

What it takes to change the way America thinks about and uses jails



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Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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Executive Summary

Introduction

America's local jails hold over 660,000 people daily, with over 7.6 million cycling through annually.¹

Transforming these complex systems requires coordination and collaboration across traditionally adversarial stakeholders including sheriffs, police departments, judges, prosecutors, defenders, government administrators, behavioral health and health care providers, community organizations, and advocates.

While many publications document effective interventions, less attention has been paid to the leadership and infrastructure necessary to implement and sustain these transformations.

This report examines key leadership approaches to implementing and sustaining criminal justice system improvements, specifically focusing on safely reducing jail

populations through the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC).

There is a need to understand the leadership and infrastructure necessary to sustain system transformation.

Methodology

Drawing on ten years of longitudinal data (2015 – 2024) across 26 SJC sites and in-depth interviews with 25 leaders, including 11 national SJC advisors and 14 site leaders, we identify seven essential knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that distinguish effective changemakers and five key insights into system transformation.

This report summarizes our analysis of 26 SJC sites' administrative jail data across three distinct phases (baseline to COVID, COVID, and Post-COVID) integrated with qualitative perspectives from semi-structured interviews.

Seven of the 26 counties were selected for study participation based on measurable reductions in jail population, length of stay, and bookings. They include

- Charleston County, SC
- Cook County, IL
- Los Angeles County, CA
- Lucas County, OH
- Minnehaha County, SD
- Philadelphia County, PA
- Pima County, AZ

A summary of the achievements within each of these sites is provided in the appendix.

National SJC advisors identified fourteen key changemakers (people who were instrumental in driving change) from these sites who were then interviewed about their SJC involvement, site performance, and leadership competencies.

Key Findings

The findings reveal a changemaker profile defined by seven essential KSAs that drive successful system improvement, complemented by five key insights into the nature of system transformation.

Seven Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for Effective Changemakers:

1. Humility and Adaptability

Approaching reform with an openness to new perspectives, willingness to acknowledge limitations, and ability to adapt strategies while maintaining focus on core mission and goals.

2. Resilience and Courage

Demonstrating persistence through challenges, embracing difficulty and discomfort as normal, and showing courage by questioning established practices while staying true to core values.

3. Inclusive Leadership and a Focus on Equity

Acknowledging diverse perspectives, creating meaningful pathways for community participation, and initiating necessary conversations about disparities and systemic racism.

4. Systems Understanding and Strategic Thinking

Developing comprehensive knowledge of how the broader justice system functions, facilitating consensus around a shared vision, and maintaining a disciplined focus on strategic objectives.

5. Strategic Communication and Coalition-Building

Using language that resonates with distinct audiences while maintaining commitment to core principles, uniting traditionally adversarial stakeholders around shared objectives, and establishing structured collaborative forums.

6. Data-Driven Decision-Making

Positioning data as the guiding compass for decisions, creating transparent reporting systems, and building trust through evidence-based approaches that counter misinformation.

7. Resource Management and Facilitation

Establishing critical infrastructure for system coordination, practicing effective stewardship of limited resources, and developing strong facilitation skills with clear accountability mechanisms.

Five Key Insights

The changemakers within these sites operated within a broader context of how system transformation occurs. Our analysis revealed five key insights into this process:

1. Transformation is Non-Linear

System improvement efforts continued despite fluctuations in jail use. Maintaining progress required an ongoing commitment to learning, adapting, and consistently moving toward more effective approaches.

2. Relationship-Building is Fundamental

Effective transformation required creating trust across traditional boundaries and identifying common goals. Leaders who achieved measurable reductions could see beyond their agency's immediate interests to understand broader system impacts and shared purpose.

3. Infrastructure Matters

Improvement efforts continued to progress as individual leaders changed roles or retired. Communities that developed collaborative infrastructure and institutionalized sustainable approaches could withstand personnel changes and evolving circumstances.

4. Community is Essential

Sites with authentic community engagement evolved from simply sharing information and raising awareness among community members, to consultation with community, and finally, to shared governance with community members. As community members increasingly took on leadership roles and offered meaningful input into decision making, their support and advocacy for system improvement strengthened.

5. Peer Relationships Build a Community of Practice

Participation in the SJC network created a supportive community where leaders shared strategies, learned from comparable challenges across jurisdictions, and tested innovative solutions together. These peer relationships provided both practical problem-solving resources and the encouragement needed to sustain long-term efforts.

