

Information Sharing to Support Juvenile Justice Reform

Cities are joining and strengthening a national juvenile justice reform movement. Sharing information and aligning policy decisions among city agencies and with county and state juvenile justice partners are key steps that cities can take to further juvenile justice reform goals.

This brief outlines important first steps for a city's stakeholder group charged with building an information sharing structure to enhance juvenile justice reform.

Map the current status of data collection, sharing and analysis in the city.

A stakeholder group can begin by mapping the current situation in the city. Questions the stakeholder group might ask include:

- What data does each agency collect about each youth and family?
- Who has responsibility to enter, keep and protect data at each agency?
- In what format and system is the data kept?
- Can each system produce data in a useable way?
- Can these systems share data or talk to each other currently?
- What security risks arise when sharing data across these systems?

San Francisco developed its Shared Youth Database to share information among the juvenile probation agency, child welfare system, and mental health treatment providers. This demonstrates that information from these diverse, sensitive systems can be aligned and shared.

Identify which single agency will be the information hub.

A key consideration for the stakeholder group will be which agency will collect and analyze the data for the body. Confidentiality concerns will likely inform which agency acts as the data hub for the group. Since laws restrict data that can be individually identified with a youth, the agency collecting data for the group must either have permission to access the names of each youth or each agency must use a shared, non-identifiable code as a secondary means of identifying each youth.

Address legal limits on sharing confidential information.



Federal, state and local laws create significant limits on individually identifiable information about minors. Many cities, including San Francisco consulted the city attorney's office when designing an information sharing system.

While relevant laws, including Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), are complicated and sometimes overlap, a general rule of thumb is that individually identifiable information, such as names, social security numbers, or dates of birth, should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis.

For policy decisions, aggregate data may be sufficient, but the stakeholder group may also need to link an individual's record from one agency to another in order to make the types of connections that can inform large-scale policy reform.

For example, San Francisco's Shared Youth Database enabled the city to realize that approximately 2,000 families used about half of the city's investments in services and supervision to youth involved in the three stakeholder systems. The city also saw that those families lived primarily within walking distance of seven street corners around the city. This data analysis helped the city decide to focus services at the community centers near those seven corners, making the best use of its existing resources and improving the lives of those families most in need.

Establish common definitions for measures of success.

The stakeholder group should also establish common definitions for measures of success early on in the information sharing process. Each agency in the group must collect the same data relevant to each success measure and define these measures in the same way. For example, while a police department might define recidivism - a frequently-used measure for youth outcomes in the juvenile justice system - as another arrest, the juvenile court might define it as a second adjudication, and the local prosecutor's office may view recidivism as another charge.

Additional Resources

- MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change [Information Sharing Toolkit](#).
- Institute for Youth, Education, and Families' [Juvenile Justice Reform](#) webpage.

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans.

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