-calculate comparative analyses that will be meaningful in learning and sharing information about the system that is pertinent to transformation (See the Deep Dive on *Types of Data Analysis* on the Taking on Transformation website for a more in-depth overview of data analysis types).

USING DATA TO ASSESS FOR BIAS AND DISPROPORTIONALITY

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

Finding and addressing systemic bias and disproportionate outcomes for youth is one of the central mandates of youth justice transformation. Therefore, it is imperative that all data analysis assess racial and ethnic disparities (RED), as well as any disproportionate effects of other youth characteristics such as gender, age, sexual orientation, sexual identity, ability or disability and geographic location.

Looking at system processes, outputs and outcomes as they relate to all youth in the system is important, but only tells part of the story. Disaggregating data helps to point out where the system is negatively impacting (or failing to positively impact) some youth based on their unique characteristics. Disaggregating data to explore one characteristic, such as race, may lead to a deeper analysis that illuminates other biases in the system.

For example, one jurisdiction found the average time from court order to placement in its jurisdiction was 45 days. The initial response was to look for ways to make the system more efficient to lower the time the average youth awaits placement—an important issue to address. But upon disaggregation of the data by race, leaders found that the average time spent awaiting placement was 18 days for Black youth and 55 days for white youth. What was the meaning behind the numbers? In this jurisdiction, it meant that Black youth were sentenced predominantly to the state's juvenile prisons, while white youth were more often placed in residential mental health facilities (which required a longer time period for admission). So, while Black youth were placed into facilities more quickly, disaggregation of the data revealed deep disparities in where youth were placed and the types of services they were offered.

As another example, there are jurisdictions where the numbers of certain types of youth who are incarcerated—such as girls—is very small, raising the question whether alternative responses to placement could be developed for these populations in the community. The Vera Institute's Ending Girls' Incarceration Initiative[3], for example, works with jurisdictions to disaggregate the data specifically on girls in placement and, when finding very low numbers, to consider alternative responses that can be developed in the community to serve this population and end incarceration altogether for these youth. This example illustrates the importance of disaggregating data for different populations in placement rather than looking at placement numbers only at the aggregate level. ■

**ACTION
STEP 5**

Present Key Findings Visually for Multiple Partners and Audiences of Transformation
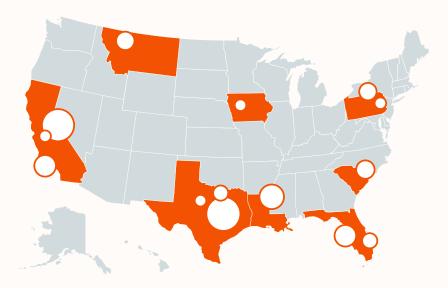
As discussed above, data analyzed for raw numbers alone and presented in traditional charts and tables may create a superficial, incomplete picture of the system that obscures rather than reveals important information. To dive deeper into system practice and guide reform that supports well-being and equitable practice for all youth leaders should work with their data analysis teams to complete more nuanced and layered analyses. Alongside this work, it is critical to present findings in a way that they can be understood and used for transformation by multiple audiences and partners. To deepen an understanding of findings among key stakeholders and enable their involvement in digesting, explaining and using these findings leaders should work with their data teams to develop presentations that are easy to understand and offer compelling narratives about the data and what they mean to current practice and to the goals and progress of transformation.

Working with the data analysis team and other partners to transformation, leaders should develop a data sharing agenda that provides regular and transparent analyses of current system practice and transformation efforts to key stakeholders and keeps key stakeholders engaged and apprised of ongoing practice, challenges, progress and successes. Thinking critically together with senior managers and leaders across the system, key youth, family and community partners, the data analysis team, and key communications partners (see the chapter on *Building Political and Public Will* for further discussion of the role of communications staff and plans), leaders should develop a thoughtful plan for how to keep key stakeholders apprised and engaged, including a list of who those stakeholders are (such as key elected officials; legislative, executive and judicial leaders and staff; youth, family and community partners; youth justice leaders; and leaders of other relevant agencies), a schedule of communications and the types of information and analyses that should be presented to each stakeholder group. Informing and engaging stakeholders in this way generates ongoing buy-in for

for transformation efforts as well as a foundation for collaboration and informed input into the ongoing work.

