Changing Practice in Juvenile Probation: An Administrator's Checklist

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Over the past several decades, we have learned a great deal about what youth supervision strategies improve public safety and youth outcomes, and about how to effectively implement research-informed interventions in practice. Aligning practice with research can improve life outcomes for youth, make communities safer, and help stakeholders use limited probation resources more efficiently. This checklist highlights key questions to consider as you think about where to begin and steps you can take to align practice with research.

Given hundreds of thousands of youth are supervised on juvenile probation each year, shifting toward smarter juvenile probation strategies can have a tremendous impact on justice-involved youth and families across the US. The research suggests you consider the following as you think about where to start and steps to take to align practice with research.

1

Assess organizational readiness and potential barriers to change early on.

- How much will the new intervention or approach change daily practice?
- Are supervisors and staff likely to embrace the approach?
- Do you anticipate any barriers to change? If so, which barriers concern you most and how might you overcome them?

2

Establish systems for continuous quality improvement and promoting sustainability from the beginning.

- What metrics will you track to assess implementation progress and quality?
- Who will be in charge of analyzing and reporting each metric?
- How frequently will you assess benchmarks and make necessary adjustments?
- How will you share insights from your findings with staff? With youth and families? With leadership/funders? With the public?

3

Develop a plan for leading the change effort before it launches.

- How will you develop a vision that leaders at all levels embrace?
- How will you demonstrate commitment to the effort in your actions?
- How will you foster staff buy-in and generate enthusiasm for change?
- How will you promote collaboration and change throughout the broader justice system and community?

4 **Define a clear mission and infuse those principles throughout.**
- How will you incorporate research-informed principles in your mission? These would include the following:
  - strengths-based perspective
  - focus on positive youth development
  - partnership with youth and families
  - attention to procedural fairness
  - individualized and culturally responsive treatment, services, supports, and opportunities
  - community collaboration

5 **Coordinate with external partners throughout the change process.**
- How are you building alliances with youth, families, and judges to support reform?
- What other partners are critical to your change effort?
- How will you engage these people, organizations, or groups?
- How will you promote buy-in for the effort with each entity?

6 **Align and build staff competencies.**
- How will you assess current staff competencies and alignment with new competencies?
- How will you support professional development for current staff?
- How will you recruit and train new hires?
- How will you provide ongoing review and feedback on performance of new tasks?

7 **Align policies and practices.**
- What structural elements must be addressed to support the change effort (e.g., standard conditions of probation or revocation requirements)?
- How will you revise overarching policies and practices to align with your new mission statement? These could include the following:
  - job descriptions
  - job expectations and performance review criteria
  - hiring procedures
  - caseload standards
  - frequency and structure of meetings with youth
  - screening, assessment, and case planning
  - ongoing data collection and analysis
- How will you align policies and procedures related to the change (e.g., assessment, case planning, incentives and sanctions)?

8 **Align data and decision-support systems.**
- What performance metrics will you need to track to understand whether the change is working?
- Will you need to acquire or create new technology systems?
- How will you promote and support data use for continuous quality improvement?