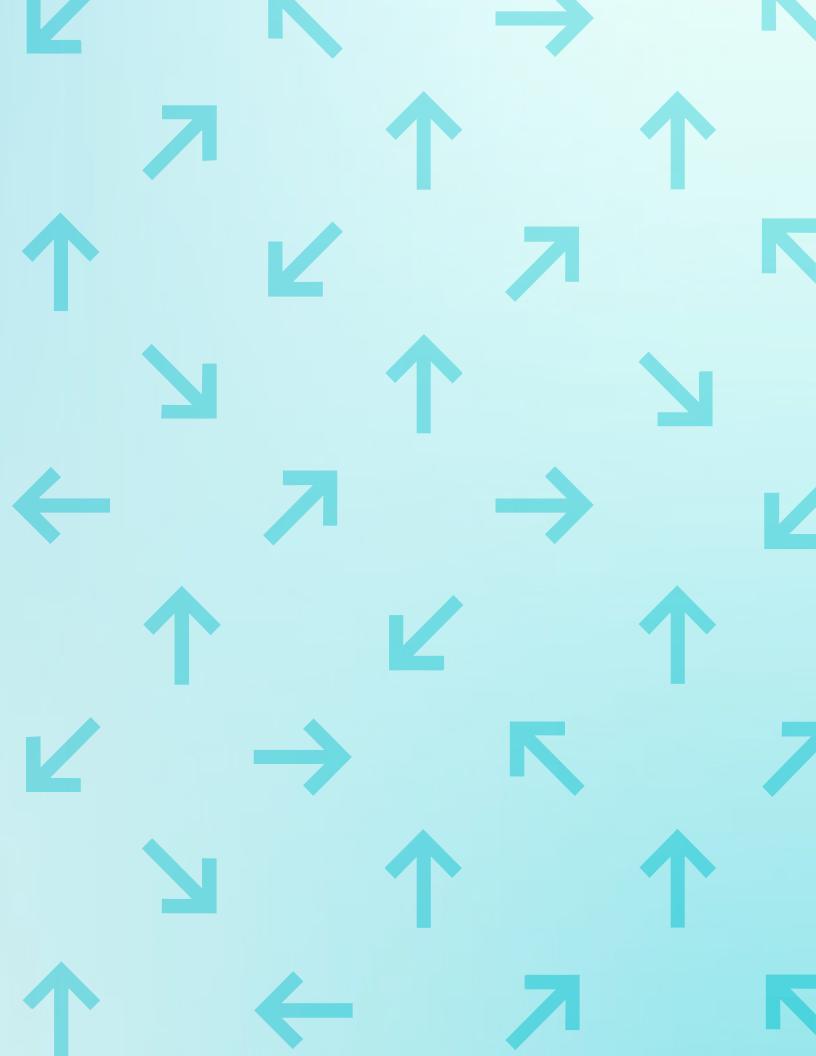
PROCESS MATTERS

Reflections from the Development of Harris County's Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund and Recommendations to Guide Future Efforts





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We are also indebted to our colleagues Danielle Lipow and Sheila Mitchell at the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their thought partnership on this project and insightful feedback throughout the drafting process. Finally, we want to acknowledge our team within the Lab for bringing this report to fruition. Special thanks to Cymone Fuller, Alessandra Meyer, Vidhya Ananthakrishnan, and the KMSG team for their writing and editing support, and to Jack Duran for his design work. We also thank Yumari Martínez, Gladys Carrión, Patrick McCarthy, and Vincent Schiraldi for their review and comments. We also appreciate the Ballmer Group and Laura Arnold for supporting this project, and our colleagues at Performing Statistics for providing the images of Harris County youth that appear within this report.

Lastly, we thank County Judge Lina Hidalgo for inviting the Justice Lab to Harris County to advise on their initial efforts to reimagine youth justice. That work started us on the path that eventually led to the development of this report.

FOREWORD

or far too long, systems have relied on harmful, ineffective, and expensive punishment and incarceration-first approaches that perpetuate racial inequity and do not advance the success, safety and well-being of youth, families, and communities. Simultaneously, there has been a systematic disinvestment from crucial infrastructure and support – primarily in the same communities of color that are disproportionately impacted by youth incarceration.

Across the country, people are forging different visions of safety and well-being for youth who encounter the law. These visions are united by the belief that young people, their families, and communities – not youth prisons – are central to the development of thriving, engaged adults. The Justice Lab's Youth Justice Initiatives (YJI) team believes realizing this vision will require work on multiple levels, including ending reliance on ineffective, abusive, and wasteful punitive interventions that perpetuate racism; investing in the communities most impacted by incarceration to strengthen and develop responses that are youth-centered, family-focused, and community-led; and, critically, creating space for, and giving power and resources to those who are most impacted by the youth justice system, so that they can design and lead efforts to create community safety and conditions that foster well-being for all. Since our inception, YJI has supported an array of youth justice stakeholders in jurisdictions across the nation, at various stages of advancing these goals as part of their youth justice transformation efforts.

Harris County was among the first jurisdictions that reached out to us. Over several months, we worked with County officials to design a Task Force on Youth Justice charged with reviewing the current system and developing recommendations to reduce incarceration and build out a community-centered approach that would foster safety and well-being for youth and families. Just before the Task Force's launch, the COVID-19 pandemic descended across the globe. While the Task Force did not proceed, local

commitment to youth justice transformation persisted and continues today. Harris County's story of transformation – which includes both reducing reliance on incarceration and shifting resources and power from systems to communities – is still unfolding. In this report, we focus on one chapter in that story: the creation of the Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund), seeded with an initial commitment of \$4 million and approved with bipartisan support from County leadership.

This report shares and reflects on the journey to create the Fund, from the multi-stakeholder mobilization for reform, leading up to and spurred by the global pandemic, to selecting an intermediary organization to run the Fund. It describes how the County's approach pivoted as COVID-19 hit, and what officials and providers did to move youth safely out of detention and continue providing them with needed support and services. As this approach showed progress – with youth doing better while not jeopardizing public safety – it set the stage for a larger conversation about how the County could redirect resources away from the youth justice system and into its most impacted communities, which had limited access to support and services for their youth. The proposed Fund offered a new path for reducing incarceration and promoting racial and ethnic equity in youth justice, namely community investment.

As local actors attempted to shift the status quo, they worked hard to center fundamental values—collaboration, community partnership, and equity. But it was not always easy, given the many systems, statutes, and processes that create the parameters for reform. Our account highlights how things unfolded in what was a messy, imperfect, and iterative process. And yet, it was just these aspects of the work that offered real moments of learning and adaptation, which may provide important lessons for others looking to implement similar reforms.

Many individuals, organizations, and institutions were involved locally in the Fund's conception and development. While we attempted to capture as many perspectives and insights from local actors as possible, it remains a snapshot of what transpired. As such, it does not chronicle the years of community advocacy and system-led reforms that undeniably planted seeds for this transformation effort, nor does it detail other notable youth justice-centered advocacy and system-led reforms that occurred alongside the Fund's development.

With the Fund just getting under way, it is hard to know what the future holds for Harris County, particularly as the climate for reform remains dynamic. The Fund is a definitive step forward, but by no means is it a silver bullet that will cure all the challenges that remain to truly shift the overall youth justice paradigm. The County will need to engage in ongoing work to reduce the system's footprint and continue funneling savings towards community–driven solutions. The Fund will also need to be scaled up significantly to foster lasting transformation. That said, the work to operationalize the Fund offers valuable learnings for other jurisdictions, as they explore ways to move away from incarceration and punishment and create new pathways to safety within communities. This discussion includes the complexities of expanding who is part of the process and what it takes to meaningfully include communities in informing the procurement of services and decision–making, particularly when current systems are not set up for that.

As stakeholders press forward with the Fund's implementation, it will be crucial for the youth, families, and community members most impacted by the system to continue holding the County accountable for advancing investments that promote racial and ethnic equity in youth justice and represent the kinds of meaningful, authentic support and opportunities that will help them experience a sense of safety and thrive. Similarly, having County officials stay committed and transparent about how things are going and where adjustments may be needed will go a long way towards building trust and achieving this alternate vision of safety.

We conclude this report with implementation-focused recommendations for the County to consider as it ushers the Fund – the first of its kind in Texas – into existence. We hope those recommendations can support the County, and regardless, we hope that Harris County's journey can inform others as they pursue similar work nationwide. We are deeply grateful to our partners in Harris County for involving us in this work.

- VIDHYA ANANTHAKRISHNAN AND YUMARI MARTÍNEZ,

Co-Directors of the Justice Lab's Youth Justice Initiatives Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

n 2017, concerned about the increasingly crowded carceral conditions at its local detention center, county officials in Harris County, Texas, the nation's third-largest county and home to Houston, proposed constructing a new 320-bed youth facility. However, in 2018, Harris County Commissioners Court did not move forward with the new construction, saving over \$75 million in construction and design costs. Rather than reflexively replacing an old facility – albeit one clearly not well-suited to provide care and services for youth – with a new and improved one, the newly-elected County Judge and first-ever Latina in that office, Lina Hidalgo, committed to examining the current system and chart a new path forward.

This commitment laid the groundwork to define a new vision for youth justice in Harris County, guided by numerous stakeholders both inside and outside of the legal system and built on past and ongoing local reform efforts. In March 2020, after an intensive planning process, the County was set to launch a Task Force on Youth Justice charged with reviewing the current system and developing recommendations to reduce incarceration and

¹ Meagan Flynn, "Harris County Jails Hundreds of Juveniles Each Year for Minor Probation Violations," Houston Chronicle, January 1, 2018, https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houstontexas/houston/article/Harris-County-jails-hundreds-of-juveniles-each-12538140.php.

² Ted Oberg, "After Spending \$2 Million Designing a New Jail, New Judge Seeks to Scrap Contract to Re-Think Juvenile System," ABC 13, June 4, 2019, https://abc13.com/harris-county-juvenile-facility-juvi-houston-design-ted-oberg-investigates/5328756/.

³ Ted Oberg, "Harris County Scraps Plan to Build New Juvenile Jail, Pledges Millions for Repair," ABC 13, June 4, 2019, https://abc13.com/harris-county-juvenile-facility-juvi-houston-design-ted-oberg-investigates/5330469/.

build out a community-centered approach. Unfortunately, these plans were upended when news of the COVID-19 global pandemic broke.

While the pandemic derailed the Task Force's launch, the public health crisis further mobilized folks towards reform. Local officials and community members began working together to support youth and their families during this harrowing time, and eventually, a new vision for community investment began to take shape. Developed by the newly-created Harris County Justice Administration Department (JAD) and in collaboration with the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, other system actors, and a Coalition of community members, the Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund) was approved by a unanimous, bipartisan vote of support by the Harris County Commissioners' Court in February 2021. The Fund - the first of its kind in Texas - launched in 2022.

This case study synthesizes and documents how this process unfolded and what it took to make the Fund a reality. It shares the successes, the difficulties, and the key reflections and lessons from this work, including its evolution in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also weaves in spotlights on related topics as well as access to primary source resources from Harris County where possible to provide opportunities for further learning.

An essential part of the effort to develop the Fund was a commitment to key values, including equity, collaboration, and community partnership. By sharing this case study, we aim to provide a sense of the challenges and promises inherent in creating a vision of youth justice that integrates and partners with communities, and just how much effort and intentionality – namely, the time and resources to build relationships and will to shift the normal course of business – that can require.

This report primarily documents the experiences and reflections of many individuals who were involved in the Harris County youth justice reform

⁴ Laura Isensee, "Harris County Will Spend \$4 Million To Prevent Youth Incarceration," Houston Public Media, March 29, 2021, https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/criminal-justice/2021/03/29/394576/harris-county-to-invest-4-million-in-community-programs-as-an-alternative-to-youth-incarceration/.

work that occurred from the spring of 2019 through the spring of 2022.

This includes representatives from County Judge Lina Hidalgo's office, the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition, the County's Juvenile Probation and Justice Administration Departments, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Staff from the Columbia Justice Lab's Youth Justice Initiatives (YJI) team collaborated with these partners to develop this report. The report is structured as follows:

SETTING THE SCENE:

Understanding the Context for this Report

Setting the Scene: Understanding the Context of this Report provides background and context for the reform story chronicled in this report. It details how this report was developed and the key players involved in developing the Fund. It then discusses the research on community investment, community cohesion and collective efficacy that undergirds the broader movement towards reinvestment. Finally, it provides a 5-year data snapshot of Harris County's youth justice system, illustrating the County's dedicated and sustained effort to downsize their youth justice system.

SECTION 1:

A Changing Landscape Offered New Opportunities to Rethink Pathways to Safety

Section 1 details how the development of a shared set of values and principles served as a compass and solid foundation for the reform work. Furthermore, it discusses how the pandemic swiftly brought into focus many of the existing challenges facing the County's youth justice system and how this served as a catalyst for reflection and change.

SECTION 2:

Reinvestment Fund Emerges as a Way to Shift Resources to Impacted Communities

Section 2 explains the steps taken in Harris County to plan and gain approval for the Fund. Specifically, this section highlights the value of learning from other jurisdictions, collaborating with multiple system actors, and importantly, building support and buy-in for the work within the community.

SECTION 3:

Engaging and Partnering with Communities to Establish the Fund was Complicated and Required Ongoing Adaptation

Section 3 chronicles the County's journey from gaining approval for the Fund to selecting an intermediary to operationalize the Fund. This includes work undertaken to elevate community voice in the selection process, to deepen relationships with and learn from community organizations that may be poised to operate such a fund, and to lay the groundwork for meaningful accountability measures to ensure it achieves its intended goals and assuring ongoing involvement by the community.

SECTION 4:

Learning from Harris County to Inform Future Reinvestment Efforts: Recommendations for Implementation

Finally, the report concludes with Section 4 which offers a set of implementation-focused recommendations for stakeholders to consider as they get this initiative up and running. While the recommendations are offered in the spirit of supporting the County in its ongoing work to set the Fund up for success, many will be applicable to other jurisdictions interested in pursuing a similar strategy.

Against the backdrop of the national movement to abandon youth prisons and shift power and resources from the criminal legal system to communities most impacted, along with the recent increase in adult and youth crime coinciding with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund's development is notable. While the Fund was just getting off the ground at the time of publication and its impact remains unknown, the process that led to this moment underscores how a focus on equity, collaboration, and community partnership can help pave the way towards a new vision for youth justice. By sharing the various twists and turns of this process, the intention is to inspire and inform other jurisdictions charting new visions of youth justice against a backdrop of constant change—ones that strive to advance true safety, healing, and well-being by investing in the inherent strengths and capacities of communities.

SETTING THE SCENE

Understanding the Context for this Report

This introductory section aims to provide some important context for the development of the Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund) and the narrative that begins in Section 1.

It begins with a look at how this report was developed, including what the report covers and who was involved in shaping it. Then, it introduces the key players involved in the Fund's development and whose contributions are discussed in greater detail in the sections to follow. Next, it provides a brief primer on some key concepts – community investment, collective efficacy and community cohesion – and how the research on these topics supports the reinvestment work chronicled in this report. Finally, it concludes with a highlevel overview of Harris County and its youth justice system – highlighting recent trends in downsizing and decarcerating the County's youth justice population.

HOW THIS REPORT WAS DEVELOPED

This report is based on the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of many individuals, most of whom were involved in planning the Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (Fund). These people included: staff from County Judge Lina Hidalgo's office, staff from the County Juvenile Probation Department, staff from the County Justice Administration Department, members of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition, and staff from national technical assistance providers working with local stakeholders, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Columbia Justice Lab. We drafted this report drawing on our own experiences and reflections of the work, as well as those of the partners listed above, and a review of primary source materials. We shared drafts with these key partners to provide feedback, which helped us edit and revise to offer a fuller and more accurate representation of the work. Compensation was provided to our community partners involved in this process.

The report documents events and work that occurred over a period of three years, between 2019 – 2022. It begins in the spring of 2019, when the County was planning a Task Force to support youth justice reforms. Then it shifts into the spring of 2020, when the County was fervently working on safely releasing youth from detention to the community, given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it tracks the work from the summer of 2020, when the Fund was taking shape, through the spring of 2022, when the County selected an intermediary to operate the Fund. Staff from the Justice Lab, who County officials had initially engaged in 2019 to support the planning and development of the Task Force, worked alongside key contacts in the County for part of this time to support them in their reform pursuits.⁵

⁵ The Justice Lab's work in Harris County included: meeting and talking with local stakeholders inside and outside of the court system, including community members and advocates, to understand the local context; coordinating and partnering with national groups engaged with the county on youth justice reform efforts; providing fundraising and planning support to county staff; advising county officials and staff hired for the Task Force effort on how to pivot their scopes of work after its suspension; connecting local staff to the work of other sites nationwide to inform their efforts; and offering strategic communications support. The Lab's intensive support tapered off by the Spring of 2021, at which point we transitioned into documenting their work.

KEY PLAYERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HARRIS COUNTY'S YOUTH JUSTICE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey)

Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Justice Strategy Group partners with communities across the nation to minimize all forms of confinement, especially for youth of color, while shifting resources to the communities where young people reside. Casey is engaged with Harris County's Juvenile Probation Department via their Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and their pilot program focused on deep-end reform and probation transformation.

Change Happens, Inc. 7

Change Happens is a nonprofit organization based in Houston's Third Ward that aims to transform the lives of families and children in high-risk communities through a range of programs and services. Change Happens was competitively selected to serve as the intermediary for the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund, providing subgrants and capacity-building and performance measurement support to community-based providers.

Columbia University Justice Lab (Justice Lab) 🗾

The Columbia University Justice Lab seeks to foundationally reconceive justice policy through actionable research, community-centered policy development, and the sustained engagement of diverse constituencies. The Justice Lab's Youth Justice Initiatives (YJI) team works to end reliance on punitive interventions, redirect resources away from punitive-centered approaches toward investments in the community, and create spaces for those who are most impacted by the youth justice system to design and lead efforts to create community safety and conditions that foster well-being. Harris County officials engaged the Justice Lab's YJI team in 2019 to support the development of a Task Force on youth justice and the team continued to work alongside key contacts in the County as the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund was in development.

Harris County Commissioners Court 🗾

The Harris County Commissioners Court is the County's governing body, made up of the County Judge (the County's chief executive officer) and four Commissioners. The Judge is elected county-wide, and the Commissioners are elected by district. In 2021, the Commissioners Court voted unanimously to allocate funds for creating the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund. In 2022, it voted unanimously to contract with Change Happens as the intermediary to administer the Fund.

Harris County Judge 🗾

The County Judge is the head of Harris County's governing body and the presiding officer on the Commissioners Court. Following a 2019 vote against the build of a new youth detention facility, Judge Lina Hidalgo called for the formation of a Task Force on Youth Justice to review the current system and develop recommendations that would both reduce incarceration and build out a community-centered approach.

Harris County Justice Administration Department (JAD)

A research Department for Harris County working collaboratively with Commissioners Court and criminal justice stakeholders to help them fulfill the vision for the County, specifically by advancing innovative approaches to justice that are consistent with the Harris County justice and safety goals to promote safe, healthy, thriving communities through restorative and evidence-based strategies that foster public trust, prevent violence and trauma, reduce racial and economic disparities, and minimize criminal justice system exposure where at all possible. The JAD oversees the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund.

Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) 7

The Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) provides supervision and services to youth between the ages of 10 and 17 who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. JPD committed \$2 million from its budget to the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund and collaborated with JAD on the development of the Fund.

Harris County Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

The Harris County Office of Management and Budget (OMB) serves the County's Commissioners Court in carrying out its vision for Harris County government by safeguarding the County's fiscal health, achieving strategic objectives, promoting transparent, accountable government, and serving the residents of Harris County. OMB collaborated with JAD in identifying the opportunities and challenges to developing a robust participatory budgeting process in the County, which helped lay the groundwork for the Fund.

Redefining Youth Justice Coalition (RYJC) 🗾

The Redefining Youth Justice Coalition is made up of youth, families, and community members both directly and indirectly impacted by the youth justice system, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and government stakeholders. The Coalition works to end youth detention and incarceration in Houston and Harris County. The Coalition advocated for and participated in the development of the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund.

Harris County Purchasing Department

The Office of the Purchasing Agent acquires appropriate goods and services essential to the operation of Harris County government and certain other governmental agencies in a timely and prudent manner, considering quality, value, and economy. All purchases are made in compliance with the Texas Local Government Code (LGC), other relevant law and best business practices. The Purchasing Department oversaw the solicitation and evaluation process to identify an intermediary to operate the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund in compliance with statutory mandates.

APPLYING RESEARCH IN PRACTICE:

How Community Investment, Community Cohesion, and Collective Efficacy Can Inform Different Paths to Safety

For nearly three decades, youth justice reform has focused on decarceration, as stakeholders nationwide have worked to reverse the calls for punishment and incarceration of youth that occurred during the "superpredator" era.⁶ And while the number of youth in custody dropped by more than half between the mid-1990s and 2019,⁷ there is growing recognition that supporting young people in their own homes and communities goes well beyond just diverting youth from system involvement.⁸

It requires acknowledging that the communities most impacted by incarceration – almost exclusively poor communities of color – have experienced long-standing discrimination and disinvestment across a number of sectors, including education, housing, employment, and healthcare. Without being able to meet these basic needs, many youth and families get caught in cycles of survival that lead them into the justice system.

⁶ Vincent Schiraldi, "Can We Eliminate The Youth Prison (And What Should We Replace It With?)" The Square One Project, June 2020. https://squareonejustice.org/paper/can-we-eliminate-the-youth-prison-and-what-should-we-replace-it-with-by-vincent-schiraldi-june-2020/ Vincent Schiraldi, V. N. (2020). "Can we eliminate the youth prison? (And what should we replace it with?)".

⁷ The data is through 2019. "Trends in the number of arrests by age group for All offenses." OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book, November 16, 2020, https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr_trend.asp?table_in=1.

⁸ Community investment is an upstream approach on the continuum from prevention to intervention, meaning that resources allocated towards community investment will reduce the need for diversion and incarceration further "downstream." from Sophie Stewart, "The Case for Smart Justice Alternatives: Responding to justice issues in WA through a Justice Reinvestment approach," Social Reinvestment WA, March 30, 2020, https://staticl.squarespace.com/static/59c61e6dbebafb0293c04a54/t/5ef5632af22174273c5d18d5/1593140018902/SRWA+Discussion+Paper+on+Justice+Reinvestment+in+WA+March2020+%281%29.pdf

Community investment aims to course correct and offers a different path forward. Such approaches are premised on three related concepts:

- 1 Individuals are shaped and influenced by the communities in which they live;
- Healthy, well-resourced communities can promote wellbeing; and
- 3 Community cohesion can promote a "thicker" type of safety than solely relying on punishment and incarceration.9

Community networks serve as "air bags that automatically inflate to protect against unexpected crashes, [as well as] financial, sociological, and institutional resources" that cushion and protect youth. Evidence is clear that young people with access to support, opportunities, programs, and services are most likely to go on and live healthy adult lives. By investing in the equitable provision of people, places, and possibilities, particularly where there has been historical disinvestment, communities become healthier and better able to maintain safety and support for youth and the community as a whole. 12

These last two points are rooted in the idea of *collective efficacy*, which states that people who have a stake in their community create safer neighborhoods.¹³ Oftentimes, the presence of non-profits or other organizations that work to improve the community in tangible ways serve as a proxy for measuring the impacts of collective efficacy. For example, a

⁹ Vincent Schiraldi, "Community Justice, Maori-Style," The Crime Report, September 24, 2019, https://thecrimereport.org/2019/09/24/community-justice-maori-style/

¹⁰ Robert Putnam, Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 198

¹¹ Peter Witt, and Linda Caldwell, eds., Youth Development Principles and Practices in Out-of-School-Time Settings (Urbana, IL: Sagamore-Venture, 2018) 27.

¹² Thomas Akiva, and Kimberly Robinson, eds., It takes an ecosystem: Understanding the people, places, and possibilities of learning and development across settings, (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc, 2022) 13.

¹³ Vincent Schiraldi, "Community Justice, Maori-Style," The Crime Report, September 24, 2019, https://thecrimereport.org/2019/09/24/community-justice-maori-style/

study by Sharkey found that for every 10 additional non-profit organizations devoted to community development or violence prevention in a city of 100,000 residents, there was a nine percent drop in the murder rate and a six percent drop in violent crime. Funding grassroots organizations is particularly impactful, because they are often well-positioned to facilitate community cohesion. Not only are they embedded within neighborhoods, these organizations typically reflect the surrounding cultural and demographic landscape. As such, these groups have an acute awareness of nuanced community needs that can only come from first-hand experience.

Manifesting this community-centered approach to safety – one grounded in abundance, community well-being, and self-determination – will take a significant infusion of resources, as well as shifts in where power and decision-making authority rests over time. In recent years, numerous states have designed reinvestment mechanisms to redirect resources away from incarceration and toward community-based supports, while still sustaining reductions in crime. That said, full-scale investment-based strategies must include transforming built environments, enhancing economic opportunity and connectivity within and between neighborhoods, leveraging the power and expertise of credible messengers, building safe, stable housing for community residents, and much more. In the safety of the sa

- 14 Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar, "Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime," American Sociological Review, 82 no. 6, (2017): 1214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417736289
- **15** Gigi Barsoum, "From the Streets to the Courts to City Hall: A Case Study of a Comprehensive Campaign to Reform Stop-and-Frisk in New York City," Communities United for Police Reform, (2017) http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CPR_CaseStudy.pdf
- 16 Robert Vargas, "Gangstering grants: Bringing power to collective efficacy theory," City & Community 18 no.1 (2019) 369. https://doi/abs/10.1111/cico.12357
- 17 For example, efforts in New York City, Ohio, Illinois, California, Connecticut, and other places have reallocated hundreds of millions of dollars from youth incarceration to communities. Since 2010, more than 35 states have slowed the growth of prison populations and/ or reduced the overall size of the prison population, using federal funding from the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI). A recent report by the Council of State Governments found that the costs and savings from JRI implementation totaled over \$3.2 billion, with expected savings over \$4 billion. For more information, including summaries of individual states, see "The Justice Reinvestment Initiative," Council of State Governments, March 2021, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/JRI_2pager_Update_March2021.pdf
- **18** Brian Higgins, and Joel Hunt, "Collective efficacy: Taking action to improve neighborhoods," National Institute of Justice. (2017) https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/collective-efficacy-taking-action-improve-neighborhoods#citation--0

Finally, attention must also be paid to how community members participate in the codesign and implementation of interventions, supports, and opportunities aimed at creating safety and well-being in their own communities. For example, participatory community development practices were used in a low-income neighborhood in Portland, Oregon to collaboratively redesign public spaces and improved the collective well-being of the community.¹⁹ True collaboration with local community members and grassroots organizations requires critical consideration of the role of power within the local context, and intentional, shared decision-making that challenges structural forces that contribute to disparities and vulnerabilities.²⁰ The buy-in that comes from engagement in collective decision-making promotes collective efficacy within communities and consequently strengthens the safety net surrounding young people.

"True collaboration with local community members and grassroots organizations requires critical consideration of the role of power within the local context, and intentional, shared decision-making that challenges structural forces that contribute to disparities and vulnerabilities."

¹⁹ Jan Semenza, Tanya March, & Brian Bontempo, "Community-initiated urban development: an ecological intervention," Journal of Urban Health, 84 no. 1 (2007) 8 https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-006-9124-8

²⁰ Brian Christens, "Targeting empowerment in community development: A community psychology approach to enhancing local power and well-being," Community Development Journal, 47 no. 4 (2012) 538 https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bss031

FAST FACTS ABOUT HARRIS COUNTY AND ITS YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Home to Texas' largest city, Houston, Harris County is the state's most populous county, the third-most populous county in the nation, and larger than many states. According to the 2020 census, Harris County's population was 4,731,145, with youth totaling 1,249,022, or 26 percent, of the total population. In terms of demographics, the County's make up was 43.7 percent Hispanic or Latino, 28.7 percent White (not Hispanic or Latino), 20 percent Black, 7.3 percent Asian, and 1.1 percent American Indian and Alaska Native.²¹

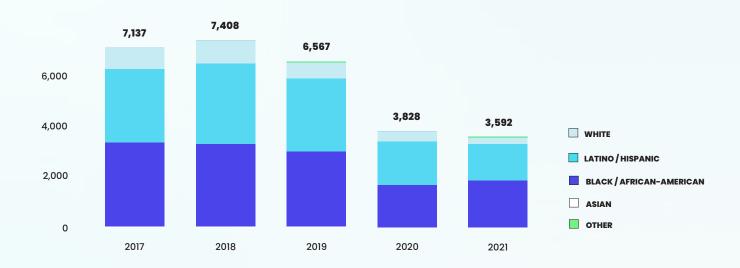
43.7%	of Harris County's population is Hispanic or Latino.
28.7%	of the population is White (not Hispanic or Latino).
20%	of the population is Black.
7.3%	of the population is Asian.
1.1%	of the population is American Indian and Alaska Native.