✓ Geo-Mapping
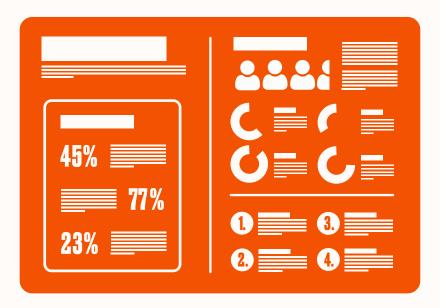
This approach presents data points super-imposed upon a map of different areas of the state or county, such as zip codes or neighborhood boundaries. When combined with other relevant indicators for each area—such as income or race—geo-mapping data **can reveal important place-based disparities in youth justice practice.**

For example, the director of Virginia's youth justice system used aggregated youth home address data layered on a state map showing service providers by type and location. This analysis and visualization revealed a significant systemic bias in the availability of certain types of services in certain locations across the state, which in turn affected the odds that a young person would be placed in secure custody rather than in a community-based group home. This "Justice by Geography" reality became a challenge to be addressed and monitored. After five years of work, Virginia was able to greatly reduce the disparity and the related Justice by Geography inequity, which was key to lowering the number of youth incarcerated in state facilities.[4]

✅ Graphically Representing Data

With the help of tools such as Excel BI, Tableau and others, data analysts can **represent data in creative and more intuitive ways** than endless tables, charts and line graphs. Using colors, shapes and shading, data and system processes can be visually represented without relying on numbers alone. For stakeholders who are uncomfortable with traditional statistics, visual learners, and the more artistically inclined, data visualization can be a **powerful tool in reaching a wider audience for transformation**. Creating infographics is also a powerful way to quickly convey complex information and large amounts of key data simply. Infographics can be particularly useful in crafting messages about the system transformation initiative and explaining the initiative internally and externally.

✅ Management-Oriented Data Reports

Leaders should use performance measurements strategically to introduce accountability and urgency to the transformation effort. Ensuring tracking and reporting of the most relevant and powerful indicators of progress will **communicate the goals and expected results of transformation to the system's senior leaders, middle**
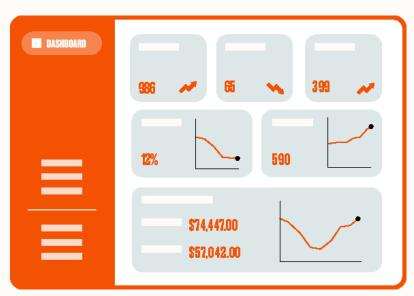
managers and line staff. Transformation means fundamental change in not only day-to-day operations but also change in how success is defined and measured. Having line managers track their units' performance not only **keeps them focused on transformation but also creates built-in accountability and opportunity to address operational challenges as they arise.**

Management reports should be produced on a regular schedule and supervisors supported to discuss the reports with their staff team and to track progress over time. Building in a regular and inclusive process for reviewing data will help increase buy-in for transformation among staff and create a learning organization where collaborative problem-solving is welcomed and valued.

Dashboards

As the system's data collection, retention, analysis and reporting systems progress and align with transformational goals and other system needs leaders should create both internal and public-facing dashboards that provide a **quick view of key information and areas needing attention**. Internal dashboards may be created and used daily for some key measures (e.g., operational measures such as admissions, discharges, population and length of stay for a detention center), weekly for other measures and monthly or quarterly for measures

that change less frequently. For example, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) in Washington, D.C. created a Daily Dashboard (see example below) that was sent to each member of the executive staff every morning. The Daily Dashboard pulled data from the agency's management information system daily and from other databases weekly to update leadership on the state of the agency. The Dashboard provided population levels, placements, service enrollments, recidivism, staffing levels and budget data on one page in simple tables and charts for quick and easy review and use. Leadership established relevant thresholds for each measure to trigger yellow or red dots next to items of concern.
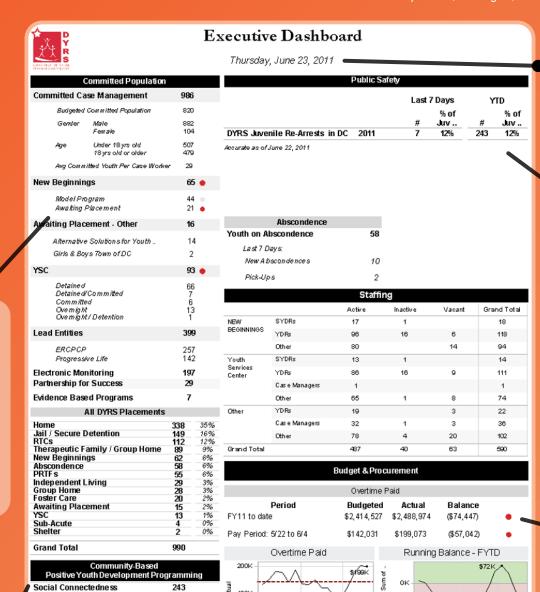
While public-facing dashboards may present somewhat different types of data—less operational but still focused on overall system performance—they are **important tools for holding the system accountable to the public and help external audiences understand how the system operates.** For example, the Utah Department of Juvenile Justice Services developed an internet-based public-facing dashboard[5] that enables anyone to track key performance measures, including system expenses, youth recidivism, and assignment of youth to various levels of service.