Conclusion

Successful criminal justice transformation crosses traditional boundaries and builds momentum incrementally, with success measured by leaders' capacity to learn from setbacks, adapt to changing circumstances, and sustain momentum toward shared goals.

These findings provide a roadmap for leaders and communities seeking to build more effective, equitable, and humane approaches to public safety and justice.

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Introduction

Since 2015, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) initiative has supported communities across the United States in their efforts to safely reduce jail populations and improve local criminal justice systems.

While much attention in criminal justice transformation focuses on policy changes, technical solutions, and data analysis, this report examines a different and equally important dimension – the leadership qualities and collaborative infrastructure necessary to enable system improvement to take root and flourish.

America's local jails hold over 660,000 people daily, with over 7.6 million cycling through annually.² Improving these dynamic local systems is complex and involves diverse stakeholders such as sheriffs, police departments, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, government administrators, behavioral health and health care providers, community organizations, and advocates. Each group has its own priorities,

perspective, professional culture, accountability structure, and budget constraints.

Changing how communities use jails requires coordination and collaboration across these independent agencies in a traditionally adversarial system.

While many publications have documented effective policy and practice improvements, less attention is paid to the leadership characteristics needed to implement and sustain these changes over time.

This report speaks to this gap and examines the experiences of key leaders in seven counties participating in the SJC.

We report experiences of key leaders across seven SJC counties.

The report draws on longitudinal jail data and interviews with these leaders to identify a profile of the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that made them effective changemakers, and provides key insights into the nature of system transformation for leaders and communities seeking criminal justice system improvement.

Communities can leverage the KSAs and key insights identified in this report to develop their own roadmaps for system transformation.

Methodology

The SJC initiative included 26 participating sites who joined the initiative in a staggered set of three cohorts depending on when they received their first implementation grant.

The City University of New York (CUNY) Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) is the principal research organization for the SJC and collected administrative data from all SJC sites, identifying a baseline data point based on when they joined the initiative.³

The analysis for this report examined the KSAs of leaders in sites that achieved reductions in key jail metrics over time. We analyzed quarterly jail data (provided by the ISLG⁴) from 2015 through June 2024 for all 26 SJC sites.

We found that not all sites sustained improvements in their metrics for the entire study period.

Therefore, to identify sites with sustained reductions during that time period, we developed a systematic filtering process

and organized the analysis into three phases:

- Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19 (November 2015/2017 - January 2020)
- Time 2: COVID-19 (February 2020 - July 2022)
- Time 3: Post-COVID-19 (August 2022 - July 2024)

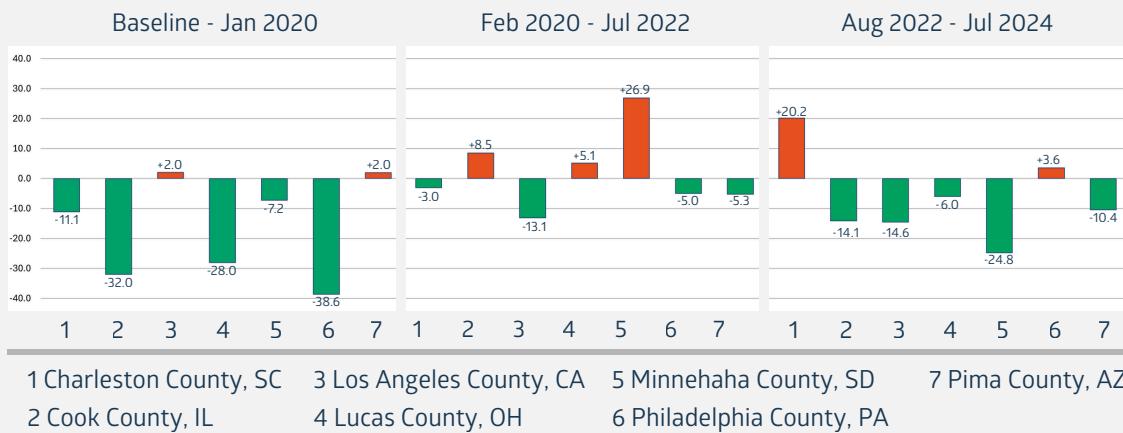
Primary measures included average daily population (ADP), average length of stay (ALOS), and overall booking volumes, with incarceration rates as a supplementary indicator.