^{21 &}quot;QuickFacts Harris County, Texas," United States Census Bureau, n.d., https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/harriscountytexas

Over the last several years, Harris County has engaged in different efforts to downsize its youth justice system, leading to reductions in referrals and the number of incarcerated youth, as well as increases in the number of youth being diverted. These trends began in 2018 and 2019, and accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, racial disparities persist, with Black youth still being overrepresented in the system and White youth underrepresented.

Below are select data points to contextualize the system's evolution between 2017 and 2021: ²²

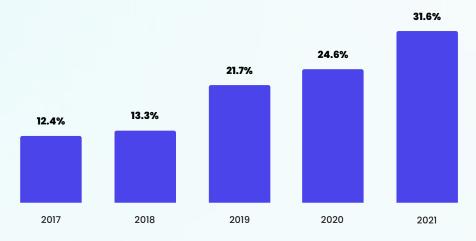
Youth Cases Referred to Juvenile Probation by Race · 2017 - 2021



The total number of youth cases referred to Harris County Juvenile Probation decreased by more than 11 percent from 2018 to 2019, and accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in an overall decrease of 50 percent from 2017 to 2021. While the overall population dropped, racial inequities did not: in 2021, Black youth accounted for 52 percent of referrals to probation, an increase from 2017 (47 percent); and White youth accounted for 8 percent of referrals to probation, a decrease from 2017 (12 percent). Latino youth are represented in proportion to their overall population.

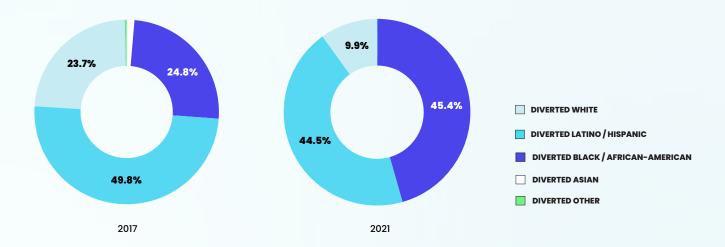
²² Harris County youth justice data provided to Justice Lab by Harris County Juvenile Probation Department June 2022.

Percentage of Youth Cases Diverted · 2017 - 2021



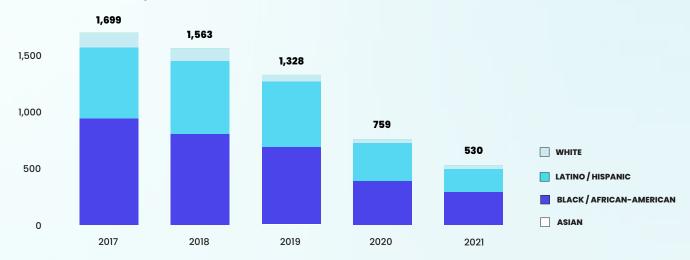
Harris County's rate of youth cases diverted annually has steadily increased from 2017 to 2021 - an overall increase of nearly 20 percent.

Youth Cases Diverted by Race · 2017 - 2021



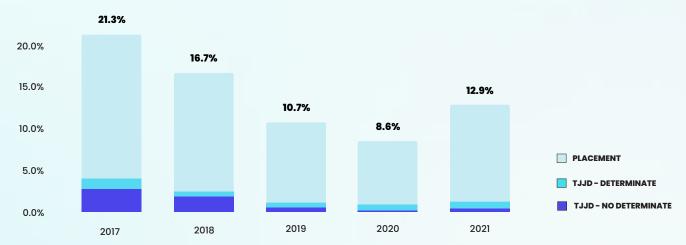
The recent increase in youth cases diverted has largely been driven by an increase in the diversion of cases involving Black youth. In 2021, almost half of all youth cases diverted (45 percent) involved Black youth, compared to just 25 percent in 2017.

Youth Detained by Race · 2017 - 2021



The number of Harris County youth detained began dropping in 2018 and accelerated during the pandemic - an overall decrease of 31 percent. Black youth continue to be overrepresented in detention, accounting for more than half of all detentions in both 2017 and 2021 (56 percent and 55 percent respectively). Latino youth are represented in proportion to their overall population.

Percentage of Cases Disposed to an Out-of-Home Placement · 2017 - 2021



The number of Harris County youth placed out of home by the court began dropping in 2018, and have generally remained below 2017 levels, despite a slight increase in cases disposed to placement between 2020 and 2021.



SECTION 1

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

22

SECTION 1

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE OFFERED NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO RETHINK PATHWAYS TO SAFETY

arris County system stakeholders, including the Juvenile Probation
Department, and the larger advocacy and service provider community,
worked hard in recent years to reduce confinement, create more
community-based opportunities and connections, and better serve youth in
custody. These efforts, coupled with the backdrop of a national movement
to close youth prisons and invest in communities most impacted by
incarceration,²³ created a strong foundation for launching a Task Force.

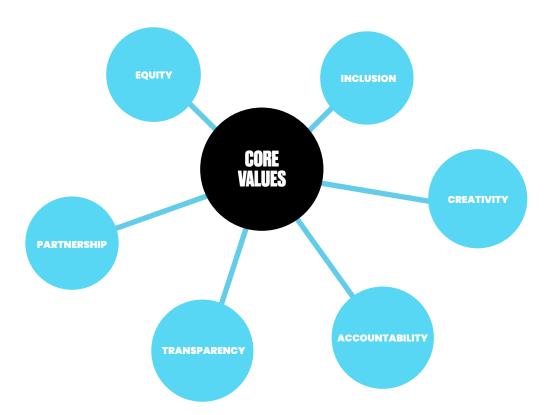
The Task Force process was conceived as a way for the County to create a plan that would eliminate the need for detention and placement and instead, invest resources to support community-centered efforts for safety. Beginning in the summer of 2019, the Justice Lab worked with staff from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Judge Hidalgo's office, and other local stakeholders to plan a Task Force that would help the County advance its vision of decarceration and create thriving communities.

23 For information on the national movement to close youth prisons and invest in communities see, for example,: McCarthy, P. Schiraldi, V., & Shark, M. The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model. New Thinking in Community Corrections Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2016. NCJ 250142.; "Closing Youth Prisons," Public Welfare Foundation, https://www.publicwelfare.org/our-work/issue-areas/youth-justice/closing-youth-prisons/; and Vincent Schiraldi, "Can We Eliminate The Youth Prison (And What Should We Replace It With?)" The Square One Project, June 2020. https://squareonejustice.org/paper/can-we-eliminate-the-youth-prison-and-what-should-we-replace-it-with-by-vincent-schiraldi-june-2020/

As the Task Force was set to launch, COVID-19 set in. Given the situation's uncertainty and to protect the health and safety of all participants, all Task Force-related activities were ultimately canceled. That said, the planning work that went into the Task Force, coupled with the public health crisis, led to new opportunities to drive reform.

Establishing Core Values and Principles Guided the Reform Work and Process that Followed

During the planning phase for the Task Force and simultaneous reform efforts, a set of core values and principles emerged from a broad cross-section of system and community stakeholders that continue to guide youth justice work in Harris County. These values and principles created a shared understanding of what concepts were being prioritized in this reform process and how they were defined. They also acted as a guiding light by which to assess and pursue potential proposals. Even after the Task Force was suspended, these values and principles animated the work of various County stakeholders and eventually enabled them to identify new opportunities – such as the Fund – to support the transformation of youth justice.



CORE VALUES



Commitment to a process that acknowledges Black and Latino youth are overrepresented in the youth justice system and strives to address the root causes of racial/ethnic disparities in the system.

2 INCLUSION

Ensuring a diverse set of stakeholders are welcomed and able to fully participate in the process to develop solutions and ensuring those who are most impacted by the system are prioritized in the process.

3 PARTNERSHIP

Building pathways to form relationships and collaborations that help to advance the vision and work.

4 CREATIVITY

Integrating non-traditional processes and skillsets, like arts, virtual platforms, and embodiment practices, to help define and advance justice transformation.

5 TRANSPARENCY

Wherever possible, pushing the boundaries of what is shared to ensure that stakeholders have honest, informed, and productive conversations.

6 ACCOUNTABILITY

Working towards a focus on the outcomes for increased safety and well-being that youth, families, and communities want to see and creating mechanisms to measure how systems and strategies are or are not achieving those outcomes.

PRINCIPLES



The youth justice system should operate with the belief that each youth has strengths, inherent potential, and important family and community connections.



The youth justice system should prioritize the use of a community-based continuum of care that focuses on rehabilitation, increased public safety, and provides pathways to success.



Out-of-home placement and detention should be used as a last resort, reserved solely for youth that pose a risk to public safety and should focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment.



The youth justice system should be transparent and accountable, with a commitment to regularly evaluating processes and procedures against these guiding principles.



BEHIND THE SCENES

CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE IN THE REFORM WORK

When it comes to large-scale change efforts, relationships and process matter. For this reason, the Task Force planning team spent months talking to and building various relationships with different people and hearing their ideas about the development of the Task Force plan. Importantly – and perhaps distinct from how such planning processes normally unfold – advocates, community leaders, and young people were engaged and prioritized similarly to criminal legal system and government stakeholders. This approach took time, particularly as stakeholders stepped outside of their comfort zones to collaborate. While this process wasn't without its missteps – for example the planning team failed to map out existing stakeholder groups that could have been leveraged to lead the Task Force's work – the focus on inclusion from the beginning helped lay a foundation for a more equitable reform experience.

The Public Health Crisis Focused Efforts on Decarceration and Community Investment, and Mobilized a Coalition to Push for Reform

Once the pandemic's magnitude became clear, suspending the Task Force was a necessary decision.²⁴ The COVID-19 emergency brought into sharp relief many of the challenges the Task Force sought to address, including the

²⁴ The Task Force was scheduled to convene for its first meeting on March 11, 2020 - this was the same day the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. Two days later, on March 13, 2020, Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for all counties in Texas due to the COVID-19 pandemic. County officials were called to respond to the unfolding crisis, and it was not feasible to proceed with a new Task Force at this time.

dangers of confinement and the need to support youth in their own homes and communities. As calls from public health officials about the life and death situation faced by youth in custody started to grow in the spring of 2020,²⁵ advocates in Harris County were simultaneously raising the alarm about the dire situation in the local detention facility, where youth were being kept in medical isolation to mitigate potential exposure to the virus. In response to mounting concern by system leaders and increasing pressure from advocates, an array of system and community partners began taking immediate steps to protect the health and safety of young people through decarceration efforts.

Building on preexisting reform efforts and processes developed with the support of policy advisors from Casey to review and manage youth detention populations, representatives from the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), the District Attorney's Office, and the judiciary worked together to examine who was in custody, discuss their cases, and determine which youth could be released safely. To assuage the system actors' concerns about how these youth would fare if released to the community, three local community-based organizations – My Brother's Keeper, Center for Urban Transformation, and Houston reVision – agreed to voluntarily provide emergency case management services to youth released from detention as part of this public health related push to decarcerate. The organizations, which provided meals, mentorship, and academic support, reported weekly to JPD on the youths' engagement with services and support.

Throughout, system actors monitored data about who remained in detention, including what communities they were from and what challenges were creating barriers to their release. In parallel, community advocates collected data on the needs and service requests of justice-impacted youth and

²⁵ For information on the concern of advocates, policymakers and impacted community members on the incidence of COVID-19 on youth and staff at juvenile facilities see, for example: Rovner, J. "COVID-19 in Juvenile Facilities," The Sentencing Project, May 18, 2021. https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/covid-19-in-juvenile-facilities/; and Youth Correctional Leaders for Justice, Recommendations for Youth Justice Systems During the COVID-19 Emergency, https://yclj.org/covid19statement

families. Additionally, the service providers that volunteered to provide emergency case management services to youth released from detention monitored data on youth participation in services. Some of the providers also tracked recidivism; for example, reVision found that eight of the 80 youth released from detention to their program were rearrested within six months, and only two of the eight youth released from detention to My Brother's Keeper were rearrested. This data – collected both from within and outside of the system – became invaluable information as it identified areas for targeted support and resources for youth returning home. It also offered a proof of concept that providing youth who might normally be in detention the necessary support and resources in their own community could help promote better outcomes while posing little risk of rearrest.

"reVision found that eight of the 80 youth released from detention to their program were rearrested within six months, and only two of the eight youth released from detention to My Brother's Keeper were rearrested."

Thanks in part to the adjusted release processes and expanded community partnerships, the Juvenile Probation Department saw a 41 percent drop in the number of youth in detention over two months.²⁷ Similar to other jurisdictions, however, even when the detention center's population was at its lowest point, 98 percent of youth who remained detained in Harris County were Black and Latino youth.²⁸

²⁶ Data provided to Justice Lab by reVision and My Brothers' Keeper June 2022.

²⁷ Harris County youth detention population was 176 on March 1, 2020 and 104 on May 1, 2020.

²⁸ New York City and other jurisdictions have seen increasing racial disparities, even as youth incarceration has decreased. See for example, Weissman, M., Ananthakrishnan, V., and Schiraldi, V. "Moving Beyond Youth Prisons: Lessons from New York City's Implementation of Close to Home." The Columbia Justice Lab, February 2019. https://justicelab.columbia.edu/moving-beyond-youth-prisons and Rovner, J. "Policy Brief: Racial Disparities in Youth Commitments and Arrests." The Sentencing Project. April 2016. https://www.sentencingproject.org/staff/joshua-rovner/

The demonstration that youth could be effectively served outside of detention, given the ongoing concerns about the conditions of confinement and persistent racial and ethnic disparities, catalyzed different youth-serving organizations, impacted youth and families, and interested stakeholders to establish the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition. Specifically, the Coalition was intended to advocate for more youth to be released from detention and investment of resources into justice-impacted communities.

"The Redefining Youth Justice Coalition's ideal and ambition is to eliminate the incarceration and detention of young people. We want to make sure young people are no longer in prison and do that by creating a continuum of care – services for the families and youth who are impacted by violence. Ultimately our goal is to safely keep young people out of custody and in the community."

DR. ASSATA RICHARDS, COMMUNITY COORDINATOR,
REDEFINING YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

SPOTLIGHT

HARRIS COUNTY'S YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM WORK

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EFFORTS

Building a new vision of youth justice, one that funds, supports, and values communities, not prisons, as the pathway to safety and well-being requires the mobilization of community.