Having good quality data in a format that can be presented to and digested by staff and external stakeholders—including young people, their families, community groups and advocacy organizations—helps make indicators of system performance transparent and addresses inaccurate beliefs, perceptions and myths. Sharing data about the system can also help create buy-in for reforms and create opportunities to engage staff and external stakeholders at all levels in problem-solving and transformation efforts. This transparency and collaboration is part of not only using data more effectively but creating an agency and transformed youth justice system that has a data driven culture.

BREAKDOWN OF A DASHBOARD

Courtesy of DYRS, Washington, D.C.

Executive Dashboard

Thursday, June 23, 2011

Committed Population

Committed Case Management	986
Budgeted Committed Population	820
Gender Male	882
Female	104
Age Under 18 yrs old	507
18 yrs old or older	479
Avg Committed Youth Per Case Worker	29

New Beginnings	65 ●
Model Program	44
Awaiting Placement	21 ●

Awaiting Placement - Other	16
Alternative Solutions for Youth ..	14
Girls & Boys Town of DC	2

YSC	93 ●
Detained	66
Detained/Committed	7
Committed	6
Overnight	13
Overnight / Detention	1

Lead Entities	399
ERCPCP	257
Progressive Life	142

Electronic Monitoring	197
Partnership for Success	29
Evidence Based Programs	7

All DYRS Placements

Home	338	35%
Jail / Secure Detention	149	16%
RTCs	112	12%
Therapeutic Family / Group Home	89	9%
New Beginnings	62	6%
Abscondence	58	6%
PRTFs	55	6%
Independent Living	29	3%
Group Home	28	3%
Foster Care	20	2%
Awaiting Placement	15	2%
YSC	13	1%
Sub-Acute	4	0%
Shelter	2	0%
Grand Total	**990**	

Community-Based Positive Youth Development Programming

Social Connectedness	243
WFD / Employment	126
Education Programming	115
Health	106
School	98
Creative Expression	4
Civic Engagement	1

Population data updated: 06/23/2011 8:53:41 AM

Public Safety

		Last 7 Days		YTD	
		#	% of Juv ..	#	% of Juv ..
DYRS Juvenile Re-Arrests in DC	2011	7	12%	243	12%

Accurate as of June 22, 2011

Abscondence

Youth on Abscondence	58
Last 7 Days:	
New Abscondences	10
Pick-Ups	2

Staffing

		Active	Inactive	Vacant	Grand Total
NEW BEGINNINGS	SYDRs	17	1		18
	YDRs	96	16	6	118
	Other	80		14	94
Youth Services Center	SYDRs	13	1		14
	YDRs	86	16	9	111
	Case Managers	1			1
	Other	65	1	8	74
Other	YDRs	19		3	22
	Case Managers	32	1	3	36
	Other	78	4	20	102
Grand Total		487	40	63	590

Budget & Procurement

Overtime Paid

Period	Budgeted	Actual	Balance	
FY11 to date	$2,414,527	$2,488,974	($74,447)	●
Pay Period: 5/22 to 6/4	$142,031	$199,073	($57,042)	●

Overtime Paid — chart showing Actual values, with $199K and $82K labeled, dates Oct 1 10, Jan 1 11, Apr 1 11, PPB DT Date

Running Balance - FYTD — chart showing Running Sum of .., with $72K, ($113K), ($74K) labeled, dates Jan 1 11, Apr 1 11, PPB DT Date

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Dashboard is generated daily every morning for each member of the executive staff.

Up-to-date figures are highlighted daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly to quickly track important changes.

Figures are broken down to provide in-depth yet quick details on population levels, status, placements, service enrollments, recidivism, and more.

Yellow, red, and green status dots are triggered based on relevant thresholds to highlight items of concern.

Dashboard is clearly visually organized with highlighted, bolded, and italicized section headings, subheadings, categories and figures to make important data quick and easy to find and review.

Simple tables and charts are utilized to provide quick and easy review of staffing levels, pay, budget data and more.

