

Bridging Research and Practice: Synthesizing the Literature on Implementing Change in Justice Agencies Executive Summary

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Over the past several decades, we have learned a lot about how to improve outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system, as well as how to successfully implement program and practice changes. [Bridging Research and Practice: Synthesizing the Literature on Implementing Change in Justice Agencies](#), an original review of the literature on a wide range of justice interventions. The report uses an implementation science lens to identify successful strategies for promoting organizational change, leading a change effort, and aligning staff competencies with research-informed practices.

THE BRIDGE PROJECT: HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION

Few existing resources provide concrete guidance on how juvenile probation officers can integrate lessons from research on adolescent development and effective interventions in their daily practices. To fill this gap, the Urban Institute has translated this information into actionable recommendations for policy and practice through the [Bridging Research and Practice to Advance Juvenile Justice and Safety](#) project, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 2015.

In the *first phase* of the Bridge Project, Urban's multidisciplinary researchers focused on identifying areas where research is not fully informing policy and practice. The Urban team systematically identified a need for practical guidance on how juvenile justice practitioners can change daily practices to respond to the unique needs and strengths of youth. The *second phase* of the project focused on bridging research and practice in youth probation, and developed tools to help probation officers and agencies align their practices with research on adolescent development, what works to reduce recidivism, and how to improve youth, agency, and community outcomes.

The [juvenile probation strategies report](#)—the first Bridge Project probation product—provides concrete strategies for frontline probation staff to align their work with knowledge about the unique needs and strengths of youth. It also provides successful strategies for promoting positive youth development, using limited supervision resources as efficiently as possible, reducing recidivism, and improving public safety.

The [research synthesis](#) documents, categorizes, and synthesizes existing implementation literature through an implementation science lens to create a bridge for translating the research into actionable strategies. We have also combined findings from the juvenile probation strategies report and the research synthesis report into a [handbook](#) to help juvenile probation administrators transition to or more fully implement a research-informed approach, integrate that approach throughout their systems and culture, and sustain changes for the long term.

RESEARCH SYNTHESIS METHODOLOGY

We chose implementation science as our frame for synthesizing and translating the research because it focuses on improving the quality and consistency of *practice*, and because we wanted to ensure the products developed through the

Bridge Project would achieve its aim of bridging research and practice. Using a standardized protocol and key terms, we searched multiple databases and websites for sources published between 1990 and 2018 and examined those 302 sources for relevancy and credibility. We used a standardized coding protocol with categories that reflect elements and processes highlighted in implementation science to code segments of text using NVivo (a qualitative database software), and ultimately drew on 106 sources to create the synthesis.

OVERVIEW OF THE SYNTHESIS

This synthesis is focused on how agencies and departments responsible for juvenile probation can successfully uptake and integrate new practices into their systems. It uses the implementation science lens to synthesize and translate existing literature to serve as a resource for probation agency management in anticipating implementation needs, suggesting strategies, providing considerations for strategy selection, improving the quality of implementation, and offering suggestions for measuring progress and success. The synthesis contains the following information:

- a summary of our research-informed approach to youth probation practices
- an introduction to how probation agencies can benefit from aligning with these practices, including a conceptual model linking practices and outcomes
- an overview of how we extracted information from existing literature to help probation agencies implement and integrate the youth probation practices into probation agencies
- a summary of the characteristics of the research examined
- findings presented as characteristics and processes, possible strategies, and considerations; findings are organized by organizational culture, leadership, staff competencies, communication, decision-support systems, external stakeholders, policies and procedures, time, continuous quality improvement, and measuring progress
- a discussion and identification of the research gaps

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bridge Project page: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/bridge-project.html>

Urban Institute Bridge Project page: <https://www.urban.org/bridgeproject>.