Community members of course play an invaluable role in providing services, opportunities, and support for their young people, but they also have the potential to wield power when they organize and coordinate efforts around issues they care about. Their work can create pressure and greater visibility for what needs to change and the desired path forward. Ultimately, that pressure can be a useful tool for system champions looking to generate buy-in and action toward implementing meaningful reforms that shift resources and decision-making authority from system actors to communities.

Advocates, service providers, community researchers, and directly impacted individuals and families had been working on a multitude of fronts over the years to improve Harris County's youth justice system. As the pandemic raged on and efforts were underway to safely release as many youth as possible from custody and wrap them and their families with services and support in the community, there was interest in bringing people together to continue pushing these efforts. With support from the Justice Lab, Dr. Assata Richards, the founding director of the Sankofa Research Institute who had been hired as the Community Engagement Specialist for the Task Force, invited folks to join forces under the umbrella of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition.

The Redefining Youth Justice Coalition was launched virtually in July 2020 with a kick-off event that generated significant excitement across the County. The Coalition is made up of youth, families, and community members both directly and indirectly impacted by the youth justice system, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and government stakeholders. The Coalition's primary goals, which are grounded in a commitment to racial equity and supporting the well-being of youth and families, are to:

- 1 Reduce and eliminate the need for detention or incarceration of youth;
- 2 Expand the community-based continuum of services available to justice-impacted youth and families to reduce youth violence and safely keep young people out of custody;
- 3 Connect local families, youth, and community stakeholders to national best practices and partners to expand and support transformation efforts.

The Coalition is supported by a coordinating team, composed of a diverse set of members that is responsible for convening Coalition members monthly.¹ When issues requiring advocacy or planning arise, the Coalition creates a temporary, task-specific work group to address it and a subset of members elect to join the workgroup. For example, a Reinvestment Fund workgroup was established to support the development and implementation of the Fund and a Youth Engagement and Leadership workgroup was formed to develop and implement recommendations to increase youth engagement in the Coalition. Additionally, Coalition members who share a common identity or experience (e.g., youth, family members of justice-involved young people, representatives from youth-serving providers) can form a caucus to strategize in ways that align their lived experiences with the Coalition's broader goals.

¹ Organizations represented on the coordinating team include: Sankofa Research Institute, Pure Justice, Urban Community Network, US Dream Academy, Dream 77021, Earl Carl Institute, Harris County Justice Administration Department and Harris County Public Defender's Office.

SYSTEM-DRIVEN EFFORTS

Implementing a new vision of youth justice that does not rely on punitive measures, invests resources in community-based services and support that foster safety and well-being, and promotes racial and ethnic equity requires many people to take action, including system actors, who can help steer the system in a new direction. Importantly, system stakeholders can consider their authority and what is in their purview to identify how they can help shift or change existing policies and practices, especially those that run counter to what is best for kids.

Over the course of 2018–2019, Harris County ushered in new leadership to the County Judge's Office, the juvenile bench, and to the Juvenile Probation Department. This new leadership reinvigorated youth justice-focused reform work from within government, laying a strong foundation for further transformation. Reforms implemented since 2018, some of which are detailed below, have already had a dramatic impact on the landscape of youth justice in the County.

Office of the County Judge

Lina Hidalgo entered the Office of the County Judge embracing an evidence-based approach toward meaningful changes in the criminal justice system and seeking sustainable solutions that benefit all members of society. Under her leadership, the Judge's Office has focused on investing County funds more effectively and promoting options that produce better outcomes for system-involved individuals. On the youth justice front, this has included:



Stopping the construction of a new, 320-bed youth detention facility and expressing a commitment instead to support the redirection of funds towards evidence- and community-based solutions;



Supporting the establishment of the Harris County
Justice Administration Department to serve as a
resource for justice-involved agencies in the County.
The Department coordinates, collaborates, facilitates
information exchange, engages the community,
conducts research, performs data analysis, and offers
evidence-based solutions meant to increase public
safety, fairness, equity, efficiency, and accountability
through the County's justice system.

Juvenile Bench

Working alongside the district attorney's office and JPD, the juvenile court has implemented different policy changes to keep more youth safely in the community. In recent years, the court has eliminated indiscriminate shackling of detained youth in court; directed more youth into different specialty courts aimed at serving youth with specific needs (including drug, gang, mental health, and human trafficking); and created a dual status docket that enables judges to collaborate with other court stakeholders on cases where youth are dually-involved in the child welfare and youth justice systems to provide individualized support while they remain home with their families.

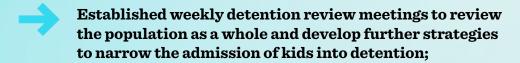
Juvenile Probation

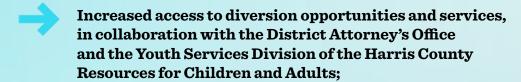
Under the leadership of Henry Gonzales, who serves as Executive Director of the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), JPD has been taking a number of steps to reform its approach, including reengaging with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and their Probation Transformation network. Since 2018, JPD has collaborated with stakeholders throughout the system to implement the following reforms:

TO REDUCE THE ADMISSION OF YOUTH INTO DETENTION, JPD HAS:



Revised its Detention Screening Instrument (DSI) with a focus on reducing the population, addressing racial disparities, and aligning detention admission decisions with judicial decisions;

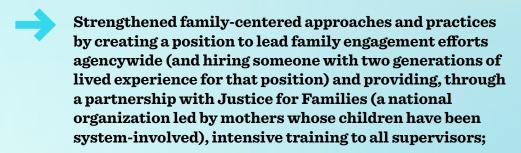




Created a new staff position focused on reviewing individual cases of youth in detention to develop strategies to expedite their release.

TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY TO SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH, JPD HAS:

Reduced probation caseloads, allowing probation officers to spend more time developing relationships with young people and brokering community connections and support that will foster long-term behavior change;



Engaged in a public/private partnership to permanently repurpose one of the County's three local residential facilities and create a community-based collection of social enterprise and vocation training opportunities for young people.

TO SUSTAIN REFORM VALUES IN THE LONG RUN, JPD HAS:



Co-chaired a reconstituted JDAI Steering Committee with City Councilwoman Tarsha Jackson which consists of leaders across several agencies and community-based organizations. Active workgroups include Family and Community Engagement, Case-Processing, Community-Based Alternatives to Arrest, and Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration;



Adopted, through an inclusive process that included staff, a new mission statement that emphasizes a commitment to providing therapeutic and restorative approaches that are youth-centered, equitable, and community-focused, and Cornerstones to summarize their core values of youth, community, accountability and equity;



Created an internal Equity Team and adopted a JPD Equity Statement expressing the department's commitment to advancing equity through their work with youth and families, examining their policies and practices through a data-driven lens of racial equity and social justice, and promoting the eradication of racial, ethnic, and gender disparities within the youth justice system.

Understanding How Resources are Currently Distributed Revealed Barriers in Establishing Community Capacity

Despite concerted efforts by the judiciary and the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) to safely release as many youth as possible from pre-adjudication detention, dozens of youth remained detained as the pandemic continued. To better understand what barriers to release might be limiting their efforts, Harris County's Justice Administration Department (JAD) analyzed juvenile detention population data and conducted deep-dive interviews with government agencies and service providers in two neighborhoods with disproportionately high numbers of youth entering detention. This work was intended to help map what services existed, as well as what specific services would be needed to support youth in these communities.

The neighborhood analysis and interviews resulted in a few consistent themes:



Certain neighborhoods – by and large communities of color – disproportionately sent youth into the County's detention center, underscoring the intense racial disparities that exist in the system.



To the extent services were available to justice-involved families in the neighborhoods that were driving detention, those services were predominantly being offered by organizations with offices and staff based elsewhere, not neighborhood groups or residents. As a result, many people interviewed noted that the staff at these organizations did not share the same lived experiences as the families they served, and people living in the neighborhoods accrued little economic benefit from the government investment made in these services provided.



Many interviewees were acutely aware of the recent efforts to reduce the number of youth in detention and stressed the need to provide community alternatives for these youth who otherwise would have been detained.



Each neighborhood's population had different needs, and residents of each stressed the importance of community control over distribution of resources to meet their unique needs.

The interviews with service providers revealed how inadequate funding and cumbersome, opaque government contracting processes locked many grassroots, community-led organizations out from serving youth in their communities. Respondents noted that the contracting process was challenging to navigate, as it required an awareness of and fluency in government processes that was not common among grassroots providers, given their limited time and capacity. This finding was corroborated by JAD's review of JPD's procurement process and existing contracts with community-based service providers, which found that few contracted providers were from the communities driving system referrals. Furthermore, while JPD maintained an up-to-date database of their providers, there was no way to search for providers by ZIP code or track if/whether providers in high-detention neighborhoods were available or sufficient to meet the needs of youth and families.

The interviews and review of probation contracts also highlighted that many existing services provided to justice-involved youth from these communities were offered voluntarily—that is, many of these organizations were not government contracted and instead used their own funding to serve these youth. Without sustained funding, interviewees reported that programs were often discontinued, because staff and organizational operations could not be kept afloat. Additionally, for programs that did stay afloat, no structures were in place to meaningfully track youth outcomes and assess whether those services were meeting their intended goals. This lack of information on

participant outcomes could negatively impact system referrals to the program, which strained programs further.

Ultimately, the JAD's interviews with government agencies and service providers, including leaders directly impacted by the justice system who had been formally and informally serving their communities for years, as well as their review of JPD's procurement process, highlighted the following impediments to community success: 1) the lack of sustained and comprehensive funding for needed supports and services both within and outside the youth justice space, 2) limited transparency and accountability, and 3) insufficient capacity building. Any proposal to address community investment needs would need to respond to these concerns – not only in theory, but also in practice.

SPOTLIGHT

ASSESSING HOW GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING AND PROCUREMENT CAN MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO

Establishing a robust continuum of community-based services and support is a key component for a youth justice system to reduce its reliance on detention.

As was done in Harris County, youth justice system leaders can take stock of what programs and support they currently have in place and where they are located. They can also dig deeper into how their existing contracting and procurement processes may help or hinder the provision of neighborhood-based support, especially whether they truly reflect the needs and desires of the youth being served.

When investigating if and how contracting and procurement practices may hamper a community-based vision of youth justice, consider the following questions:



What do your state statutes on procurement note about how that process must unfold? Consider reaching out to the entity that oversees procurement in your jurisdiction to learn how the process works and discuss how best to partner with their office to advance your goals within the parameters of the law.



To what extent do you invite different providers to inform the services and support that might be needed and desired in their communities? Consider issuing concept papers about potential ideas being explored and gathering feedback to help scope out future requests for proposals (RFPs), so that community needs and interests are being heard and addressed.



Does your agency solicit and fund services specifically in communities that drive system referrals and detention admissions? And if so, to what extent are these services informed by conversations and a review of needs with youth and families from those communities?



What kinds of providers are you funding in different communities—that is, are they small, grassroots neighborhood-based providers or providers located outside of the neighborhood? Are these organizations led and staffed by the people in communities you would like to serve?



If you don't have a practice of funding neighborhood-based providers, what are the known reasons? Consider whether you need to do the legwork to identify and build relationships with locally-based providers and/or if there are aspects of your solicitation process that pose a barrier to their participation and how you might address them.



Do you have a process to meaningfully track the efficacy of contracted providers for improving youth wellness? What about for providers you may refer to but not currently contract with?



What is the current timeline and process for providers to receive payment from awarded contracts? Have you spoken with providers to know if they can "afford" to work with you, (i.e., can they pay their rent and staff while they wait for slow government payments to arrive)? Do you offer any structural or financial supports, like access to no-interest or low-interest loans, to bridge any gaps in payment?



FOR MORE INFORMATION

SECTION 1 RESOURCES

Harris County Youth Justice Town Hall: Redefining Youth Justice Coalition Launch ✓

This July 2020 virtual town hall launched the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition. Panelists included the Task Force's community engagement specialist and project manager, advisors from the Justice Lab and Haywood Burns Institute, and representatives from several community-based organizations.

Redefining Youth Justice Coalition: About the RYJC 7

This slide deck provides an overview of the RYJC, their composition, goals, values, and history.



SECTION 2

SHIFTING RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES

SECTION 2

REINVESTMENT FUND EMERGES AS A WAY TO SHIFT RESOURCES TO IMPACTED COMMUNITIES

he various strands of work happening at the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), the Justice Administration Department (JAD), and through different community organizations opened up a new conversation about strengthening and building out the community-based infrastructure needed to keep youth out of the justice system. Given the challenges associated with current funding and procurement processes, driving investments to the County's most highly-impacted communities was critical.

Leadership at both JPD and JAD were inspired by reinvestment fund models from other jurisdictions and committed to exploring local applicability. Meanwhile, advocates believed that reinvestment was well-suited to address long-standing problems in Harris County, including stark racial disparities in youth detention, the absence of adequate community alternatives to youth detention, and a lack of data-driven investment in community-based resources for youth.

Establishing the fund took multiple steps, including learning more from other jurisdictions that had reinvestment funds, collaborating with multiple county departments including procurement, the Harris County Attorney's Office, and the budget department, and most importantly, building support for the work within the community. The JAD, along with JPD, was well-positioned to coordinate this effort and liaise between different actors. These efforts eventually paid off, with the unanimous approval of the Harris County Commissioners Court and their vote in favor of the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund in February 2021.



As a starting point, the JAD and the Justice Lab connected Harris County system stakeholders and leaders of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition to partners involved in Community Reinvestment Initiatives in Colorado. Colorado's Community Reinvestment Initiatives redirected state funding deeply into impacted communities for community-led health and safety strategies and services. The Initiatives are designed to acknowledge the essential role community plays in advancing community safety and well-being and aim to resource communities to play that role effectively.

Connecting with leaders from the Colorado's Community Reinvestment Initiatives gave the County a helpful roadmap for how to build a community reinvestment model from the ground up that would simultaneously develop community capacity to serve justice-impacted people and resource the most impacted communities to meet their identified needs. It also equipped stakeholders to garner local support for a reinvestment fund and position people to play a role in it later.

"Establishing the fund took multiple steps, including learning more from other jurisdictions that had reinvestment funds, collaborating with multiple county departments including procurement, the Harris County Attorney's Office, and the budget department, and most importantly, building support for the work within the community."