We first screened sites' metrics to flag sites with reductions in ADP, ALOS, and bookings during at least two of the three study intervals. This quantitative filtering yielded 12 preliminary sites.

Given resource constraints for conducting in-depth interviews, we further refined this list to create a manageable but representative sample of sites. To help us further filter the sites and understand more about the local factors influencing trends across metrics in the three periods, we conducted 11 semi-structured consultations with MacArthur SJC program officers and site coordinators.

These consultations offered perspectives on progress within the 12 sites, essential KSA profiles for effective changemakers both generally and within these sites,

Figure 1, Percent change in ADP in seven SJC sites during three time periods



interview protocol development, and potential interview participants.

Informed by these perspectives and considering geographical distribution, jail population size, representation across all three SJC cohorts, and affiliation with each of the collaborating site-coordinating agencies, we selected a final set of seven sites.

The final set of seven sites included:

- Charleston County, SC
- Cook County, IL
- Los Angeles County, CA
- Lucas County, OH
- Minnehaha County, SD
- Philadelphia County, PA
- Pima County, AZ

Within these seven sites, there were 14 key leaders identified during the initial consultations as changemakers – people who were instrumental in making transformational changes happen in their systems.

From entering SJC through 2024, seven sites averaged a 19.8% reduction in Average Daily Population.

These leaders held varied types of positions, such as elected and appointed officials (including judges, prosecutors, sheriffs, and defense attorneys), criminal justice coordinating council (CJCC) or SJC project directors, and community representatives.

We developed an interview protocol featuring open-ended questions focused on sites' SJC involvement. Interviewees were

asked to reflect on their insights into site performance during each study phase, perceptions of essential KSAs for driving reform for themselves and their colleagues, and advice for emerging leaders interested in system improvement.

Between January and March 2025, we conducted 14 interviews via Zoom with each of the changemakers identified in the seven sites (an average of two interviews per site, with a range of one to three per site).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with interviewees providing supplementary information as relevant via email following the interview.

Our approach integrated administrative jail data and qualitative data from consultations with MacArthur SJC program officers and site coordinators, as well as interviews with changemakers.

This mixed-methods framework provided a rigorous, nuanced foundation for our findings and insight into the essential KSAs for system transformation.

Changemakers



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Findings Essential KSAs of Effective Changemakers

The individuals we interviewed were identified by their colleagues as “changemakers” in their sites – leaders who contributed greatly to successful system change.

When we interviewed these leaders, they shared their experiences doing the work, their beliefs about the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) essential to achieve success, and their advice for other people tasked with implementing system change.

Upon completion of the interviews, we analyzed the qualitative data to identify common themes and organized them into the following seven essential KSAs of effective changemakers, beginning with person-centered, individual character traits and abilities and ending with structural, more externally focused knowledge and skills.

Figure 2, Essential Knowledge, Skills and Abilities of Effective Changemakers

Internal Character Traits & Abilities

- Humility and Adaptability
- Resilience and Courage
- Inclusive Leadership and a Focus on Equity

Externally Focused Knowledge & Skills

- Systems Understanding and Strategic Thinking
- Strategic Communication and Coalition-Building
- Data-Driven Decision-Making
- Resource Management and Facilitation

Internal Character Traits & Abilities

Humility and Adaptability

Interviewees spoke about humility and adaptability, approaching system improvement with an openness to new perspectives, willingness to acknowledge limitations, and ability to adapt strategies while maintaining focus on core mission and goals. They suggested that people approaching system transformation in their jurisdictions should:

- View the work with humility, recognizing that no single individual possesses all the answers when engaging in system change. When faced with knowledge gaps, seek out external expertise.
- Demonstrate openness to new ideas and perspectives, particularly those that challenge established thinking or personal biases.
- Be willing to acknowledge limitations, embrace continuous learning, and adapt strategies when presented with new information or evolving circumstances.

- Practice adaptive thinking, and be willing to adjust approaches during leadership transitions, policy shifts, and other challenging moments. Interpret obstacles to system change efforts as opportunities for improvement rather than personal failures.
- Recognize your replaceability and maximize time in your current role by communicating authentically and focusing on building sustainable system improvements rather than personal legacies.

