

Frequently Asked Questions

When and why did the MacArthur Foundation enter the field of juvenile justice grantmaking?

The Foundation began making grants in the field of juvenile justice in 1996. The investment grew from our long-standing interest in youth development and was sparked by an unsettling national trend to treat youthful offenders as if they were no longer young.

What do you wish to achieve through your grantmaking in this area?

Our goal is to promote a juvenile justice system that is rational, fair, and effective—one that holds young offenders accountable for their actions, provides for their rehabilitation, protects them from harm, increases their life chances, and manages the risk they pose to themselves and to public safety.

How will the Models for Change initiative advance that goal?

The initiative will identify and accelerate promising statewide models for juvenile justice systems reform. In each state a lead entity or organization is identifying systemic leverage points, like the services offered to young people after they leave the system (called aftercare), that can help accelerate the pace of change. After selecting several of these “targeted areas,” the lead entity partners with state, county, and national organizations to carry out a plan intended to make the state a model—among many—of successful juvenile justice reform.

What does a model system look like?

We do not believe that there is a single model—in fact, we are investing in multiple states with the express goal of promoting several different models. We do believe, however, that a model system must reflect eight key principles identified by experts in the field. These are: fundamental fairness; recognition of juvenile-adult differences; recognition of individual differences; recognition of young peoples’ potential; public safety; individual responsibility; community responsibility; and system responsibility.

How is the initiative structured?

A lead entity will oversee planning with local grantees and stakeholders and coordinate grantees’ implementation work. A national resource bank of grantees will provide training, technical assistance, and other support as it is needed. A technical resource center will document the implementation of reform efforts, assess their effects, and report the results.

Which states did you select for investment, and why?

Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana, and Washington were selected based on their record of progress, the likelihood of realizing successful outcomes in three to five years, and their potential as bellwether states. The states have very different histories and cultures, population demographics, economic resources, political landscapes and types of challenges. In particular, they diverge on the spectrum of juvenile justice reform. By examining change in states at different starting points, Models for Change aims to broaden understanding of success in different regions, making it easier to generalize the lessons learned and replicate progress nationwide.

Who are the lead entities in those states?

The lead entity in Pennsylvania is the Philadelphia-based Juvenile Law Center. The lead entity in Illinois is the Civitas ChildLaw Center at Loyola University Chicago. The lead entity in Louisiana is the Louisiana Board of Regents. The lead grantee in Washington is the Center for Children and Youth Justice.

How will progress be measured in each state?

We will track five key outcomes.

- Impartial and unbiased decision making (reduced racial disparities)
- Retention in the juvenile justice system of all youth capable of benefiting from its programs and services (reduced transfer and waiver to adult criminal court)
- Youth exiting the system more capable and productive than when they enter it (increased participation in education and rehabilitation and treatment programs and services)
- Reduced recidivism (re-offending)
- Increased proportion of juvenile offenders handled as informally, as unrestrictedly, and as close to home as possible (reduced reliance on incarceration and increased use of community based alternative sanctions).

How will you gauge the overall success of the initiative?

The initiative will be judged a success on four levels: if the sites targeted for systems change show progress toward the goals in each targeted area of improvement; if improvement in the targeted areas moves the state closer to having a model system; if there is reduction in minority overrepresentation and racial disparities in case processing; and if the progress shown across the sites motivates leaders in other states to take on the challenges of reform.

Who can apply for grants?

Application for grants is by invitation only.