BEHIND THE SCENES



CATALYZING REFORM BY CONNECTING THE DOTS AND LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Prior to the onset of the global pandemic, the County Judge's Office hired two local Houstonians to support the Task Force. Trisha Trigilio was brought on as the Project Manager to lead the facilitation and management of the Task Force, while Dr. Assata Richards was hired as a Community Engagement Specialist to build partnerships and create inclusive processes for impacted community members to participate in the Task Force. Both positions were supported with a grant from a local, private foundation.

Once the Task Force was suspended due to the pandemic, staff from the Justice Lab continued to work closely with the local project manager and community engagement specialist to support them in carrying on the important reform work. Dr. Richards helped establish and support the convening of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition. Meanwhile, staff from the Lab worked with Judge Hidalgo's Office and other system stakeholders to find a temporary agency home for Ms. Trigilio.

During her initial placement at the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), Executive Director Henry Gonzales introduced the idea of reinvestment as a promising way to direct unspent agency dollars to youth in communities and expressed his interest in pursuing reinvestment to Ms. Trigilio. When Ms. Trigilio eventually moved to the Justice Administration Department (JAD), a newly-created agency serving as a resource for justice-involved agencies in the County, she shared Mr. Gonzales' expressed interest in reinvestment with her colleagues there.

These conversations then led to discussions about what community reinvestment models could look like as evidenced by models existing in Colorado. Ms. Trigilio was able to leverage her role to facilitate key research and planning activities among JAD and JPD that ultimately helped shape the development of the County's reinvestment fund. Critically, she also stayed connected to the advocacy and planning work in the community that was supported by her former counterpart during this time. Ultimately, having a point person for coordinating reform exploration and planning activities across agencies helped to maintain forward momentum for the Fund's development.

SPOTLIGHT

AN OVERVIEW OF COLORADO'S COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT INITIATIVES

There are currently four Community Reinvestment Initiatives in Colorado which provide funding for community-based reentry, crime prevention, underserved victim services, and harm reduction. These initiatives were established in accordance with enabling (and reauthorizing) legislation drafted by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC); ¹ each bill had bipartisan sponsorship and no opposition. As of Spring 2022, and since the first initiative took effect in 2014, these initiatives have invested almost \$80 million in state funding, cumulatively, into impacted communities. The Initiatives, which served as inspiration for Harris County stakeholders, are as follows:

Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) Program² **オ**

In 2014, formerly incarcerated people and the CCJRC successfully passed <u>HB</u> <u>14-1355</u>, which created Colorado's first grant program to support community-led reentry programs, particularly those led by formerly incarcerated people. This grant program is administered by the Department of Corrections (DOC), but the legislation enables DOC to contract with an intermediary organization to manage the grant program. The bill initially provided an annual appropriation of \$500,000

¹ The CCJRC is a community-based organization, founded in 1999, with the mission of ending the overuse of the criminal justice system and advancing community health and safety. CCJRC engages in policy and budget advocacy at the state level in order to end mass incarceration and secure funding for Community Reinvestment. For more information, see: https://www.ccjrc.org/

² WAGEES was the focus of a 2018 research report by the Urban Institute titled Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs: Lessons Learned from Colorado's Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) Program. The report provides an overview of Colorado's community investment model and summarizes considerations and lessons learned from the WAGEES program. It profiles the WAGEES program as a leading example of a state department of corrections directly investing in and partnering with community providers, many of which are led by people with firsthand experience in the justice system.

in General Fund for the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program but over time and in accordance with its proven success, it was reauthorized in 2018 (HB 18-1176) and is now funded as an annual appropriation of \$9 million (as of 2022).

Transforming Safety Project

In 2017, community members and CCJRC were successful in passing another Community Reinvestment bill, HB 17-1326, which adopted a community development approach to public safety. The Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention bill took money (\$4 million per year) from parole reform savings and created a five-year pilot program known as the Transforming Safety Project that funds small business lending and a community grant program in two Colorado communities impacted by over-policing and mass incarceration. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) oversees the Transforming Safety Project and contracts with several intermediary organizations in each local community to manage the project. Based on the initial success of this bill, the Colorado Legislature expanded the pilot in 2021 to add two rural communities and extended the sunset review to 2026.

Community Crime Victims Grant Program 🗷

In 2018, driven by survey findings indicating a lack of equity in community-based support services for crime survivors, particularly for men, people of color, and young adults, CCJRC worked with bipartisan legislators to pass HB 18-1409 that created a community grant program for victim services. The project aims to provide a community-based, public health approach to serving populations of crime victims that have historically been hard to reach through current victims' services. The program is housed not within a criminal justice agency but within the state Department of Public Health & Environment; an intermediary organization manages the program. The program is funded at \$880,000 annually via the general fund; for FY2022-23 the program will receive an additional \$1 million in federal funding via the American Rescue Plan Act.

Harm Reduction Grant Program 🗷

In 2019, Colorado ushered in its fourth Community Reinvestment Initiative. The Harm Reduction Grant Program was created through <u>SB 19-008</u> to promote prearrest diversion and collaboration between public health agencies, community service providers and law enforcement so long as those collaborations are prearrest and based on harm education principles and strategies. The program is administered by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; unlike its counterparts, this program is not administered via an intermediary organization. The program is funded at \$1.8 million annually via the general fund.

SPOTLIGHT

UNDERSTANDING WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE FUND

The Harris County group engaged with the Colorado team to learn from their approach. Topics explored included:

Purpose of Community Reinvestment Initiatives

The Colorado team emphasized that Community Reinvestment Initiatives are not purely about increasing funding for services. Importantly, they are a community development strategy to provide resources to communities most impacted by mass incarceration and over-policing to empower them to address community challenges (e.g., reentry, crime, victimization, addiction) in the ways they believe will be most effective. Ultimately, the aim of reinvestment is to empower and resource communities to identify and design solutions that address their own needs.

Identification of Funding

The Colorado team discussed the value of looking across government agencies – including but not limited to justice agencies and health and human services agencies – to identify potential pots of money for community reinvestment initiatives. They shared that while securing "big money" is tempting, starting small while getting to know the community providers can be beneficial in being able to successfully scale over time. They underscored the importance of advocating annually for continued and increased funding and negotiating funding terms that are responsive to community needs. Lastly, they highlighted how community advocates that do not receive any funding from the reinvestment initiative can function as powerful and credible champions for increased funding, and the role of program data in illustrating to legislators a return on investment.

Geographic Focus

The Colorado team discussed the importance of targeting resources hyper-locally to communities most impacted (to be defined in accordance with the focus of a given initiative). The central premise is that services and support need to be directed to individuals most impacted by the legal system and that local organizations are best suited to develop responses within the unique context of the communities they work in and with. There are real differences across communities as well as unique opportunities and challenges, all of which are important to consider.

Services Focus

The Colorado team discussed the value of reinvestment initiatives funding local organizations that are diverse in their approach to service provision. They underscored the importance of providing flexibility with regard to service provision so that services evolve to meet the real-time needs of the target population. This flexibility allows clients to provide input on programming, as well as innovation in service delivery models and the ability to course-correct when needed.

Role of the Intermediary

The Colorado team explained that a defining component of their reinvestment approach – and one that cannot be overstated – is that the governing legislation (in 3 of its 4 initiatives) mandates the state contract with a community-facing grant manager (or intermediary organization) to manage the grant-making functions. The intermediary's role is to ensure the reinvestment money reaches deeply into communities most impacted and to provide ongoing capacity-building services and case management, financial management, and data collection infrastructure to its community-based grantees to ensure they are successful. The intermediary also facilitates functional partnership between grantees and system officials.

Strategies to Center Community

The Colorado team shared that measures are put into place in each reinvestment initiative to have community members at the table and meaningfully involved in supporting implementation. For example, the Transforming Safety Project required that a Local Planning Team in each community determine the crime prevention priorities that would ultimately serve as the community grant guidelines for their respective community. The Teams comprise a diverse group of people including: residents who have been directly impacted by crime and involvement in the criminal legal system, local business owners, nonprofit direct service leaders, faith leaders, local government and law enforcement personnel and local educators. Other initiatives have established community advisory groups that advise the intermediary on community needs and/or community review committees that review proposals and issue funding recommendations to the intermediary.

Involving Different Actors in the Process Helped Create Momentum for a New Approach

The Justice Administration Department (JAD) followed up with the stakeholder group who met with the Colorado team, as well as the County's Purchasing Department and Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to determine how such a fund could be implemented in Harris County. Collaboration with OMB was critical because the Commissioners Court instructed the JAD to work with OMB to meaningfully engage the community in the current budgeting evaluations for all criminal justice departments funded by the County. The reinvestment fund presented a good opportunity for JAD and OMB to jointly pilot, troubleshoot, and improve strategies to increase the capacity for community participation in the budgeting process.

With strong interest in adapting Colorado's work to Harris County, the JAD partnered with the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) to develop a concrete proposal for a Community Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund. A key turning point came when JPD's Executive Director Henry Gonzales offered to contribute \$2 million from the agency's unspent funds for the fiscal year. These unspent funds largely reflected savings from decarceration during the pandemic.²⁹

29 Given the time that lapsed between the Fund's approval (February 2021) and the Fund's implementation (Summer 2022), it is possible that a different pot of funds from Probation will be leveraged to support the \$2 million commitment.



SPOTLIGHT

THE REINVESTMENT FUND AS A FIRST STEP IN PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

In June 2020, the Commissioners Court approved a motion made by County Judge Lina Hidalgo instructing the Justice Administration Department (JAD) to develop a process for meaningfully engaging the community in the current budgeting evaluations for all criminal justice departments funded by Harris County. In response, the JAD collaborated with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to identify the opportunities and challenges to developing a robust participatory budgeting process (i.e. a process by which policymakers engage residents in part of a public budget, giving them real power to inform budgetary decisions and identify which investments will best meet their needs) in Harris County. Together, they identified the following benefits and potential challenges of participatory budgeting:

BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
Encourage residents to become more informed	Ensuring inclusivity, representativeness, and equity
Better inform Commissioners Court members and county Department leadership about their constituents' needs	Ensuring asks of community members are reasonable, supported, and accessible
Generate more community buy-in	Following through on promises
Increase fiscal transparency	Making the process accessible

Being clear-eyed about the upside and potential challenges, JAD and OMB came to see the reinvestment fund as a project to pilot, refine, and learn from community engagement strategies and community-driven resource allocation processes that would be instrumental in their development and execution of a broader participatory budgeting initiative.

Community Participation in the Design and Support of the Reinvestment Fund Was Crucial

Once the reinvestment fund was deemed feasible, Coalition leaders shared the concept with the broader Redefining Youth Justice Coalition to ascertain community interest and support for moving the plan forward. Next, the Justice Administration Department (JAD) invited Coalition members to join their Request for Proposal (RFP) working group, enabling community members to provide input on how the JAD should structure the RFP for the intermediary that would receive and distribute the reinvestment funds. Because Texas procurement law prohibits people with substantial involvement in drafting the scope of work for an RFP from later bidding on that same RFP, the JAD let Coalition members know about this limitation before inviting them to participate in the RFP working group, so they could elect (or not) to participate in the working group in an informed manner.

The active engagement of Coalition workgroup members in the reinvestment fund development resulted in their support when it came time for the final vote on the Fund. Coalition leaders submitted a letter of support for the County's Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund and ten Coalition members gave public comment in favor of the Fund, which was unanimously approved by the Commissioners Court.



Now more than ever it is time to reimagine the kinds of support we are providing our minority youth and how to prevent them from being affected by crime in the justice system and any social injustice. Our communities have been exhausted by the headlines of breaking our people of color in communities like ours further down and we should be lifting each other up. We can't do it without community investment into the community-based programs that will provide support for social and emotional development and mentorship and college and career readiness and keeping our youth out of the streets and out of the justice system. We have to take action and we hope you approve this new Initiative and investment into our community.

⁻ ISAAC EGUIA, YOUTH, REDEFINING YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION



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The Reinvestment Fund is part of a groundbreaking vision for youth justice — a vision that is not owned by institutions.

Instead of maintaining the punitive status quo, this fund will help to directly invest in the communities that are home to many Black and Latino youth and families that have been neglected for far too long.

⁻ DR. ASSATA RICHARDS, COMMUNITY COORDINATOR, REDEFINING YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION



Our department is committed to working with community groups to ensure Harris County youth will be served by those who know them best and are from their community. This new fund will allow us to continue doing this in a more robust and streamlined manner and increase community capacity to help more - Black and Latino youth stay on the right track.

- HENRY GONZALES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
THE HARRIS COUNTY JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT





- The Youth Justice Community
 Reinvestment Fund is another
 important piece of our work to reshape
 the justice system in ways that improve
 public safety and address inequity at
 the same time.
 - HARRIS COUNTY JUDGE LINA HIDALGO

BEHIND THE SCENES



MAINTAINING ALIGNMENT TOWARDS A SHARED GOAL

While system and community stakeholders were aligned on directing more resources and decision-making authority to the communities most impacted by the systems, developing trust and working together in pursuit of a shared goal took time.

Once the reinvestment fund was identified as a realistic goal, there was recognition that planning this initiative would need to involve many different perspectives, especially given that the Coalition was vocal about wanting to play a meaningful role in the process. As such, new processes had to be established that were more intentional about partnering with the community. Community members had real concerns about just how open, transparent, and inclusive this process would be. While not perfect, JAD personnel established regular communication channels, meeting twice a week with the Coalition and also liaising regularly with other system actors. JAD also relied on JPD as a sounding board and leveraged their support to see the Fund to fruition. Ultimately, this collaboration led to a joint press release announcing the Fund's approval from JPD, JAD, and the Coalition.

Separately, both the JAD and the Coalition recognized that the \$4 million Reinvestment Fund – slated to initially fund four to seven organizations – is only a small fraction of what would be needed to correct decades of systemic disinvestment in communities of color countywide. This reality added to community members' underlying anxiety about which organizations would ultimately be resourced by the Fund. This backdrop sometimes magnified the missteps and mistakes that come with any new process or partnership among community and government actors.

That being said, this initial \$4 million serves as a pilot, one that will hopefully demonstrate the need for and promise of investing in communities to promote public safety. Once it does, stakeholders hope to more intentionally grow this pot of money, both by redirecting resources away from incarceration and adding in other sources and committing to capacity building and other empowerment strategies to help communities thrive. This approach – that is, starting small – mirrors how places like Colorado and New York City have structured similar efforts to promote investment and have used these initial wins to grow their scope and funding over time.

SPOTLIGHT

HOW HARRIS COUNTY STRUCTURED ITS YOUTH JUSTICE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

The Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund) is a partnership between the Justice Administration Department (JAD) and Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) to enhance and promote community-based programming to reduce youth justice involvement for youth and address disparities in the youth justice system. The Fund is a two-year pilot program housed within JAD that will make direct investments in youth- and family-serving community-based organizations in communities disproportionately impacted by the youth justice system through an intermediary that can engage with and have its investment strategy be informed by stakeholders.

A key feature of the Fund is to help grow the capacity and enhance operations of smaller organizations, as they work to support young people in their community. Current funding for the Fund totals \$4 million, with a true "reinvestment" of \$2 million from JPD's budget (the additional \$2 million is to come from the County's general fund).

By design, the Fund aims to:



Address economic inequities in communities of color that are hardest-hit by youth detention through direct investment in home-grown, community-based direct service providers;

- Support capacity development for grassroots service providers in communities of color to prevent youth of color from justice system involvement and prevent deepening involvement for youth who are released from detention and incarceration;
- Support service providers to collect and report data on whether their services improve outcomes for youth, using data collection support from the intermediary organization.

The Fund aims to achieve these above-stated goals by contracting with an intermediary organization to:

- Support grassroots service providers, with a focus on communities of color, to prevent youth involvement and deepening involvement in the justice system;
- Engage directly with impacted communities in order to determine which types of services to fund, including but not limited to incorporating youth voice and representation;
- Select grantee organizations based on community priorities through a transparent and accessible solicitation process that can support organizations and collaborations in various stages and phases of growth (including people and organizations in highly impacted communities that are already providing services for youth but may be under-resourced and/or not adequately networked with government or larger service providers);

- Administer subgrants to approximately four to seven organizations at variable funding levels over a two-year period;
- Support grantee organizations via training and coaching on best practices, establishing shared metrics of youth well-being (beyond basic measures of recidivism) and providing a data collection platform for tracking outcomes, continuously using data generated by grantee organizations to troubleshoot problems with implementation, and developing a community of practice for organizations that promotes quality service provision and quality control across the initiative;
- Report on fiscal and performance status of grants to JAD and JPD, and work with JAD and JPD to share information about and develop referral processes for funded programs;
- Serve as the point of contact for subgrantees and JAD and JPD for purposes of problem solving, resolving

A third-party evaluator will work with the intermediary to assess the overall effectiveness of the pilot program in reducing disparities, improving youth outcomes, and building community power and strengthening community capacity to provide high-quality resources and services to meet community needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

SECTION 2 RESOURCES

Opportunities for Participatory Budgeting in Harris County

This report issued by the Harris County Justice Administration Department to members of the Commissioners Court outlines opportunities and challenges to developing a participatory budgeting process in Harris County. It points to the Reinvestment Fund as a first step on the road to robust participatory budgeting in Harris County.

Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund Budget Request Proposal ➢ & Presentation ➤

This budget request is JAD's proposal to the County Commissioners Court to establish the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (see pgs 78-84). It describes the purpose of the proposed Fund, the proposed approach for developing the Fund, and projected funding allocations for the Fund's implementation. It also cites examples of similar funds in other jurisdictions to provide an evidence base for its anticipated impact.

The accompanying presentation includes JAD's budget request of \$2 million of general funds for the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund for FY 2021-22. The \$2 million is intended to serve as a match to \$2 million of Probation funds that were earmarked for reinvestment into the Fund.

Testimony to the Commissioners Court on the Reinvestment Fund Budget Request

This February 9, 2021 Commissioners Court meeting included public testimony from ten members of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition voicing their support of the Reinvestment Fund budget request. A video and transcript is available.

Letter of Support for Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund Pilot

This letter of support was issued January 5, 2020 to the County Commissioners Court and signed by over 60 impacted community members, direct service providers, and advocates. The letter was developed – as part of a broader campaign organized by the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition – to voice support for a vote in favor of the joint budget request by the Juvenile Probation Department and Justice Administration Department to pilot a Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund.

Press Release "Harris county commissioners approve first of its kind community led multimillion dollar youth justice community reinvestment fund"

The Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund, JAD, Juvenile Probation Department, and Redefining Youth Justice Coalition issued this joint press release on February 10, 2021 to announce the County Commissioners Court's approval of the Fund.

"Harris County Will Spend \$4 Million to Prevent Youth Incarceration" – Houston Public Media interview with Assata Richards

This March 29, 2021 Houston Public Media interview is with Assata Richards who served as the community engagement specialist to the Task Force and then went on to coordinate the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition. In the wake of the Commissioner Court's approval of the Fund, Ms. Richards speaks to how the development of the Fund serves the Coalition's goals and how important it is that the Fund, once implemented, directly responds to the expressed needs of impacted youth and their families.

Photos by students from 8 Million Stories in collaboration with the Performing Statistics project.



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SECTION 3

THE COMPLEXITIES OF PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITIES





SECTION 3

ENGAGING AND PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITIES TO ESTABLISH THE FUND WAS COMPLICATED AND REQUIRED ONGOING ADAPTATION

ith the Commissioners Court's approval of the Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund) and continued support and enthusiasm at the community level, system leaders moved quickly to ready the Fund for implementation. Armed with input from the RFP working group (which included Coalition members), the Justice Administration Department (JAD) finalized and worked with the County's Purchasing Office to release a solicitation in June 2021 for an intermediary to administer the Fund. The JAD's goal was to select a qualified vendor and have the Fund up and running by fall 2021. While the community was hungry for it and system leaders were politically and otherwise motivated to roll out this new initiative, this timeline ultimately proved untenable.

Readying the Fund for implementation in a manner that aligned with the underlying values of partnership, community collaboration, and equity required significant effort and time.



First, following the release of the RFP, procurement rules posed challenges to community members' aspirations for an equitable and inclusive selection process. These challenges had to be addressed before proceeding with the review process.



Second, the County received a non-competitive response to its solicitation for an intermediary to administer the Fund. Due to the lack of competitiveness, the Evaluation Committee recommended canceling and reissuing the RFP. Additional outreach to and relationship building with community-based organizations was necessary to bolster interest in the opportunity.



Third, community and county government stakeholders alike recognized a need to think through and build out accountability measures and evaluation strategies prior to the Fund's implementation, especially those that would ensure the intermediary's accountability to ongoing partnership with impacted communities.

System and community leaders worked through these early implementation challenges together. Following the release of a reissued RFP and a dedicated review of a more robust applicant pool by a selection committee inclusive of community voice, the JAD issued a recommendation to the Commissioners Court on April 26, 2022 for the Harris County-based nonprofit Change Happens to serve as the intermediary to operate the Fund. The Commissioners Court voted unanimously and across party lines to approve this recommendation. At the time of press, the \$4 million Harris County Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund pilot is scheduled to launch in 2022.

Establishing a Selection Committee Inclusive of Community Voice Took Resolve, Fluency in Procurement Rules, and Creativity

After the RFP to select the Fund's intermediary was released, the Coalition initiated a process to solicit, train, and nominate interested Coalition members to serve on the Evaluation Committee, based on their desire for an inclusive and equitable selection process. Because an Evaluation Committee with community members had never been created in Harris County, JAD staff spent months researching procurement rules and meeting with various County officials to determine to what extent it was feasible to include community members in the selection process and still remain in compliance with the state purchasing law.

Once it was learned that the state statute governing RFP processes only contemplates county employees as part of the process and does not specifically build in a role for community members to participate, this information was immediately passed on to Coalition members for ongoing dialogue on the subject. The stakeholders found themselves up against the delicate balance between community engagement and maintaining integrity in the purchasing process.

"The stakeholders found themselves up against the delicate balance between community engagement and maintaining integrity in the purchasing process."

Thanks to the Coalition's resolve, and JAD's willingness to dedicate time and resources to further explore this issue with the Purchasing Office and the County Attorney's Office, the County ultimately determined that community members could serve on the Evaluation Committee in an advisory capacity. Specifically, community representatives could review documents, participate in applicant interviews, submit comments, and consult with and give advice based on their expertise and lived experience to County personnel committee members. However, they could not participate in the official scoring process or be compensated for their time and expertise. While not ideal, this compromised path kept Coalition members at the table during this critical juncture, enabling them to meaningfully advise County personnel on the selection of the Fund's intermediary.

To help counter the limitations of serving in an advisory role, the Coalition compensated community members for their time and expertise on the committee. The Coalition also encouraged their government partners to think critically about diversity – in terms of race, ethnicity, and areas of expertise

(including lived experience with the youth justice system) – when selecting county personnel to serve on the Committee. The County took the Coalition's recommendations around diversity seriously and adjusted the composition of the Evaluation Committee to include a County employee who had lived experience with the legal system and Black members, since the committee already had Latino members.

Despite this progress, the Coalition next learned that local procurement rules prohibited Committee participation if people had a conflict of interest.³⁰ Understanding what constituted a conflict was critical for Coalition members, since it would preclude one from applying to serve as the intermediary. But other questions emerged: Would it also preclude one from applying for future subgrants from the intermediary? Would it preclude a relation of theirs from doing the same?

Ultimately, the JAD advised the Coalition that a relationship with or stake in any organization that may apply for a subgrant would constitute a conflict and therefore prohibit any participation in the selection of the intermediary, even in the limited advisory role.³¹ Following receipt of this guidance, the Coalition nominated four members with no known conflicts to participate on the Evaluation Committee in the predefined advisory role.

³⁰ The intent of the Conflict of Interest (COI) rules is to ensure people on the committee are not (a) biased for/against a specific candidate because of a COI and/or (b) going to use the confidential information they receive as part of the proposal review process to help themselves, their organization, or a family member tailor a future application for a sub grant.

³¹ The County's guidance around what constitutes a conflict of interest (COI) was as follows: If there is any COI including relationship with or stake in any organization that may apply for an intermediary grant or a sub—grant that individual cannot in any way participate in the Evaluation Committee. That individual has a COI if: they have a financial interest and/or a family relationship with an organization applying for the intermediary grant or with an organization that will be applying for a subgrant. A family member for this purpose is defined as a parent, child, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, spouse, step-parent, or step-child. A financial interest for this purpose is defined as: (a) owns or controls, directly or indirectly, an ownership interest of at least 1 percent, including to share in profits, proceeds, capital gains, in an entity that provides goods or services or (b) has a future financial interest and could benefit (or their family member could benefit) from a contract

SPOTLIGHT

LESSONS LEARNED ON ESTABLISHING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE PROCUREMENT PROCESSES

Procurement — the process to acquire goods and services — is a vital activity of every local government, and yet it often operates as a back-office function. In the case of many new initiatives, it can be an in-the-weeds step on the path to implementation, with little visibility to stakeholders invested in that initiative. In Harris County, the development of the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund rested upon a shared commitment to community partnership, collaboration, and equity. As such, there was significant appetite, on behalf of members of the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition, to participate in the County's process to select the intermediary to operate the Fund.

System actors coordinating the process were also committed to exploring community participation and leveraging their expertise in the selection process. Additionally, the role of an intermediary for a community reinvestment fund was new to the County, so there was a need for the County to raise awareness about this new role and execute a selection process that was inviting and accessible to suitable vendors. As the County worked to establish an inclusive and accessible procurement process, there were many learnings along the way that may prove instructive for others doing this work. Those lessons learned include:



UNDERSTAND THE RULES GOVERNING COMMUNITY MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS:

Before establishing an evaluation committee, do the due diligence to get clear on the rules that govern who may serve on the Evaluation Committee. This may involve review of state and local statutes, conversations with legal advisors, and consultations with procurement officers. When seeking to involve community members in the process, being clear about what the parameters of their role will look like, given

existing rules, is essential. For instance, are they permitted to serve in certain capacities and what will that look like (i.e., can they be full members of the evaluation committee, helping to score proposals and participate in evaluative discussions, or will their role be more advisory, and what does that look like)? Additionally, understanding whether and how community members can be compensated for their time is also important.



UNDERSTAND AND BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST RULES:

Procurement processes by design are intended to safeguard against undue influence. As such, conflict of interest rules exist to prevent people who had a role in influencing the selection process from benefiting (either directly or indirectly) from those final grant awards. When involving individuals – whether community members or government employees – in the process to design a solicitation and/or evaluate proposal submissions, inform them about what constitutes a conflict of interest and educate them early and thoroughly about the parameters to avoid later issues.



SELECT A DIVERSE AND REPRESENTATIVE EVALUATION COMMITTEE:

While evaluation processes are necessarily designed to promote fair reviews and scoring of proposals, each member of an evaluation committee brings their own set of life experiences and expertise.

Having a diverse evaluation committee – both in terms of subject areas of expertise and in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identification, geography, and lived experience – can help broaden how the applicant pool is viewed. A good rule of thumb is that the evaluation committee should be representative of the population to be served by the initiative.



RAISE AWARENESS OF YOUR AGENCY AND POTENTIAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO GENERATE A COMPETITIVE POOL:

When soliciting a vendor for a new initiative, broadening the reach of the solicitation can help widen the pool of potential applicants. As such, before releasing your solicitation, take the time to map the landscape and landscape and establish connections with a broad range of

providers, including those who may never have engaged in solicitation processes previously. Hold community meetings and speak with local community and faith-based leaders, who can be helpful messengers in this effort. When it comes time to release your solicitation, do so through your typical channels and consider opportunities to promote it across agencies and partner organizations.



KEEP THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTRACTING TERMS SIMPLE:

Solicitation processes must be comprehensive and rigorous to ensure the process as designed support the selection of an appropriately suited and qualified vendor and does so in a fair, equitable, and transparent way. However, it's important to assess whether your process as designed is inviting and accessible to a diverse range of potential applicants or is overly burdensome.

- What is the turnaround time for an applicant to prepare a proposal? Is that sufficient?
- Can applicants submit questions or participate in a bidder's conference?
- How complicated is the submission process? Are there ways to structure the solicitation so that you receive the pertinent information to assess suitability without posing undue burden on the applicant?
- Are the contracting terms specified in the solicitation around liability and remuneration structured in such a way to be tolerable by a diverse range of applicants or are they inadvertently and unnecessarily going to limit the pool?



ADAPT AND COURSE CORRECT AS NEEDED TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL PROCESS:

Despite all the careful planning, a given solicitation process may not result in a competitive pool. Evaluate your options and be willing, as in the case of Harris County, to close a solicitation, make adjustments to the RFP and educate the field as necessary, and then reissue it. Ensuring your process leads to the selection of a highly-qualified vendor is paramount to the success of any initiative.

BEHIND THE SCENES



STAYING THE COURSE WITH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

The Coalition and the JAD had worked hard – through ongoing participation in formalized biweekly workgroup meetings – to develop a strong, trusting community-systems partnership in the process to design, garner support for, and ultimately secure approval for the Fund. During this time, the Coalition expressed interest to JAD that, in keeping with their expressed commitment to inclusivity, equity, and partnership, they would like representatives of the Coalition to serve on the Evaluation Committee to select an intermediary organization for the Fund. The Coalition made this request and began discussing it among its community members without being fully informed of or fluent in the procurement rules that would govern the selection process.

Following the RFP's release, the JAD spent months exploring to what extent Coalition members could participate in the selection process while still maintaining integrity to purchasing laws. The JAD learned that non-county personnel could serve as advisors on the Evaluation Committee but could not vote or be compensated. When the JAD communicated this finding to the Coalition, it was experienced by some members as a blow. Some members felt that their hard-won and hard-built trust with the County for an inclusive and equitable process had been squandered, and it triggered an all too familiar feeling of being engaged by government personnel when their support is needed but then being cast aside.

Despite not being able to fully participate in the selection process, Coalition members were committed to this initiative and being meaningfully involved in its implementation. Fortunately, JAD staff were receptive, who understood the value of establishing an Evaluation Committee for this groundbreaking initiative. It took perseverance on both sides – including a shared commitment to participating (even when tensions were high) in biweekly planning meetings – to ultimately carve out a way for community members to serve on the Committee. One Coalition member referred to this time as "an exercise in stretching themselves and showing back up after a breach in trust," with the understanding that "it isn't perfect, but it's an opportunity to move forward and continue to push against long standing barriers that stand in the way of inclusive processes."

Coalition members recognized that systems don't change easily and experiencing and working through conflict is part of the change process. On a pragmatic level, some recognized the importance of doing their own "due diligence" and researching procurement rules before making promises to members about their potential involvement in the process. On the government side, there was a recognition that collaboration and community partnership take time and commitment, along with a willingness to be creative and explore alternative – and often unfamiliar – pathways.

Relationship Building with Community Providers Helped Generate Interest in the Solicitation

In releasing its June 2021 RFP, the County sought a highly-qualified organization to operationalize this brand new \$4 million reinvestment fund. As outlined in the RFP's scope of services, serving as the intermediary would require adeptness across several key domains: capacity-building and technical assistance (to subgrantees), program development and resource sharing, procurement and contract administration, oversight and monitoring, and performance management and program evaluation. When the Evaluation Committee convened to review submissions, it became increasingly clear that they did not have the robust applicant pool they had hoped for in assessing for such a critical provider. The Committee unanimously agreed to issue a recommendation to the Purchasing Department to close the RFP and reissue it at a later date.

After closing the RFP, staff at the JAD spoke with local community organizations to hear more about their impressions. During a series of individual virtual meetings, the JAD inquired about whether organizations sufficiently understood the initiative and its goals, and why they did not elect to apply. Through this exercise, the JAD learned that some organizations were unfamiliar with the role of the intermediary and what the County was looking for in an applicant and others opted not to apply due to the cost-reimbursable funding structure detailed in the RFP (out of concern that it would cause undue financial burden for the organization). The JAD demystified the initiative for potential applicants, helping organizations better understand what the initiative was aiming to achieve and the critical and multi-faceted role of the intermediary.

Additionally, the JAD brought their findings back to the Evaluation Committee and together they discussed how to make the RFP clearer and to address concerns around the payment structure. The County revised the RFP for clarity and adjusted the payment structure, making sure that program funds (i.e. funds earmarked for subgrants) would be entrusted to the Intermediary at the start of the contract and only the remaining funds (i.e. funds earmarked for administration purposes) would be disbursed via cost-reimbursement basis.

The revised County RFP was reissued in October 2021, with a more competitive applicant pool received this time around. Following the Evaluation Committee's review of proposal submissions, the Purchasing Department issued a request to the Commissioners Court on April 26, 2022 for Change Happens to be awarded the contract to serve as the JAD's intermediary for the Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund. The bipartisan Court unanimously approved this recommendation. The award was structured as a one-year \$2 million contract (to provide for the subawards to community-based providers and operational expenses for the intermediary) with a one-year renewal option.



The Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund exemplifies the kind of public safety investment we need in Harris County—and across the country. For too long we've unjustly criminalized and incarcerated our young people, especially children of color, and we're no safer for it. Instead of connecting at-risk kids to the prison pipeline, this Fund will connect them to the community-based resources and services they need to overcome obstacles and succeed. Investing in our youth makes our communities stronger—the Justice Administration Department, Juvenile Probation, Change Happens, and all the community members involved in creating this Fund are helping to chart a new path that leads to safety, justice, and opportunity.

⁻ HARRIS COUNTY COMMISSIONER RODNEY ELLIS

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additional law enforcement as this

Commissioners Court has repeatedly done is part of what needs to be done, but we should remain committed to finding ways to do what can be done to prevent crimes from ever happening. The Youth Justice Community

Reinvestment Fund will work to deter kids from a life of crime before it starts. I am proud to support this important investment in our young people.

⁻ HARRIS COUNTY COMMISSIONER ADRIAN GARCIA



When possible, young people should remain in their community, maintain a connection with their family, and be supported by local, community-based services. To achieve this goal, those services need to be available to all community members regardless of geography. For that to happen, true community-based providers must have the necessary resources to accomplish that goal. Change Happens, Inc. and the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund can help make this happen.

HENRY GONZALES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
 THE HARRIS COUNTY JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT



SPOTLIGHT

INTRODUCING CHANGE HAPPENS AS INTERMEDIARY OF HARRIS COUNTY'S YOUTH JUSTICE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

Following a competitive selection process, Change Happens was selected as intermediary of Harris County's Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund (the Fund). A Black-founded and -led community-based social service organization with deep ties in Houston's Third Ward neighborhood, Change Happens steps into this role drawing on decades of direct service provision to youth and families and significant capacity building experience to nonprofits within Harris County and across the greater Gulf Coast region.

Change Happens is focused on early implementation activities to operationalize its role as an intermediary. These activities include: building their internal team to manage the Fund, gathering and reviewing data on communities most impacted by youth detention and the needs of youth and families in those communities, designing a fair and equitable solicitation process to support the administration of subgrants to a range of locally-based providers, and developing a standardized organizational assessment to inform their capacity building assistance to subgrantees.

The organization's CEO, Ms. Helen Stagg, recognizes the importance of building relationships and collaborating with invested community members and system actors to achieve their shared goals of decarceration, community investment, and youth well-being. Ultimately, Change Happens sees the Fund as a way to invest in and build the capacity of local organizations and home-grown providers to effectively prevent youth in their communities from entering or deepening their involvement with the youth legal system.

Building in Community Accountability Measures and Evaluation Strategies Early on Holds Promise for Ongoing Community Involvement

While selecting the intermediary took longer than anticipated, the additional time gave stakeholders space to set the Fund up for success. Specifically, the Coalition suggested that County officials form an Advisory Group (inclusive of community representation) to help the intermediary identify community needs and gaps to inform how funds were awarded. In response, the County specified in the revised and reissued RFP that the intermediary would be required to liaise with an Advisory Group composed of key stakeholders identified in partnership with JAD and JPD. This group would assist with identifying community needs and gaps to inform how funds were awarded. Stakeholders also established a Youth Advisory Board to advise the intermediary, which would be staffed by young people with lived experience.

"Beyond supporting the intermediary, these advisory groups are also intended to build in accountability – namely, that key stakeholders from the community are at the table when decisions are made about how and where funds distributed by the intermediary are being spent and how that matches the vision."

Beyond supporting the intermediary, these advisory groups are also intended to build in accountability – namely, that key stakeholders from the community are at the table when decisions are made about how and where funds distributed by the intermediary are being spent and how that matches the vision.

This time also jumpstarted discussion and planning around an evaluation strategy. While the County always intended (and remains on track) to solicit a third-party evaluator for the initiative, this extended planning period allowed for increased consultation with researchers and, importantly, conversations with community members about what success for the Fund looks like. During this time, the Coalition invited a researcher to discuss what an evaluation of this initiative could entail and how to approach the development of community-informed metrics of success for the Fund.

SPOTLIGHT

ESTABLISHING PROCESSES TO CENTER YOUTH VOICE IN ONGOING YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM

While the Harris County Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund was conceived and ushered into being by a multi-stakeholder group, it notably lacked membership by Harris County youth. Community and system stakeholders alike recognize the critical importance of centering youth voice – their perspectives, expressed needs, passions, and inherent wisdom – in youth justice reform efforts going forward. As a result, efforts are now underway locally to develop structures and processes to incorporate youth perspective and expertise in ongoing advocacy and policy work.

On the community side, the Redefining Youth Justice Coalition is taking steps to transform into an intergenerational coalition that centers youth leadership and participation. Coalition members codesigned and launched a summer internship program with eight young people who were justice-involved or live in communities impacted by youth incarceration to help the Coalition build youth leadership and participation. These youth were compensated by the Coalition and discussed over the course of their internship the impacts of youth incarceration and the position of young people in society and then developed recommendations for the Coalition on how to organize and cocreate community with young people. Several of the youth who participated in the internship program continue to participate in the Coalition and have formed a Youth Caucus with plans to expand the caucus amongst their peers.

On the systems side, the JAD, with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has partnered with Collective Action for Youth (CA4Y) to establish a Youth Advisory Board comprised of young people from Harris County with lived experience to advise the JAD and other county agencies on programs and policies impacting young people. The JAD's impetus for establishing the advisory board is "nothing about me without me" and its leadership is committed to engaging youth advisory board members across a range of policy issues that impact young people, including the implementation of the Fund. With organizing and training support from CA4Y, youth advisory board members will be trained in facilitation methods that are participatory and allow for group self-determination.

SECTION 3 RESOURCES

RFP for Intermediary Organization to Administer the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund for the Harris County Justice Administration Department

This RFP, released by the County in October 2021, seeks an intermediary organization to administer the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund.

Redefining Youth Justice Coalition (RYJC) Internship Report

This report documents how the Harris County Redefining Youth Justice Coalition that formed in the summer of 2020 to organize around the common goal of ending youth incarceration executed an internship program the following summer as a strategy to develop into an intergenerational coalition that centers youth leadership and participation

Harris County Purchasing Department's Request to Issue Intermediary Award

This text details the Harris County Purchasing Department's request to the Commissioners Court to issue an intermediary award to the local nonprofit Change Happens to administer the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund for the Justice Administration Department. It summarizes the request, expected impact, anticipated implementation date, and other pertinent information.

Press Release: "The Harris County Justice Administration Department (JAD) Announces Intermediary for the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund."

This press release announces Change Happens, Inc. as the Intermediary for the Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund.

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Photos by students from 8 Million Stories in collaboration with the Performing Statistics project.



SECTION 4

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE FROM HARRIS COUNTY





SECTION 4

LEARNING FROM HARRIS COUNTY TO INFORM FUTURE REINVESTMENT EFFORTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Justice Reinvestment Fund (the Fund), we have identified and shared here some implementation recommendations for our partners in Harris County and the youth justice field at large. These recommendations are intended to support our partners in Harris County as they embark on implementing the Fund, as well as provide direction for system and community actors working to develop and implement similar efforts elsewhere. It is our hope that these recommendations serve as useful and actionable guidance to those in active pursuit of a new vision of youth justice, one that is grounded in community investment, community safety, and youth well-being.

Recommendations for Implementation



CLEARLY DEFINE THE PURPOSE AND PARAMETERS OF THE FUND PRIOR TO LAUNCHING THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS TO AWARD SUBGRANTS

Harris County's Fund grew out of a successful effort in the early months of the pandemic to dramatically reduce reliance on detention, which proved that detained youth could be successfully served in the community without jeopardizing public safety. Separately, the work to look more closely at current services and supports raised up the notion that investment in youth and families

in communities of color most impacted by the justice system is necessary. Since its creation, stakeholders have characterized the Fund as a promising strategy on many issues, including reducing youth gun violence, preventing youth crime, preventing youth from entering the youth justice system, addressing racial and ethnic disparities in detention, and preventing deepening involvement in the youth justice system for youth who are released from detention and incarceration. As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions embark upon implementation of similar approaches, the following considerations can help set the Fund up for success:

• Define the Fund's Primary Goals

For example, is it about youth crime prevention, or reducing detention admissions via increased diversion opportunities, or reducing recidivism for youth released from detention? While these goals and more are related, getting as clear and specific as possible about the Fund's intended focus is important.

• Define the Fund's Parameters

Given its primary goals, what types of services, support, and interventions might be funded and which may fall outside of the scope of the Fund?

• Allocate Dollars to Align with the Fund's Primary Goals

For example, if the primary goal is to reduce detention, a significant portion of subgrant dollars should be reserved for organizations who are willing and able to work with youth facing the kinds of serious charges that are typical for youth in detention.

Plan How the Fund's Goals and Parameters Will be Communicated

Plan how to communicate goals and parameters with all system and community stakeholders – to align expectations prior to the intermediary launching a competitive process to award subgrants.



EXECUTE A DATA-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-INFORMED, AND ACCESSIBLE COMPETITIVE PROCESS TO AWARD SUBGRANTS

As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions explore similar approaches, the following considerations can help inform how to set up a competitive process to award subgrants that drives resources into communities most impacted by incarceration:

Be Strategic about Place

Examine current rates of system referrals, detention admissions, and incarcerative dispositional placements by neighborhood to pinpoint which communities are overrepresented in the system and which may benefit from focused investment, and then focus the solicitation of services by geography accordingly.

Keep in mind that the same systemic factors that lead to high arrest rates in certain neighborhoods – such as long-term disinvestment and housing displacement – may also create challenges for the growth and development of community-based organizations in those neighborhoods. As such, traditional approaches to soliciting bids may be insufficient. Planning for and budgeting to engage in active recruitment in advance of launching a competitive process can be helpful to address these challenges.

• Be Strategic about Services

Assess the service needs of detained and other justice system-involved youth (and their families) residing in the target neighborhoods and identify and map the services available in those neighborhoods to identify service gaps, and then focus the solicitation on services that may address those gaps.

In particular, it is critical to pay attention to the culture fit of available services (in terms of familiarity with lived experience, racial/ethnic background, and culturally responsive programming) for the target youth population, because without it, service gaps may remain. Additionally, if the Fund is intended to reduce detention or other forms of confinement, discouraging or disallowing bids from organizations that are unwilling to work with young people facing serious charges is important to consider.

• Be Strategic about Procurement

Before any requests for proposals are posted, meet with procurement personnel to get educated on the procurement rules that apply to this competitive process, discuss the value of community participation in the process, and identify ways to meaningfully involve community members in the process. Throughout the process, communicate clearly about procurement rules. In partnership with procurement staff and community representatives, design legal and meaningful ways for community-members from the target neighborhoods to be involved in the solicitation and evaluation of proposals.

• Be Strategic about Subgrants

Design an accessible and culturally-informed competitive process to award subgrants that welcomes all types of providers, including grassroots and less formalized providers that may not have fluency in or the staff capacity or financial resources to participate in a more standard – government-like – competitive process.



BUILD IN MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH AND ADULT COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO HELP GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION

As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions explore similar approaches, the following considerations offer ideas to center community members in the work:

Establish an Advisory Board

Establish and resource an advisory board with diverse membership (in terms of areas of expertise, geography, race, ethnicity, age, and gender identity), representative of the communities and youth/families to be served by the Fund.

• Co-create a Charter Document

Co-create with advisory board members a charter document that formalizes the responsibilities and decision-making authority of members across all aspects of the Fund's implementation. Consider how the members will be involved in the solicitation and evaluation process for sub-awards, capacity building work, efforts to measure progress and impact, and broader communications and strategic planning efforts pertaining to the Fund.

Be Clear with Community Partners about Conflicts of Interest Be clear with community partners up front about any conflictof-interest rules that may preclude them or a relation of theirs, depending on their level of involvement with the Fund's implementation, from applying for and being awarded a future subgrant via the Fund.

Compensate Advisory Board Members

Compensate advisory board members for their time and expertise and ensure meetings are accessible and welcoming to all (taking into account convenient meeting times and locations, childcare, food, transportation subsidies, and more).

Promote Transparency and Accountability

To promote transparency and accountability, co-create with advisory board members a process by which the intermediary routinely reports on the Fund's progress, successes, and challenges in meeting intended goals.

Create Opportunities Outside of the Advisory Board

Create opportunities outside of the advisory board, such as community visioning sessions or volunteer opportunities, for community members at large – especially youth – to get involved with and help shape the implementation work.



PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE, CUSTOMIZED, AND CULTURALLY-INFORMED CAPACITY BUILDING ASSISTANCE TO SUBGRANTEES

Harris County's Fund envisions that the intermediary will recruit and select providers, administer subgrants, and actively partner with subgrantees to strengthen programs, build capacity to gather data, and support organizational development. As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions explore similar approaches, the following considerations could prove useful in offering capacity-building assistance to subgrantees:

• Administer Comprehensive Assessments

Administer a comprehensive assessment to each subgrantee to identify the programmatic, strategic, and operational areas where they need support to perform optimally and their level of readiness to receive support and put learnings into practice, and then tailor assistance accordingly.

Leverage External Expertise

Leverage external expertise (e.g., consultants, trainers, coaches, advisory group members) as necessary to support the delivery of capacity building assistance, with the understanding that it is unlikely for one agency to have the in-house skillset to address all organizational needs that may arise from subgrantees.

Build Peer-to-Peer Learning Exchanges

Build in peer-to-peer learning exchanges among subgrantees to promote cross-organizational exchange, collaborative troubleshooting, and sharing of promising practices.

• Provide Opportunities for Subgrantee Staff

Provide opportunities for subgrantee staff at all levels to participate in training and learning opportunities to cultivate growth, learning, and leadership development organization wide.

• Deliver Culturally-informed Coaching and Support

Deliver coaching and support that is culturally informed, developed, and delivered with awareness of and sensitivity to the diversity of subgrantee staff and the cultural and community conditions within which they live and serve.



EDUCATE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM AND COMMUNITY ACTORS ON THE FUND TO FOSTER REFERRAL PATHWAYS THAT SUPPORT DECARCERATION AND HOLISTIC SERVICE PROVISION

As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions explore similar approaches, the intermediary and system and community actors involved in implementation may want to consider the following:

Meet Regularly with System Actors

Hold regular meetings with family court judges, defense counsel, prosecution, and probation to brief them on the status of the Fund and the services and programs provided by subgrantees. These meetings can help facilitate youth justice referral pathways to the funded programs, ultimately creating off-ramps from the system to the community in service of decarceration efforts.

Educate Community Actors About the Fund

Educate a wide range of community actors in the communities to be served by the Fund about the Fund's existence and the services and programs provided by subgrantees. This may include outreach to faith-based leaders, schools, healthcare centers, recreation centers, and other youth- and family-serving nonprofits. This effort can support the subgrantees in cultivating a bidirectional referral network among other local providers for its participants.



ESTABLISH PROCESSES TO MEASURE, MONITOR, AND EVALUATE THE FUND

Harris County's Fund is the first of its kind in Texas and there is much to learn from the initial pilot period. In the spirit of knowledge generation and informing the next phase of Fund implementation, we encourage those in Harris County coordinating the Fund's implementation and actors in other jurisdictions involved in similar reinvestment initiatives to consider the following:

• Co-design Performance Metrics

Co-design with community members performance metrics for the intermediary and subgrantees that are important to the community and reflective of the vision of community safety, youth well-being, and racial/ethnic equity that the Fund is seeking to support. When identifying performance metrics, be realistic about subgrantee capacity to collect data – ensuring the metrics are meaningful and will help build towards an evidence base without posing undue burden on the subgrantee.

• Establish a Performance Review Process

Establish a quarterly performance review process with the intermediary and subgrantees to assess whether the funds administered are reaching the intended communities and youth/family populations (particularly with an eye – in Harris County – towards the Fund's goal of promoting racial equity and reducing youth involvement in the system), allowing for real-time course correction as necessary.

• Evaluate the Fund's Process with a Third-Party Partner

Partner with a third-party to conduct a process evaluation of the Fund. Consider working with a research entity to design an evaluation plan that centers community-based participatory research approaches in its design.



COMMUNICATE SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED IN REAL-TIME

At the outset, Harris County's Fund, like any new initiative, will undoubtedly encounter a unique set of successes, challenges, and lessons learned. As Harris County implements their Fund and other jurisdictions explore similar approaches, it is important during the initial stage of implementation for the intermediary to consider the following:

• Raise the Visibility of the Fund

Institute ways – via community events, media, social media, public testimony, the arts, distribution of reports and briefs, and more – to raise the visibility of the Fund and share its successes and lessons learned with the local community and beyond. This will help generate buy-in and support for future efforts to scale the program as well as provide inspiration and support for related local and national reform efforts.

• Raise Awareness About Challenges Subgrantees Experience

Give voice to challenges experienced by subgrantees and their youth/family clients that are systemic in nature, in that they are the result of system-imposed policies or practices; raising awareness on these issues can help system actors implement change from within the system and/or mobilize advocates to put pressure on a particular issue.



LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR SIGNIFICANTLY SCALING THE FUND BEYOND ITS PILOT

Harris County's establishment of a \$4 million community reinvestment fund is a notable step in a broader effort to shift resources and decision-making authority from the system to the community, but it will need to be significantly scaled over time to address the decades of disinvestment in communities of color. While starting small can help provide proof of concept, we encourage those involved in pilot implementation of reinvestment funds – in Harris County and elsewhere – to be strategic from the start about how it will be expanded.

• Identify Sustainable Funding Streams

Look across agencies (local, state and federal) to identify additional sustainable funding streams that may be leveraged for its expansion.

Track the Finances of Applicants and Subgrantees

• Track the operating budgets and funding requests of all applicants for subgrants. This information may begin to inform the level of investment needed in the communities currently served by the Fund.

Track Demand for Subgrantee Services

• Track the participant demand for subgrantee services quantifying, if applicable, the number of youth/families who solicit services but are placed on a waitlist or not enrolled due to current funded-capacity. This information will also help illustrate the level of need for the Fund's expansion.

Partner with Champions for Increased Funding

 Partner with advocates and community organizers poised to function as powerful and credible champions for increased funding.

Leverage Data and Stories to Convey the Fund's Impact

• Leverage program data and participant success stories to illustrate to system actors and legislators the Fund's true impact and the "return on their investment."

Consider Enlisting Additional Organizations to Expand

 Identify whether contracting with additional intermediaries will be necessary to serve an expanded geographic area, considering the added value to enlisting multiple organizations to serve in this role
 each with a particular geographic focus that is aligned with their place-based expertise.



STAY TRUE TO THE VISION AND BEST PRACTICES, WHILE ALLOWING ROOM FOR FLEXIBILITY, INNOVATION, AND EXPERIMENTATION

Harris County's Fund draws on learnings from similar efforts in other states and holds promise in aiding the County in transforming its approach to youth justice. For those involved in its implementation, it will be crucial to stay laser focused on safely preventing youth from entering or becoming deeply involved in the justice system, particularly at the point of detention, and eliminating racial/ethnic disparities in the system. It is also important to incorporate best practices in its implementation. However, implementing something new will necessarily require and benefit from a willingness to be flexible, innovate, and experiment. We encourage our partners in Harris County and those elsewhere embarking on something similar to consider the following:

• Empower Intermediaries to Act in the Interest of Communities

Empower the intermediary to execute community-driven decision-making. System actors undoubtedly need to be at the table lending their knowledge, expertise, and resources to the implementation process, but it is critical that the intermediary is empowered to act in accordance with the expressed interests, expertise and needs of the communities it is serving.

• Empower Subgrantees to be Flexible With Outreach

Empower the subgrantees to be flexible with their outreach practices and service delivery models, pivoting as needed in real-time to ensure they are successful in reaching and effectively supporting youth and families as intended.

Fund Programs and Services that May Not Currently Be "Evidence-based"

Programs designated as "evidence-based" require rigorous evaluations that can be resource- and time-intensive, particularly for small grassroots providers with limited budgets. For this reason,

consider investing in programs and services with demonstrated track records of success that have not been evaluated, as well as those that are untested but embrace best practices. And then, provide these organizations with ongoing capacity building, coaching, quality assurance, and performance measurement to ensure that funded programs are indeed having a positive impact on its participants and community.



CONCLUSION

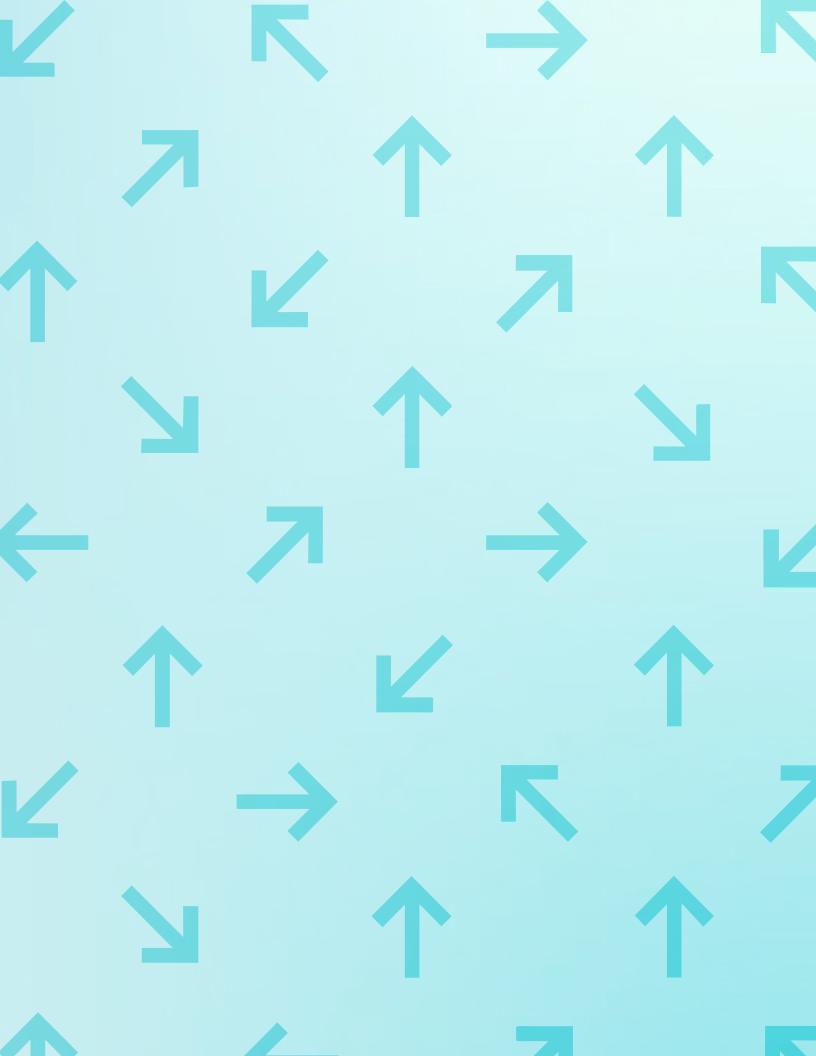
as states and counties across the country grapple with what it means to safely transform youth justice and do so in a way that prioritizes the youth and communities that have been most impacted by incarceration, Harris County offers an example of how values and process can inform these efforts.

From the beginning, stakeholders in Harris County were committed to the vision of reducing reliance on incarceration, investing in communities most impacted by incarceration, and promoting racial and ethnic equity within youth justice, all while preserving public safety. Importantly, they were also committed to the idea that youth justice transformation would not solely be undertaken by legal and court system actors. Rather, there was a strong interest in how to engage a multitude of stakeholders – including impacted communities, advocates, and service providers – in this effort. And even though it was far from perfect, having these different perspectives supporting and advising on solutions – including those most impacted by the harms of the current paradigm – was a key part of this effort.

The County's Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund signals an important leap forward, one that recognizes communities as central in creating safety. But more importantly, it speaks to the importance of relationships and building trust as the foundation of this work. And that work can be difficult and challenging, but also worthwhile.

Fully realizing the potential and promise of the Fund's vision – and doing so in a way that truly lives up to the values of equity, collaboration, and partnership – will take ongoing time, work, and continued and expanded reinvestment of system dollars. As the implementation of the Fund gets under way in the near term, both system and community stakeholders will have to maintain their openness to staying engaged with one another and continuing to build trust to embed community expertise in the design, even when the going gets tough.

In so doing, Harris County's work in this area could provide real learning about how community investment is a pathbreaking way to advance safety, healing, and well-being, and in the process, begin to eliminate long-standing racial disparities, economic injustices, and reliance on incarceration.



PROCESS MATTERS

Reflections from the Development of Harris County's Youth Justice Community Reinvestment Fund and Recommendations to Guide Future Efforts