Resilience and Courage

Interviewees shared how they persisted through challenges, embraced difficulty and discomfort as normal, and displayed courage in questioning established practices while staying true to core values. To maintain resilience and courage, they encouraged emerging leaders to:

- Persist through setbacks, challenges, and resistance, continuing to advance meaningful changes despite periods when progress seems unattainable.
- Learn to be comfortable with discomfort, recognizing that difficult conversations and tensions are normal aspects of meaningful transformation rather than indications of failure.

- Strive to display courage by questioning established practices, taking calculated risks despite uncertain outcomes, and remaining focused when confronted with opposition and other hurdles.
- Stay true to core values while discerning when strategic compromise advances long-term objectives. Balance bold vision with strategic patience, understanding that meaningful reform requires sustained and tenacious effort over time.
- Prioritize self-care and burnout prevention practices, acknowledging the significant emotional toll of the work and the need to make time for renewal.
- Cultivate support networks beyond your direct reporting structure to process challenges and maintain perspective.
- Develop the emotional intelligence to recognize when team members need encouragement or respite from intense reform efforts.
- Celebrate incremental progress alongside major milestones, understanding that small victories sustain momentum during what can feel like daunting work.

Inclusive Leadership and a Focus on Equity

Interviewees highlighted the need to acknowledge and uplift diverse perspectives, create meaningful pathways for community participation, and initiate necessary conversations about disparities and systemic racism. They advise others to:

- Approach reform with genuine empathy for diverse experiences and perspectives, particularly those most profoundly impacted by the justice system, including crime survivors and individuals experiencing incarceration.
- Practice deep listening skills that acknowledge multiple valid perspectives and promote healing rather than defensiveness. Use inclusive dialogue techniques that elevate all voices, particularly those traditionally excluded from decision-making processes. Be mindful of language choices and advocate for person-first terminology that honors human dignity (e.g., consciously avoiding terms like "criminal" or "addict").

- Create meaningful pathways for authentic community participation that transcends “token” representation, including leadership positions for community members and integration into decision-making processes. Recognize that those closest to the challenges often possess the clearest insights into potential solutions.
- Initiate difficult but necessary conversations about disparities and systemic racism. Use data (disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and geography across system involvement), and community input to design and implement targeted interventions that confront structural harm and advance racial equity.
- Create psychologically safe environments where stakeholders can propose innovative ideas without fear of hierarchical constraints or professional repercussions.
- Nurture the growth and development of staff and community partners. Build “long tables, not tall fences,” creating inclusive spaces where diverse voices contribute meaningfully to reform work.

Externally Focused Knowledge and Skills

Systems Understanding and Strategic Thinking

Interviewees described having a comprehensive understanding of their local system and how the broader justice system functions, beyond their individual roles or agencies. They possessed an ability to facilitate consensus around a shared vision and maintain a disciplined focus on strategic objectives. They advised others who wish to be changemakers to:

- Learn about the complete lifecycle of system processes, including both formal protocols and informal dynamics.
- Push stakeholders to shift from siloed to more system-wide perspectives, helping them recognize their place within an interconnected ecosystem rather than independent agencies.
- Develop sophisticated problem-solving capabilities, methodically breaking down complex challenges into manageable components while maintaining focus on long-term objectives.

- Collaborate with diverse stakeholders, using strategic intervention sequences (i.e., beginning with achievable "low-hanging fruit") to build consensus, momentum, and confidence before addressing more challenging improvements.
- Facilitate consensus around a shared vision while developing strategic plans with specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.
- Maintain disciplined focus amid competing priorities by staying oriented toward strategic objectives when "fires" threaten to derail progress.
- Use persuasive communication skills to successfully engage diverse stakeholders with competing interests and priorities, and tailor messaging to specific community contexts.
- Cultivate both formal and informal relationships, recognizing that crucial conversations often occur during unstructured meeting "bookends" and informal gatherings rather than official agenda items.
- Proactively engage media to support media literacy around system structures and data, as well as share stories of success and challenges, rather than waiting to reactively respond to crises.
- Inform, educate, and meaningfully involve community members in reform efforts. Engage community through varied channels of outreach and throughout different periods of ongoing progress towards goals – not just at the tail-end of a new initiative.
- Establish structured collaborative forums where stakeholders can navigate tensions collectively rather than in isolation.

Strategic Communication and Coalition-Building

To strategically communicate and build coalitions, changemakers discussed using language that resonates with distinct audiences while maintaining commitment to core principles, uniting traditionally adversarial stakeholders around shared objectives and mutual interests.

Changemakers recommend future leaders:

- Recognize that sustainable reform requires broad coalitions built through strategic communication and deliberate relationship development.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Changemaker interviewees emphasized the importance of using data as the guiding compass for decision making processes, creating transparent reporting systems, and building trust within and outside the justice system through evidence-based approaches that counter misinformation. They advised emerging changemakers to:

- Elevate key data and evidence from occasional reference points to central decision-making tools that drive strategic direction and enable timely course corrections.
- Focus conversations on empirical facts and measurable trends rather than allowing subjective opinions and anecdotes to dominate critical discussions about system transformation.
- Define challenges precisely, identify strategic intervention points, and generate evidence-based solutions.
- Cultivate data literacy and shared understanding by establishing common metrics with standardized definitions across agencies and among stakeholders, helping them interpret and apply the metrics that drive decisions while honoring the human stories behind the numbers.
- Develop transparent, trusted data reporting systems that effectively bridge traditional divides between agencies and departments. Implement systems for monitoring implementation quality, identifying course correction opportunities, and measuring both process and outcome metrics.
- Strategically engage external researchers and technical assistance providers to contribute specialized expertise, validate findings, and/or establish credibility when faced with resistance or skepticism.
- Create accessible reports and public-facing dashboards that present meaningful insights and develop transparent reporting mechanisms that convey both progress and challenges with integrity.

Resource Management and Facilitation

Changemaker interviewees highlighted the value of establishing critical infrastructure for system coordination, practicing effective stewardship of public resources, and developing effective facilitation skills with accountability mechanisms. Changemakers advise people approaching system transformation to:

- Demonstrate effective project management skills that balance appropriate urgency with thoughtful planning, relationship development, and realistic implementation timelines that acknowledge operational constraints while maintaining momentum.
- Establish and maintain critical infrastructure for system coordination and collaboration, such as criminal justice coordinating councils with dedicated staff and governance structures.
- Practice skillful stewardship of time, financial resources, and human capital, strategically focusing limited system resources on interventions with maximum potential for impact.
- Invest in effective internal and external communications to support implementation and sustainability.
- Identify when specialized training or technical assistance can accelerate progress and apply stakeholder engagement skills to optimize its value. Leverage training and external support to address identified capacity gaps while concurrently developing internal competencies for continuous improvement.
- Develop effective meeting facilitation and process management skills, creating efficient structures with clear objectives and robust accountability mechanisms.
- Implement practical tools to maintain productivity while respecting diverse viewpoints and fostering an environment that sets egos aside in favor of collective progress.
- Navigate tension productively, channeling energy toward resolution rather than entrenchment.
- Prioritize comprehensive documentation and knowledge management, ensuring that institutional memory survives inevitable transitions.

Findings Key Insights into System Transformation

Drawing on both our analysis of the administrative jail data and qualitative interview data, we identified five key insights that characterize system transformation.

These insights provide important context for understanding how the KSAs function in practice and offer guidance for individuals and communities embarking on system improvement initiatives.

These insights provide context for how the KSAs function in practice.

Figure 3, Key Insights into System Transformation

Transformation is Non-Linear

Relationship-Building is Fundamental

Infrastructure Matters

Community is Essential

Peer Relationships Build a Community of Practice

Transformation is Non-Linear

System improvement efforts continued despite fluctuations in jail use. While none of the seven sites achieved consistent reductions across all three time periods, their work persisted through shifting levels of jail use.

These changes reflect complex internal and external pressures, including policy changes, the COVID pandemic, and evolving community needs.

This non-linear trajectory challenges traditional notions of "success" in criminal justice reform. Rather than expecting steady, unidirectional progress, effective changemakers recognize that setbacks and fluctuations are inherent to transformation.

Effective changemakers recognize setbacks are inherent to transformation.

This insight underscores the importance of resilience and sustained commitment, encouraging communities to view obstacles as opportunities for learning and adaptation rather than signs of failure.

Relationship-Building is Fundamental

Effective transformation depends on building trust across traditional boundaries and aligning around common goals.

Leaders who achieved measurable reductions in jail use looked beyond their own agency's immediate interests to consider the broader system impacts of their decisions.

