



A Framework for Implementing Jail-Based Technology Projects

Lessons Learned from the Safety and Justice Challenge Innovation Fund

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Jails are a critical driver of mass incarceration in the United States. After peaking in 2007, jail incarceration rates declined slowly, partly the result of jails and jurisdictions across the country exploring ways to address issues impacting jail populations, including overcrowding, extensive use of pretrial detention, delays in processing court cases, inadequate data infrastructure, barriers to court appearance, and racial and ethnic disparities. Jail populations also dropped sharply because of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ To reduce jail use more generally, jurisdictions are increasingly incorporating technology in multifaceted approaches to reducing jail populations. Though innovative technological advancements can introduce efficiencies to certain jail-based practices, scholars and activists have raised concerns that some technologies, such as electronic monitoring and algorithmic risk-prediction instruments, may introduce or in some instances exacerbate inequities (Leadership Conference on Human and Civil Rights 2018).² Practitioners and policymakers must consider the limitations and unintended consequences of implementing technology-oriented projects, including their potential for perpetuating and reinforcing racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal legal system and harming the communities they are intended to serve.

Many of the projects supported through the Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) Innovation Fund (box 1) have involved technological strategies for addressing jail use. This brief, part of a series highlighting work supported by the Innovation Fund, presents lessons from these varied projects and

lays out a framework for jurisdictions, criminal legal system agencies, and organizations working on jail reform to consider when developing technological strategies to address jail issues. In this brief, we specifically focus on developing technological strategies while advancing equity and preventing further damage from the criminal legal system. This framework draws on lessons learned from 11 SJC Innovation Fund sites that implemented technology-oriented projects to enhance or otherwise change how jails engage with other agencies, people who are or have been incarcerated in jail, and their broader communities; how they process, understand, and deliver data; and how they solve problems and make decisions. To inform our framework, between August and September 2020 we interviewed six criminal legal system stakeholders and social service providers from five sites and reviewed relevant background materials on their technological strategies.

BOX 1

The Safety and Justice Challenge's Innovation Fund

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched the Safety and Justice Challenge in 2015 to address the misuse and overuse of jails, a main driver of incarceration in America. In 2016, the foundation established the Innovation Fund to provide jurisdictions small grants to test ideas for safely reducing the US jail population while maintaining or enhancing public safety. Innovation Fund jurisdictions received small grant awards, technical assistance from the Urban Institute, and access to the Safety and Justice Challenge's peer learning network. The initial Innovation Fund cohort included 20 competitively selected jurisdictions in 2017, and in June 2018, Urban added 12 sites through a second competition, to expand the breadth and variety of initiatives.

Technology and Jail Population Reduction

Jail admissions in the United States fell 16 percent in 2020, mostly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Even so, local jails admitted nearly 8.7 million people that year and on a given day held around 550,000 people.⁴ Most people in jail are being detained pretrial, meaning they have not been convicted (Subramanian et al. 2015).⁵ Moreover, at least 1 in 4 people admitted to jail will be arrested again during the same year.⁶ Being detained in jail has significant disruptive effects on people, families, and communities, as even a brief jail stay can result in lost employment and housing, destabilized familial relationships, and financial burdens related to court fines and fees and other carceral debt (Digard and Swavola 2019).⁷

Moreover, for many people, jail incarceration exacerbates challenges involving behavioral health and mental health; substance use disorders; physical health; low income, financial insecurity, and unemployment; and housing instability, among other areas. It also drives a compounding cycle that in particular criminalizes people of color, people experiencing poverty, people with mental health disorders, and people exhibiting (or perceived to be exhibiting) criminalized behaviors (e.g., loitering, survival sex, stealing) that aid in surviving challenging circumstances, such as homelessness (Hinton and

Cook 2021; Hinton, Henderson, and Reed 2018; Sykes and Pettit 2014). This cycle disproportionately affects people of color, and particularly Black people, who are arrested and incarcerated at higher rates and held in jail longer than white people because of a variety of factors, including overpolicing, biased treatment by system actors and law enforcement, systemic racism, and the practice of money bail, which makes pretrial release from jail harder to obtain for people with low incomes (Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang 2018; Hinton, Henderson, and Reed 2018; Sawyer 2019). It also contributes to some of the very challenges jails are trying to address, such as overcrowding and racial disparities.

Technological tools have long been part of local corrections and criminal legal system operations, and localities looking to reevaluate and adapt policies and practices related to jail use are tending to look to these tools to address strategic goals and priorities, such as reducing jail populations. Technology (box 2) is designed, produced, shaped, and influenced by human behavior and through our interactions with one another (Eaglin 2021). If a technology is founded on flawed systems and assumptions, its impact will also be flawed. A 2019 report of the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights described the emergence of and reliance on technological solutions as the “digital welfare state,” in which “systems of social protection and assistance are increasingly driven by digital data and technologies that are used to automate, predict, identify, surveil, detect, target and punish.”⁸ They caution that the integration of technology sometimes comes at the expense of other social goods; for instance, funding for social services may be reduced or eliminated, punitive sanctions made stronger, and visibility into and the transparency of systems decreased. In the criminal legal system, the widespread use of risk assessment tools and the more recent adoption of pretrial risk assessments across the United States have generated concerns about their potential for increasing racial and ethnic disparities (PAI 2019; Robinson and Koepke 2019).⁹ This is particularly troublesome for pretrial release or detention decisions, in which Black people disproportionately experience more detention, with negative future consequences, compared with white people (Freeman, Hu, and Jannetta 2021).

BOX 2

Defining Technology

In this context, “technology” can refer to many tools and approaches, including apps and software for phones and computers, data infrastructure, and hardware and devices issued to system workers and people incarcerated in jails. Examples of how technology has been adapted for jail settings include information-sharing and case-management software, data integration tools, electronic monitoring, and predictive analytics and risk assessment tools.

Technology Projects of SJC Innovation Fund Sites

The SJC Innovation Fund was created to provide local jurisdictions small, targeted grants for projects and initiatives to reduce jail use and inequities in jail populations. Jurisdictions implemented technology-oriented projects with goals that included increasing efficiency and streamlining processes, reducing failure-to-appear rates, and better understanding jail populations through data.

An important commonality among these technology projects was cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration. Through our work with the Innovation Fund sites, we identified four types of technology partnerships (described in table 1) that jurisdictions formed to change their use of jails and promote more efficient case processing and data collection. The most common of these were partnerships with technology vendors to provide software services targeting outcomes such as reducing rates of failure to appear in court, mitigating barriers to pretrial appearance, and making reentry case management and connection to community-based services more effective. In other partnerships, local agencies collaborated with and received technical support from an external partner (like a local university or technology start-up) to build a data dashboard for tracking trends in a jail population to inform policymakers' decisions around criminal legal system reform. For many sites, the idea to form a technology partnership arose from an already identified need or service gap among people at elevated risk of being held in jail. Some jurisdictions needed to improve data collection and capacity (for instance, by creating infrastructure to link data across agencies) and others needed ways to address certain populations impacted by incarceration.

The jurisdictions reported that technology partnerships increased agencies' capacity, built trust and collaboration between partners, and advanced technological capabilities for local justice agencies. Importantly, these partnerships promoted development and growth in previously underdeveloped, underused, and/or understaffed areas. For example, in Gwinnett County, Georgia, Pokket—a case management app for coordinating reentry, facilitating service provision, and tracking progress—expedited intake for new reentry clients, enabling the sheriff's office to serve more clients. But the county struggled to get community service providers to buy in to and use Pokket. The county built a collaborative relationship with Acivilate (the company that created Pokket), which regularly met with jail staff and incorporated feedback from the county to improve Pokket's user experience and adapt the interface to improve case management and individual tracking. For example, county stakeholders suggested adding a section where jail staff could record case notes, an improvement that Acivilate made.

Moreover, in Wisconsin, Dane County's new data tool (a case management infrastructure) helped fulfill one of the county's core objectives: to advance racial equity locally. County stakeholders found that the newly connected data across agencies helped them facilitate conversations between criminal legal system stakeholders about racial equity and increase transparency with community members. With the new data tool, stakeholders and community members alike could clearly identify where racial disparities were occurring in the pretrial system and make recommendations for policy changes based on the data. The county also found that working with an external partner was highly valuable for understanding its data and building its data tool.

Sites have also developed data tracking and visualization tools. For example, the City of St. Louis developed a data dashboard that gave the city (and St. Louis County) more capability and flexibility in pulling corrections information. Previously, the data were stored with a vendor whose ability to create reports was limited. Now, the city is more capable of generating reports to inform policy decisions and reduce the jail population. Developing the dashboard also enabled the city to be more transparent with the public about the jail population.

TABLE 1

Types of Technology Partnerships in SJC Innovation Fund Projects

Technology partnership type	Description	SJC Innovation Fund example projects
Partnership with technology vendors	A vendor either provides or adapts a technology product to a local jurisdiction. This type often occurs when a jurisdiction identifies a specific challenge that could be addressed with a certain product.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ City of Atlanta, Georgia. The Public Defender’s Office collaborated with Justice Works to implement a system called defenderData to track progress of municipal court clients (including those linked to social services pretrial and postconviction) so public defenders can advocate for alternatives to jail. ■ Gwinnett County, Georgia. The sheriff’s office partnered with Acivilate to implement case management app Pokket for key stakeholders and people returning from jail to coordinate reentry, facilitate service provision, and track progress on personal goals, as part of the Gwinnett Re-entry Intervention Program. ■ Hennepin County, Minnesota. The Public Defender’s Office collaborated with Hitch Health, adapting its software to the county’s system to coordinate free rides to court and court-related appointments for people who lack reliable access to transportation. ■ Tulsa County, Oklahoma. The Public Defender’s Office partnered with UpTrust to implement a two-way text messaging app that reminds clients of upcoming court dates and reduces barriers to court appearance by connecting clients to a social worker who helps them access services.
Partnership to build internal capacity with technical services	Support from external organizations supplements local jurisdictions’ technical capacity for data and analytical work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. The county’s Department of Human services and the county jail collaborated with Deloitte to integrate data across agencies and develop a series of data dashboards in the CountyStat program. ■ City and County of San Francisco, California. The City and County of San Francisco undertook a data integration and dashboarding project^a to better understand recidivism outcomes for adults involved in the legal system, guide policy modifications, and monitor system performance, in partnership with scholars at the University of California, Berkeley, Goldman School of Public Policy. ■ Dane County, Wisconsin. The Criminal Justice Council partnered with OpenLattice to connect incident and case records from the sheriff’s office’s, district attorney’s, court system’s, and law enforcement system’s record management systems to understand trends in pretrial arrest and detention and identify racial disparities in pretrial decisionmaking.

Technology partnership type	Description	SJC Innovation Fund example projects
Partnership involving cross-agency collaboration	Internal partnerships across government agencies in a single jurisdiction are formed to accomplish a shared goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Baltimore, Maryland. The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services collaborated with key stakeholders to develop a data dashboard and information-sharing process to monitor the pretrial population in the Baltimore Pretrial Complex, identify candidates for pretrial release, and expedite case processing. ■ Durham County, North Carolina. The Criminal Justice Resource Center collaborated with county information services to establish an automated notification system to prevent failure-to-appear warrants and arrests by sending text or phone notices of scheduled court dates to people facing criminal charges.^b
Partnership for building data infrastructure	This type is a partnership with external organizations that would lead the development of a new capacity, such as a new data infrastructure, that could be maintained locally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adams County, Colorado. Adams County continued a partnership with the National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, and more specifically with the consortium's Open Justice Broker Consortium, to establish a secure data-linking system to connect data from the Thornton Police Department and the community mental health system to better understand how many critical incident response calls involved mental health crises and how these related to service intake and diversion from arrest. ■ City of St. Louis, Missouri. The City of St. Louis partnered with Stanford University's Computational Policy Lab to build two data dashboards for internal city use: (1) a jail capacity dashboard that enables the City of St. Louis Division of Corrections to quickly understand the distribution of people in the city's two jail facilities and informs policy decisions around the jail population, and (2) a trends dashboard that enables St. Louis stakeholders to understand the characteristics of the city's current and past jail population contexts.

Notes: SJC = Safety and Justice Challenge.

^a More detail on the data integration projects in Allegheny County and San Francisco can be found in an Innovation Fund case study specific to that work: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/using-data-dashboards-drive-criminal-justice-decisions>.

^b More detail on Durham County's Innovation Fund project is available through a previous Innovation Fund case study: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/supporting-individual-agency-pretrial-release-process>.

Lessons Learned

In this section, we present some of the lessons Innovation Fund sites learned about implementing new technology, including the importance of strong and consistent engagement with stakeholders and community actors and of mechanisms and procedures that can make the process easier.

Build and nourish partnerships with key stakeholders. One lesson many sites learned through the SJC was the value of having agencies and organizations that had previously worked in siloes collaborate and partner. Local jurisdictions had varying technical capacity and to fully support their projects often had to bring in external agencies. Building these partnerships helped jurisdictions problem solve some of their technology challenges and more generally helped them strengthen supports for system-impacted people. Being proactive about partnerships and ensuring each partner is on the same page is crucial.

Developing a clear and shared understanding of the goals of technology projects and the problems they address supports success. Adams County, Colorado, and Dane County noted that knowing the goals of their projects at the outset and clearly understanding the problems they aimed to address and the direction of their work were imperative to their success. These factors kept partners confident in the projects while they worked on protections and parameters for inherently sensitive data related to mental health. This made it easier to collaborate across agencies, work with new and existing partners, and generally get things up and running. In particular, the sites noted that seeking out collaborators who are interested in understanding “the why” is important for success and effective collaboration. For example, Dane County already understood its problem and had a solution in mind—it just needed a way to process information and present the data, making it simple for the collaboration to bloom and hit the ground running.

Engaging partners to enhance agencies’ capacity is often necessary to successfully execute data collection and integration projects. For instance, the Dane County Criminal Justice Council partnered with [OpenLattice](#) because, despite its own robust capacity for data analysis, it required support to build the data infrastructure necessary to efficiently and accurately connect records from the record management systems of the sheriff’s office, district attorney, court system, and law enforcement system to better understand trends in pretrial arrest and detention and identify racial disparities in pretrial decisionmaking. In its project developing a series of data dashboards to monitor key decision points in its criminal legal system, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, used a preexisting contract with Deloitte, which carried out the technical work of integrating the data. The City and County of San Francisco also undertook a data integration and dashboarding project,¹⁰ in its case to better understand recidivism outcomes for adults involved in the legal system, guide policy modifications, and monitor system performance. While a working group of the San Francisco Sentencing Commission scoped the project and guided the work, San Francisco used Innovation Fund grant support to hire a fellow to coordinate the dashboard project and develop the prototype dashboard.

Crafting roles for external partners with respected expertise can increase confidence in sharing sensitive data. Concerns about protecting the safety and security of sensitive person-level data can make sharing data across systems and agencies a challenge. In its Innovation Fund project, Adams County continued a partnership with the [National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics](#), and more specifically with the [Open Justice Broker Consortium](#), which the consortium incubated and provides staff support to. The county established a secure data-linking system to connect data from the largest municipal police department in the county (the Thornton Police Department) and the community mental health system to better understand how many critical incident response calls involved mental health crises and how these related to service intake and diversion from arrest. The Open Justice Broker Consortium was responsible for the technical day-to-day work of building the system to integrate the data, and it also took the lead in maintaining the project's information security, critically important given the sensitive and protected nature of the underlying data. Its expertise in this area was important in securing and maintaining partners' confidence that the data integration and rules for data access would support the project's goal: to provide a better system-level understanding of how law enforcement engages with people experiencing mental illness while ensuring legally protected data on mental health conditions remain protected.

In efforts involving the integration of data from multiple sources, stakeholders should be prepared to navigate limitations to data access and quality. In Oklahoma, the Tulsa County Public Defender's Office partnered with [UpTrust](#) to implement a two-way text messaging app that reminds clients of upcoming court dates and reduces barriers to court appearance by connecting clients to a social worker who helps them access services and assistance with basic needs (such as transportation). The county faced several challenges in accessing high-quality data, as its main data source was missing court dates, had inaccurate dates, and did not transport data seamlessly between platforms. Also, client contact information changed often, which required manual updates. Similarly, in Minnesota, the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office collaborated with [Hitch Health](#), adapting its software to the county's justice system to coordinate free rides to court and court-related appointments for defendants who lack reliable access to transportation. County stakeholders intended to import district court data into the Hitch Health portal to coordinate rides, but the district court was unable to share defendants' names and phone numbers, meaning the public defender's office needed to manually enter the information, defeating the purpose of using the automated platform.¹¹

Proactively communicating and building relationships with partners maintains support and momentum. Reflecting on partnering with Stanford University's [Computational Policy Lab](#) to build two data jail dashboards, St. Louis stakeholders noted that being proactive about partnerships and ensuring each partner is on the same page is crucial because, as one stakeholder said, "Agencies are busy so these projects, these pilots, can be put on the back burner." As such, it is imperative to stay up to date on the status of a project and to be patient. St. Louis stakeholders also noted that personal relationships across agencies are key.

Staff turnover can impede implementation progress. Several sites experienced staffing challenges and staff turnover, which delayed implementation or otherwise slowed operations. Adams County, the

City of St. Louis, and the partnership in Baltimore all lost at least one key player in their projects' creation and/or implementation. Because Innovation Fund technology projects involve many technical details, people stepping into key roles experienced significant learning curves. For instance, when someone in the St. Louis mayor's office who was integral to the project there left, finding a replacement who was knowledgeable and had equivalent "data literacy," as one stakeholder put it, was difficult. Even in sites where someone filling a role was as qualified as the person departing, the turnover was disruptive and delayed the projects to some extent. Furthermore, in Gwinnett County, five people left the Department of Community Supervision in one week, leaving only two full-time staff where there should have been seven. This halted progress with Acivilate because there were no safeguards or supports to help people with reentry services, the purpose of the Pokket app.

A Framework for Technology Projects to Change Jail Use

The Innovation Fund sites' technology projects provided valuable insights regarding how the goals of such projects can be reached. In this section, after discussing equity considerations (box 3), we build on those insights by providing a framework for equivalent efforts, drawing from critiques of technology in the criminal legal system made by those participating in the nationwide movement for greater racial equity in the system. As local jails and jurisdictions increasingly turn to technology-oriented solutions to some of their biggest challenges, it is imperative they take steps to mitigate risks associated with adopting new or enhanced technology. Although there are qualitative differences between the types of technology projects described above, they all demonstrate the need for jurisdictions to think critically about the roles they have played in the mass incarceration crisis and strategies for minimizing harm, including the possibilities of technology.

BOX 3

Equity Considerations for Setting Technology Project Goals

Jurisdictions implementing technology to change jail use should incorporate equity considerations at the outset or in the planning stages of their projects by asking questions such as the following:

- Would the technology directly or indirectly increase surveillance of people and communities?
- Does it increase the number of people being controlled by the criminal legal system (i.e., does it net-widen)?
- Does it reduce burdens on people most impacted by the criminal legal system?
 - » Have we consulted them when determining the level of burden?
- Does it extract resources from people most impacted?
- Does it create harmful labeling effects?
- Does it help with understanding and measuring equity impacts?

Our framework has four elements jurisdictions can consider when implementing technology projects related to jail use. We derived the elements from a review of scholarly and practice materials, as well as lessons learned from SJC Innovation Fund sites, to define what it means to use technology responsibly in criminal legal system reform; these efforts have often focused on specific areas like the use of artificial intelligence for risk prediction but have nonetheless provided generalizable principles. The framework is not exhaustive, but we believe it is a starting point for minimizing the use of jails and ensuring jurisdictions' approaches to doing so are aligned with goals for reducing their jail populations and racial and ethnic disparities and do not cause further harm. Each framework element includes a series of action-oriented recommendations. These elements are

- community engagement and oversight,¹²
- transparency,¹³
- grounding technology interventions in the goals of reducing correctional control, reducing surveillance, and reducing inequity,¹⁴ and
- the accountability mechanisms and capacity needed for monitoring progress toward those goals and course correcting as needed.¹⁵

Below, for each element, we provide a general overview of that element before discussing more specific activities that those involved in technology projects to change jail use can engage in.

Community Engagement and Oversight

Community engaged methods should be used because they intentionally and explicitly involve including impacted communities as contributors, participants, and reviewers in projects, interventions, and strategies that directly or indirectly affect them. This means empowering communities and giving them the autonomy to collaborate on and codesign strategies for meeting community needs and addressing challenges. Because technology implementation is subject to risk of built-in bias and discrimination, it is imperative that communities be engaged in technology partnerships. Proactively including historically marginalized or excluded groups when designing such partnerships makes inclusive and equitable outcomes more likely (Greene et al. 2019). Those designing technology interventions should complement community engagement with community oversight mechanisms for monitoring performance and outcomes (including unintended and unanticipated ones) once the technology is in place. To effectively engage communities, jurisdictions should do the following.

Engage community members and affected populations as stakeholders. Jurisdictions should make a special effort to engage community members and people with relevant lived experience in their projects (e.g., people who have been involved in or otherwise impacted by the criminal legal system). This means directly asking community members for and encouraging them to provide input about the biggest challenges impacting their communities and explicitly asking what their needs are. This also means communicating how the information community members provide will be used to inform decisions. People should have a variety of easily accessible and approachable methods for providing

feedback, such as community surveys and polls, town halls, open council meetings, and steering committees. Without such input, jurisdictions may implement strategies that address communities' needs less effectively, as the case of Hennepin County's CourtWatch demonstrates.¹⁶

Center decisionmaking power in the community. Empowering communities does not just mean asking for community members' input. It means actively transferring power to them and helping them address the priority areas they identify. Empowerment involves creating leadership roles for or passing them off to community members, particularly to Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color, who experience the brunt of the burden of the criminal legal system because of the myth of race-neutral or "colorblind" policies and practices, racial bias, disadvantageous practices for already low-income people, and policies that exacerbate inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Ghandnoosh 2015).¹⁷ This means uplifting community members (who are often closest to the problems at hand) as experts of their own lived experiences. As part of its technology project, Dane County conducted a series of community engagement activities that informed the design and use of the data model it built to connect incident and case records. The county closely collaborated with county committees including the Criminal Justice Council Racial Disparities Subcommittee, the Community Restorative Court Advisory Council, Dane County Reentry Collaborative, Dane County Restorative Justice Collaborative, Focused Interruption Coalition, and its National League of Cities team. The majority of these committees are led by local government staff with direct input from community members.

Incorporate community engagement and oversight into existing collaborative structures. Many of the Innovation Fund technology projects were initiated and overseen by collaborative entities such as criminal justice coordinating councils. Including community members in those entities can situate community oversight in existing structures and supports the assessment of technology interventions within the overall contexts of local reform strategies rather than in isolation.

Transparency

Transparency around technology interventions is fundamental to the community engagement and oversight discussed above and to the accountability discussed below. But any number of barriers impede transparency when jurisdictions are choosing, implementing, and monitoring technology interventions. For instance, jurisdictions may consider some aspects of these interventions proprietary and may therefore restrict who can access information on how they operate. In addition, technology interventions often involve the integration of sensitive data. Collaborative efforts may involve system partners who are developing new partnerships and need or want to build trust before exposing their work to public scrutiny. All of these are legitimate challenges, but transparency must be established for community members to be adequately engaged and for support for any technology intervention to be built and maintained. This is particularly so for communities that have been harmed most by criminal legal system practices and responses.

Communicate information necessary to understand and evaluate technology interventions in nontechnical terms. Investing time in developing and communicating explanations of how technologies work in terms that do not require technical expertise to understand is critical to community oversight.

This may not be possible for all details, but a general understanding of points such as how information will be protected when data are integrated or how risk scores are derived should be provided.

When using tools such as risk assessment instruments or other algorithmic decisionmaking technology, make information available for outside parties to assess the validity of the approach. As mentioned in earlier sections, risk assessment and algorithmic decisionmaking technology is one of the more well-known and highly criticized technologies used in the criminal legal system. System stakeholders should make an effort to provide accessible information about what data sources the risk assessment instrument is based on, what known limitations exist, how decisions are made (i.e., decision point thresholds), and whether, when, how, and how often individual discretion is used in addition to risk assessment decisions. Stakeholders must regularly evaluate risk assessment instruments to determine their impact and address areas for improvement.

Invest in education on the new or enhanced technology. Educating stakeholders on the “how” should be part of any new policy or practice. Many projects involving new technologies will have a learning curve for the people who have to use them, and resources should be devoted to a robust and rigorous training system to meet this challenge. Such training would be distinct from but complementary to public education to support oversight, such as the workshop St. Louis planned to demonstrate its jail data dashboards (though the workshop was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

Develop a dissemination plan. Jurisdictions can develop plans for sharing their work with communities. A widespread and versatile dissemination plan helps increase visibility and transparency while helping community members hold agencies accountable for the work they are doing. This also requires sites to have robust documentation strategies to keep track of their work, successes, milestones, and challenges.

Aligning Goals

Successful partnerships require thoughtful communication about projects’ goals and priorities, an understanding of each partner’s role, and continuity of information sharing. One recurring theme across Innovation Fund sites was the importance of collaboration in driving the implementation of technology.

Ensure collaborators have aligned goals and priorities. Knowing the goals for a project at the outset and clearly understanding and being able to articulate the problems it is intended to address are imperative for all collaborators and agencies involved. Having this shared understanding makes it easier to collaborate across agencies and systems, develop new partnerships, and launch projects. Stakeholders should not underestimate the value in providing a thorough briefing to key staff and partners before implementing a project, something that can be done in the planning stage. In Adams County, stakeholders said this grounding was key to their success.

Terminate partnerships that don’t serve the overall missions and goals. Jurisdictions should consider which partnerships are serving their needs and goals to reduce their jail populations.

Stakeholders should formally assess and reevaluate partnerships regularly to ensure staff and partners align with project goals and needs. Some sites initially found their new tools were successful but after reevaluating found they no longer needed them. This opened the door for conversations about their needs and new directions. For example, Gwinnett County discontinued the use of its Pokket app after two years. Even so, stakeholders were proud of the project and of having created a foundation to support reentry in Gwinnett County.

Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability is defined as a system of internal and external checks and balances aimed at ensuring a public institution's actors carry out their duties properly. It requires high standards of integrity and a responsibility to uphold that integrity.¹⁸ Accountability mechanisms are essential to ensuring technology projects are implemented with fidelity and that they help mitigate risk of potential harmful effects by providing a clear avenue for addressing issues. Accountability in the context of the criminal legal system extends beyond implementing technology and must be linked to specific racial equity goals. Furthermore, accountability cannot happen in isolation from the very groups system stakeholders must be held accountable to,¹⁹ which is why it is imperative that system stakeholders engage community members, embrace transparency, and align with racial equity goals. McCampbell (2021) describes seven issues that jails aiming to create or enhance transparency and accountability should consider (these issues can be taken up not just by jails but by jurisdictions more broadly): (1) solicit leadership commitment; (2) demonstrate objective performance measures; (3) align performance measures with the jail's mission, vision, and values; (4) improve the agency's internal culture; (5) perform a self-critical analysis; (6) hold employees responsible for achieving performance measures and implementing corrective actions; and (7) develop a strategic plan/allocate resources.

Input processes for holding people and agencies accountable. In this context, system accountability is the active process of holding people and agencies responsible for upholding values of racial equity. Jurisdictions must develop processes for holding people and agencies accountable for harms they cause and must stick to them when those moments arise. Independent oversight boards where community members can provide input for how to handle cases and complaints are one such mechanism.²⁰ Unfortunately, many jurisdictions still do not have such mechanisms in place, further contributing to distrust.

Regularly and routinely assess the performance of the technology project. It is important for jurisdictions to assess whether and how their projects are working to accomplish their goals, particularly those related to racial equity. Adaptability is also a major component of performance assessment. If its project is not producing the desired outcomes, a jurisdiction should be ready to adapt to a new system and ideas rooted in and advised by the communities impacted.

Assess the existing infrastructure to see what supports are already in place and what gaps exist. Monitoring for technology accountability requires the ability to get timely and accurate data on which to base assessment of how a technology is performing. Capacity gaps that will impede this should be identified in the design phase and remedied during the implementation phase.

Evaluate the technology for its impact on the community and discrimination. Jurisdictions should have ways to solicit feedback from community members to assess how their projects are or are not working. For projects intended to directly reduce jail populations, jurisdictions should have ways to assess that impact and whether reductions are equitable. Research demonstrates that reforms often benefit white people more than Black people and people of color. Jurisdictions implementing technology projects to change jail use should be sensitive to this and evaluate their processes regularly and often.

Devise a sustainability plan. Stakeholders should consider the short-term impacts of their technology projects and what happens when funding or grant periods conclude. Jurisdictions must be ready to absorb the costs of such technology projects and their critical personnel and must understand the potential impact of discontinuing a project after its implementation. If a project provides a great benefit to the community and its discontinuation could derail progress, the jurisdiction's leaders need to be aware of that and able to input the proper supports and social services to counterbalance it.

Conclusion

As local jails and jurisdictions increasingly turn to technology to address some of their biggest challenges, they must consider factors that impact the lifecycles of technology projects and their lasting impacts. Jurisdictions looking to implement new or enhanced technology should proactively determine how to engage community members directly impacted by jail incarceration, develop key partnerships with well-aligned goals, adopt accountability and transparency mechanisms, and assess the adequacy of their infrastructure. Although the framework in this brief is not exhaustive, we believe it can be used to minimize the use of jails and the punitive tradition of the United States legal system and to further develop community-based approaches to public safety.

Notes

- ¹ "Incarceration Trends," Vera Institute of Justice, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://trends.vera.org/>.
- ² Michelle Alexander, "The Newest Jim Crow," *New York Times*, November 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/08/opinion/sunday/criminal-justice-reforms-race-technology.html>.
- ³ Todd D. Minton and Zhen Zeng, "Jail Inmates in 2020 – Statistical Tables," Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2021, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/jail-inmates-2020-statistical-tables>.
- ⁴ Minton and Zheng, "Jail Inmates in 2020 – Statistical Tables."
- ⁵ Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020," Prison Policy Initiative, press release, March 24, 2020, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html>.
- ⁶ Alexi Jones and Wendy Sawyer, "Arrest, Release, Repeat: How Police and Jails Are Misused to Respond to Social Problems," Prison Policy Initiative, August 2019, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/repeatarrests.html>.
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- ¹¹ More detail on the Tulsa County and Hennepin County projects can be found in a 2021 Urban Institute case study specific to that work, available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/removing-barriers-pretrial-appearance>.
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