Below is a high level summary of next steps to take in your jurisdiction to build capacity for using data now, creating a data driven culture, and developing robust data systems that turn data into transformative action:

Assess your system's current data use and capacity to determine the need and progress to date in using data to guide transformation and in developing more robutst data systems. Leaders should assess their capacity and also whether there is already a data driven culture among staff and throughout the system.

Build a strong data analysis team. Ensure the technical capacity to collect, analyze, use and present data to inform the transformation process. Initially, this may require collaboration with an external partner and/or contracting with outside technical experts. The data analysis team should include at least a senior manager who can develop the information agenda; a skilled data analyst who can perform statistical studies and analyze multiple data sets, and knows how to present findings in accessible ways; a proficient technical expert with experience in extracting data in various formats from the management information system; and someone with the skills to create engaging and easy to understand visual representations of the data.

Use key goals to understand the data needed to guide transformation. Using the key transformation goals developed earlier as a framework, clarify the data that will be needed to understand the current system, changes that will be made as part of transformation, and progress in achieving

NEXT STEPS

transformation goals. Review key transformation goals with the data analysis team and make sure that they are able to translate these goals into questions that can be answered by the data, query the data system for answers, analyze the data, understand where gaps lie and how to develop the system further to get better answers, and present and explain findings. Working with the data analysis team, use the goals of transformation to analyze the data you will need to understand the current system, including the current youth population, what is working to support youth well-being, what changes need to be made as part of the transformation process, and progress made with these changes and their success in better serving the goals of the youth justice system.

Assess the system's current data management capacity and create a baseline system map. Work with the data analysis team to understand the data currently available in-house and from other agencies, what gaps exist to having accurate, reliable data and/or the ability to access it, and how to fill those gaps and obtain or develop the data necessary to drive transformation. Assess the data available, creating a list of existing variables and their quality that is informed by the goals of transformation. Bring together representatives across the system and key partners to create a case flow map that explains in graphic format the paths a young person may travel from first contact with the system to exit. Work in partnership with the data analysis team, staff, youth, families and communities, and other youth justice agencies to develop a longer-term data development agenda that includes gaining access to data held by other systems, establishing strategies to collect data that are not currently available and developing new data sources, including qualitative reports from youth, families and staff experiencing the system.

Conduct analyses to understand the system, guide transformation and measure progress. Develop straightforward and relatively easy-to-calculate comparative analyses that are meaningful in examining current practice and learning information pertinent to transformation. These include point-in-time analyses to understand day-to-day use of the system, and places where resources are over- or under-utilized; trendline analyses to examine the dynamics at work in different parts of the system over time, and trends that align with and counter transformation; cohort analyses that track groups of youth subject to specific changes in policy and practice, and reduce the risk of biased or incomplete analysis from using point-in-time data alone; and disaggregation analyses, which

break down data by subgroups of youth and are critical to understanding differences and disparities in practice based on specific youth characteristics such as race, age and gender.

Present key findings visually for multiple partners and audiences of transformation. Work with the data team to develop presentations that are easy to understand and offer compelling narratives to various key stakeholders about the data and what they mean to current practice and to the goals and progress of transformation. Important tools include mapping data geographically to reveal place-based disparities in practice; graphically representing data to create intuitive presentations that reach a wider audience; management oriented data reports that focus leaders and managers on the goals and desired outcomes of transformation, and create accountability to address operational challenges as they arise; and private and public data dashboards that provide a quick view of key information and areas needing attention for leaders, management and staff. They are also an important tool to hold the system accountable to the public, make indicators of system performance transparent, help external audiences understand how the system operates and engage stakeholders at all levels in problem-solving transformation efforts. ■

CHAPTER RESOURCES

Utah JJYS Data Dashboard **VISIT LINK ↗**

No Kids In Prison: The Facts Report **VISIT LINK ↗**

W. Haywood Burns Institute: Exploring Data on Racial and Ethnic Disparities **VISIT LINK ↗**

The Center on Youth and Social Policy: Youth Data Update 2022 **VISIT LINK ↗**

ENDNOTES

1 For more on Child and Family Services Review best practices the US Department of Health and Human Services has <u>a guide</u>.

2 See more about Vera's <u>Restoring Promise</u> project.

3 Read more about Vera's <u>Ending Girls' Incarceration Initiative</u>.

4 For a 2019 update on Virginia's transformation efforts and response to "justice by geography" issues see their <u>update presentation</u>.

5 See Utah's public-facing dashboard through the Data Dashboard link on their <u>JJYS data page</u>.

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TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION