

# Improving Strategic Planning through Collaborative Bodies

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Justice reinvestment is a systemwide process of data analysis and collaborative decisionmaking used to identify drivers of criminal justice costs and reinvest resources to yield a more cost-beneficial impact on public safety. It is not a single decision, project, or strategy, but rather a multistaged, ongoing process involving the collaboration of local stakeholders across city, county, and state systems. It is therefore critical that, at the onset of engaging in this process, sites establish a strategic planning entity whose primary mission is to direct efforts and ensure that goals are met. Beyond directing efforts and tracking goals, this type of collaborative body can also ensure that the right decisionmakers are involved in reinvestment efforts and that no critical stakeholders are excluded.

This brief will first discuss the importance of strategic planning entities within criminal justice systems and explain why a jurisdiction may want to pursue the formation of a strategic planning body. The discussion should help localities examine the collaborative efforts among its agencies and determine if the formation of an organized planning body is appropriate. The brief will then outline how these bodies are structured and operated, giving guidance for those who wish to form such a collaboration. Finally, a case study from one local justice reinvestment site, Allegheny County, is presented to highlight how a successful collaborative body can conduct a case review to identify systemic issues and develop solutions.

## Reasons to Assemble a Strategic Planning Entity

Over the past decade, jail populations have increased dramatically. The costs associated with this population are not confined to

housing additional people. Treatment and provision of services for such issues as mental health and substance abuse are less efficient when providers are forced to grapple with less space, more clients, and fewer resources. Localities experiencing these difficulties are primed to establish strategic planning entities involving stakeholders and decisionmakers across the criminal justice system.

Indeed, decisions within the criminal justice system are made by agencies at different levels and at different times. These agencies all have a shared goal of public safety, but their responsibilities, actions, and missions do not necessarily align. Law enforcement agencies are responsible for removing criminal offenders from the streets. Courts and the judiciary seek to ensure that people charged with crimes are processed in accordance with the law and that people convicted of crimes receive appropriate sanctions. Jails house those sentenced to short terms of confinement, those awaiting bail determination hearings, and those ineligible for pretrial release or unable to meet their conditions of bail. Jails also may offer prerelease programming for those reentering the community.

Moreover, each agency within the criminal justice system may be operating with data that could be valuable to others but due to technological and administrative issues, the existence of such information may not be known or it may be difficult to share. Convening a body that consists of all relevant members of the criminal justice system can provide a beneficial mechanism that allows these actors to innovate and strategically operate in a unified approach toward the shared goal of public safety, despite their disparate activities and responsibilities. All agencies responsible for various criminal justice functions, as well as those representing the multiple levels of government, would likely benefit from collaboration through open dialogue and information sharing, but the outlets to do so often do not exist.

## The Foundations of Strategic Planning Entities

The presence of a strategic planning entity is essential to justice reinvestment, but jurisdictions need not establish a new one to serve this purpose. Many localities already have such a collaborative body responsible for some measure of oversight of their criminal justice systems. These bodies can vary in origin; some counties have statutorily required councils and others have boards created to address specific issues.

These coordinating entities can also serve a variety of functions. Directing strategies to reduce jail populations, developing system-wide strategic plans, and overseeing efforts to streamline interactions between system actors, such as the court and the jail, are just some of the responsibilities with which criminal justice collaborative bodies may be tasked. Collaborative bodies can also help jurisdictions avoid duplication of efforts and are often well positioned to take on the responsibilities associated with justice reinvestment. Indeed, by utilizing existing collaborations, jurisdictions benefit from familiarity with partner agencies' staff, procedures, hierarchies, and structures, streamlining justice reinvestment processes and decision-making.

Existing collaborative groups can vary in name, purpose, and makeup: public safety coordinating committees or councils, criminal justice advisory boards, and justice councils are just a few titles for collaborative groups whose members can include prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, corrections officers, court administrators, and sheriffs. These bodies are often created in accordance with state mandates or to oversee tasks in a specific area of the criminal justice system, and may serve as the basis for a justice reinvestment strategic planning body. When contemplating whether to use an existing entity for justice reinvestment planning, decisionmakers should note the existence of statutory requirements or exclusions

for membership as well as the size and current composition of the extant entity, thus ensuring the group is representative, has participation from high-level decisionmakers, and is not so large as to be unwieldy.

## The Purpose of Strategic Planning Entities

The primary purpose of a strategic planning entity is to designate authority and responsibility to make data-driven decisions for the criminal justice system in its jurisdiction. Within this purpose, the entity oversees more specific efforts. Upon the entity's formation, participants should locate and access data to identify cost and population drivers. Depending on the existing data systems, this effort can be complex.<sup>1</sup>

After cost drivers have been identified, the strategic planning entity should develop programs that address these drivers. Building permanent supportive housing, increasing treatment beds in the jail, and developing assessment tools for systemwide use are actions jurisdictions might consider in diverting people from jail and ensuring beds are dedicated to those who pose the greatest risk to public safety. The entity should then track the implementation of these strategies and the savings they generate.

The last step in the process is to reinvest the generated savings in strategies or activities that will continue to address the local criminal justice system's population and cost drivers. In some cases reinvested funds can be allocated to support programs or strategies that were designed to generate savings, creating a self-sustaining initiative.<sup>2</sup>

## Staffing a Strategic Planning Entity

Whether starting from scratch or building onto an existing planning entity, decisionmakers should recruit participants from across an array

*“Assembling such a group will not only facilitate cross-agency collaboration, but will also increase awareness of issues across agencies, expose deficiencies in data collection, generate innovative approaches to problems, and boost system-wide support for policy proposals.”* (Hall 1987)

of agencies, including those working within the criminal justice system (such as judges) and those from agencies affiliated with the criminal justice system (such as community service providers). Each participant should be highly knowledgeable of his or her agency, have the authority to make decisions within the strategic planning entity, and have the ability to implement decisions. Judges, representatives from law enforcement, prosecutors, defense attorneys, jail administrators, local government agencies, and community members/activists should be represented to ensure that appropriate players are positioned to collaboratively develop and implement justice reinvestment strategies. Responsibilities should be clearly defined, articulated, and agreed upon from the outset. The Getting Started worksheet in this brief, “Assessing Existing Efforts and Needs,” is designed to help answer some of the key questions pertaining to the existence, nature, and membership of a collaborative body in a jurisdiction.

## Organizational Structure

While the strategic planning entity can be structured in a number of ways, it is often useful to organize participants based on roles within a hierarchical decisionmaking structure (see figure 1). In this model, the top tier represents high-level executive decisionmakers who have the authority and influence to change policies and practices. The second tier consists of the staff charged with implementing those changes.

An overarching executive committee should include only one or two high-level individuals

per participating agency and should meet at least monthly, preferably biweekly, to ensure that tasks remain fresh in mind and progress can be easily tracked. Regular meetings among these top-tier executives may also strengthen relationships and engender mutual understanding regarding the operations and limitations of involved agencies.

Working groups underneath the executive committee include many participants who represent areas and interests that pertain to the group's tasks. This larger committee can be subdivided into tasks related to specific components of justice reinvestment, such as finance, data collection, and administration, with each group composed of members with expertise related to that task. For example, the development of an improved data collection and storage system would be staffed with IT managers, corrections officers, police officers, and court administrators rather than members of the executive committee. The

line staff's in-depth knowledge of these more task-specific issues is advantageous in guiding the implementation of these micro-level decisions.

In initial meetings, the strategic planning entity should address the following questions:

- Are there specific stakeholders who should be included in the group but are not yet members?
- What are the mission and goals of this group?
- Do participants have a shared goal of examining and revising existing policies, practices, staffing priorities, and resource allocations in the interests of more cost-efficient public safety outcomes?
- What are the public safety principles that the jurisdiction aims to follow?
- Are resources being expended in accordance with those public safety principles?

