Changing Practice in Juvenile Probation: Preparing for Change

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Overview

The knowledge base on how to improve public safety and outcomes for youth involved with juvenile justice system has expanded substantially. This fact sheet is part of a set of resources to help juvenile probation agencies and officers understand adolescent development, what works to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and how to change practice in juvenile probation agencies. Reflecting the framework on the other side of this sheet, some of the resources focus on what frontline practices need to change and others focus on the administrative activities needed to support a change.

Assessing Organizational Readiness and Laying the Groundwork for Change

Researchers in the field of implementation science have studied how organizational change efforts succeed. They have focused on the key drivers of successful organizational practice: staffing competencies, organizational structures and processes, leadership strategies (see the “administrative activities” box in figure 1), and the cycle of continuous quality improvement (represented by the arrows flowing around figure 1).

It also indicates that the process of successfully changing an organization, agency, or department typically takes two to four years. Two stages help organizations to become ready for the changes they will make – we refer to these stages as exploration and preparation. (See our Integrating and Sustaining for information about implementing or integrating and sustaining the change phases.)

Readying for Change: Exploration

In this stage, the agency or department is doing the following:

- assessing their mission and priorities
- seeking evidence on what kinds of strategies, approaches, and practices could help them better reach their desired outcomes
- investigating the appropriateness of those options for the populations they serve
- considering the feasibility of adopting the new practices

Readying for Change: Preparation

In this stage, the agency or department has determined the type of change it wants to make and is preparing to make that change by identifying administrative activities to support changes in the following areas:

Staff Competencies

- identifying competencies staff will need
- assessing current competencies of staff to determine supports needed
- determining options for professional development and their costs

Organizational Structures and Processes

- examining policies, procedures, and data systems to determine where changes will be needed to align old and new
- estimating the options, timelines, and costs for making those changes
- involving external partners in determining how and where policies and procedures outside the agency will need to be made

Leadership Strategies

- identifying all types of leaders within the agency and involving them
- collaborating with leaders to determine how they will convey the importance of the change and their commitment to it
- strategizing and anticipating potential challenges and identifying work-arounds
- examining options for using communication channels and feedback loops to fully engage staff in the process, monitor change, and track success
- identifying the supports leaders will need to be successful change-managers

Resources to Help You Assess Readiness

- Change Management Readiness Assessment Tools Overview (casey.org)
- Checklist to Assess Organizational Readiness for EIP Implementation (CARI)
- Organizational Readiness for Change Assessment (TCU ORC-SA)
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