**Figure 1. Suggested Planning Entity Organizational Structure**



- Are current policies and practices pertaining to criminal justice systems' operations and costs well documented?
- What criminal justice data are currently available? What data are needed to make informed decisions and track progress?
- What internal performance indicators should be tracked?
- What external factors should the group consider monitoring?
- How often should the executive and working groups meet? How long should each meeting last? What is the period of time for which the group should continue meeting?

The individuals involved and their associated activities will help answer the above questions.

Further, planning entity participants maintain roles and responsibilities relevant to the overall effort of justice reinvestment. As previously discussed, some of the new tasks may be closely aligned with previous responsibilities while others may be entirely new. Examples of some potential JRLI activities, by role, can be seen in figure 2.

## Case Study: Allegheny County's Case Review Process

The Case Review Board in Allegheny County exemplifies a strategic planning entity working to effect change. This well-established strategic planning entity evolved from the county's existing Criminal Justice Advisory Board and involves agencies from across the local criminal justice system. Members thoroughly discuss issues and challenges before implementing new policies to address them. Under their strategic planning entity, members formed a case review board and tasked this new body with identifying systemic issues in their criminal justice system based on criminal court case reviews. Previously, case reviews had been implemented primarily to review child fatalities and near fatalities as well as child welfare practices. Allegheny County adapted those existing processes to examine the adult criminal justice system as a whole.

To ensure all relevant interests from the criminal justice system and community stakeholders were included, Allegheny County formed a standing review team of established criminal justice and community members who

**Figure 2. Potential Justice Reinvestment Activities of Planning Entity Participants**

### Judges

- Sentence individuals in a way that efficiently uses jail resources
- Improve oversight of the use of alternatives to incarceration
- Establish responsible and cost-effective bail policies

### Prosecutors

- Make recommendations for sentencing
- Facilitate the use of alternatives to jail
- Expedite cases through the criminal justice system

### Local Government Agencies

- Contribute expertise to policy formation
- Collaborate to avoid unnecessary delays of cases, especially those of individuals detained in the jail
- Provide access to and eligibility screening of public services to individuals in and exiting the jail

### Jail Administrators

- Manage the jail's resources
- Maintain data
- Understand clientele of the jail
- Provide programming and prerelease planning

### Law Enforcement

- Prevent crime
- Decrease the number of arrests
- Divert arrestees

### Social Service Providers/Community Members

- Build strong connections with community
- Represent community concerns
- Educate the public about resource allocation decisions

attend each case review meeting. Table 1 shows the participants involved in a typical case review in Allegheny County.

Case reviews also required participation and input from individuals involved in each particular case:

- arresting officers,
- assigned assistant district attorneys/public defenders,
- assigned probation officers,
- assigned magistrates/judges, and
- active service providers (e.g., jail case managers, reentry teams, and mental health service providers).

Participation from all standing review team members and individuals invited on a case-by-case basis proved beneficial in several ways. By bringing everyone into the same room, communication was drastically streamlined so that facts and ideas could be shared and responded to instantaneously. This improvement in communication, combined with the presence of all relevant stakeholders, permitted on-the-spot decisions regarding systematic changes and

implementation of improvements. For example, during one case review, the county's recently improved forensic techniques, which reduced evidence processing time, were noted. The clerks in charge of calendaring events had not been aware of the improvement and were continuing to set defendants' court dates based on the old, slower processing times. This revelation prompted an immediate decision to decrease the time typically scheduled for trial preparation. The hope is that this policy change will ultimately reduce the size of the jail population by shortening lengths of stay for pretrial detainees.

In addition to this prompt decisionmaking, the atmosphere generated through the presence of highly committed stakeholders engendered accountability and ensured all participants arrived to reviews fully prepared and armed with accurate information. The reviews have also been highly beneficial to individual stakeholders, as each can interact with other agencies with whom they might not normally communicate. Potential, perceived, or experienced problems can be navigated collaboratively through the discussion of prospective changes, experienced difficulties, and unintended consequences.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1. Potential Case Review Committee Participants**

Chief judge
Administrative judge
Magistrate
Court administrator
Criminal court administrator
Family court administrator
Pretrial services director
Adult probation director
County manager
Police chief
District attorney
Public defender
County jail warden
Providers of relevant community-based services
Line staff from relevant agencies associated with individual case

## Conclusion

Planning for justice reinvestment requires the existence or establishment of a criminal justice planning entity; membership should be representative of all criminal justice stakeholders. Careful design of the structure and function of the strategic planning entity will help ensure that the precursors to justice reinvestment are in place—appropriate actors are engaged, the full array of criminal justice interests in the jurisdiction are represented, accountability measures exist for achieving outcomes, and progress toward goals is regularly assessed. A strategically orchestrated planning entity can aid in the coordination of decisions, assist in the development and accomplishment of goals, and ensure that the vision for a more efficiently managed criminal justice system is sustained.

## Additional Resources

Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level Brief Series: Tracking Costs and Savings through Justice Reinvestment. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=412541>.

Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level Brief Series: Data-Driven Decisionmaking for Strategic Justice Reinvestment. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=412542>.

Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level Planning and Implementation Guide: <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=412233>.

## Notes

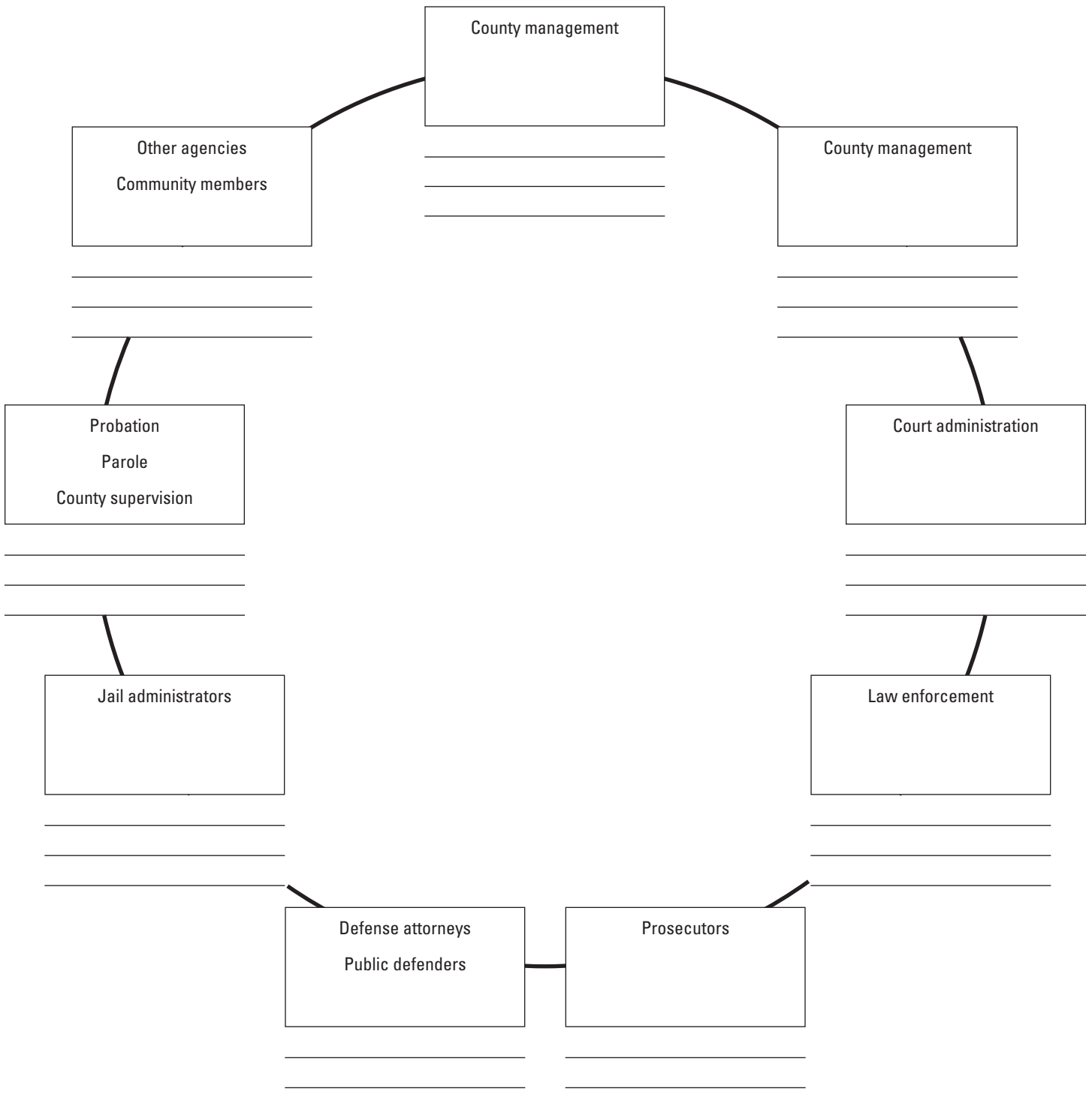
1. For information on the role of data in justice reinvestment, see the companion brief by Dwyer, Neusteter, and Lachman (2012).
2. The process of reinvestment is detailed in the companion brief by Lachman and Neusteter (2012).
3. More information on the case review process is available in La Vigne et al. (2010).

## References

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- Hall, Andy. 1987. "Systemwide Strategies to Alleviate Jail Crowding." Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
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- Lachman, Pamela, and S. Rebecca Neusteter. 2012. "Tracking Costs and Savings through Justice Reinvestment." Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level brief 1. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=412541>.

## Getting Started Worksheet: Assessing Existing Efforts and Needs

Participants in a strategic planning entity: A successful collaborative body includes a balance of members from agencies throughout the criminal justice system. Enter the names and/or positions of those in a current or potential planning entity to determine the extent that they span the entire system.





In establishing a strategic planning entity to guide local justice reinvestment efforts, cities and counties should gather the following information regarding any existing collaborative bodies in operation to determine if they are capable of directing these efforts.

1. Do stakeholders from different criminal justice agencies meet?

		<b>Do stakeholders from different agencies meet on a regular basis?</b>	<b>Are all stakeholders present in meetings?</b>	<b>Are these meetings mandated by state law?</b>	<b>Is membership restricted to a certain stakeholder level?</b>
Yes	No				
Yes	No				
Yes	No				

1.1. If mandated by the state, does this mandate grant authority to make decisions to guide local criminal justice agencies? Yes No

2. Are data systems in place with capacity for basic sharing?

<b>Are data in a uniform format? (type of data)</b>	<b>Are these data currently shared between agencies?</b>
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No
Yes No	Yes No

3. Do stakeholders have a basic understanding of evidence-based principles? Are decisions made as a result of data analysis and program evaluations?

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4. What perceptions do stakeholders in the community have regarding the state of the local criminal justice system?

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Do they perceive that too many people are in jail?</b>	<b>Do they believe that released offenders receive adequate services to help them reenter their communities?</b>

### The Justice Reinvestment Initiative

In October 2010, the Bureau of Justice Assistance formalized the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) to expand prior state and local justice reinvestment work. JRI provides technical assistance and competitive financial support to states, counties, cities, and tribal authorities either currently engaged in justice reinvestment or well positioned to undertake such work. The initiative is structured in two phases: in Phase I sites receive intensive onsite technical assistance to start the justice reinvestment process and in Phase II sites receive targeted technical assistance and are eligible for seed funding to support the implementation of justice reinvestment strategies. For more information about JRI, visit <http://www.bja.gov/JRI>. Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level (JRLL) was a partnership between the Urban Institute and three local jurisdictions: Alachua County, Florida; Allegheny County, Pennsylvania; and Travis County, Texas. For more information on JRLL, e-mail [jrll@urban.org](mailto:jrll@urban.org) or visit us online at <http://justicereinvestment.urban.org>.

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