They invested time in understanding diverse perspectives, created safe spaces for difficult conversations, and kept focus on shared objectives despite tensions and setbacks.

Sustainable change required shifting from adversarial relationships to collaborative partnerships – particularly during crises, when established trust enabled rapid, coordinated responses instead of retreat into silos.

This insight underscores the need for proactive relationship cultivation as a core investment in system transformation capacity.

Infrastructure Matters

In these sites, improvement efforts continued even as individual leaders moved on or retired.

While strong leadership is valuable, sustainable transformation depends on institutional capacity that extends beyond any one person's tenure.

Successful sites established formal structures, such as criminal justice coordinating councils and other collaborative bodies, with dedicated staff to provide continuity and support for system transformation.

Building this infrastructure involves multiple components: governance structures that formalize collaborative decision-making, data systems that enable evidence-based monitoring, communication protocols that ensure consistent information sharing, and documentation practices that preserve institutional knowledge.

Communities that invest in these foundational elements create systems capable of continuous improvement despite leadership transitions and changing circumstances.

Community is Essential

Successful community engagement efforts evolved from simple information sharing and awareness raising to consultation, and ultimately to shared governance.

This progression represents a fundamental shift in how criminal justice systems relate to the communities they serve, moving from top-down decision making to authentic partnerships and shared responsibility.

As community members increasingly assumed leadership roles and contributed meaningful input, community support for system improvement deepened.

This evolution was driven by deliberate efforts to create meaningful participation pathways beyond “token” representation, including compensating community members for their participation and integrating them into formal decision-making structures.

This insight reflects a deeper understanding of justice as a community responsibility rather than solely a governmental function.

Successful sites established formal structures with dedicated staff to provide continuity and support.

Peer Relationships Build a Community of Practice

Leaders consistently described the SJC initiative as career-defining, providing collaborative frameworks, peer connections, and sustained support that renewed their professional purpose and effectiveness.

Participation in the SJC network fostered a community where leaders shared strategies, learned from comparable challenges, and tested innovative solutions together.

This community of practice provided both practical problem-solving resources and the encouragement needed to sustain long-term efforts.

Leaders gained validation for their experiences, discovered solutions applied in other jurisdictions, and built professional relationships that extended beyond formal SJC activities.

For those pursuing system transformation, peer networks and communities of practice offer critical encouragement, professional development, and connection, while also strengthening the broader movement to safely reduce jail use and improve local systems.

Conclusion

Transforming how local criminal justice systems think about and use jails is among the most complex challenges facing jurisdictions.

The experiences and perceptions of the leaders we interviewed show that lasting reform requires more than new policies, technical solutions, or additional funding.

It demands adaptable systems, collaborative infrastructure, and leadership approaches capable of sustaining momentum through changing circumstances, leadership transitions, and shifting political contexts.

The KSAs described by interviewees offer critical guidance for navigating these dynamic environments. These competencies and insights demonstrate that lasting system improvement emerges from developing the relational, foundational, and institutional capacity to sustain collaborative progress toward shared goals over time.

The path to transformation is neither linear nor the responsibility of a single leader.

Progress comes through incremental change and collaborative efforts that span traditional boundaries, building momentum step by step.

What matters most is creating relationships and systems that can learn from setbacks, adapt to new circumstances, and maintain forward movement.

By applying the KSAs and key insights identified in this report, communities can craft their own roadmaps for transformation.

Through investment in collaborative infrastructure, development of leadership competencies, and a commitment to the principles uncovered through this research, jurisdictions can move toward more effective, equitable, and humane approaches to public safety and justice.

Appendix 1

Site Summaries

This resource provides narrative descriptions of the seven SJC sites selected for their measurable progress in reducing jail use across the three study phases.

Each narrative integrates quantitative shifts in jail metrics with contextual accounts of strategic practices, infrastructure developments, policy changes, and leadership approaches – providing concrete examples of how collaborative, data-driven, and community-centered efforts translated into measurable outcomes.

Charleston County, SC

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Charleston County's average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics shifted notably across the three study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, the county's Average Daily Population (ADP) fell from 987.8 to 878, reflecting an 11 percent decrease. Average Length of Stay (ALOS)

“*You have to be really comfortable being uncomfortable...A lot of people are uncomfortable with change or difficult conversations and that's not going to work in this space.*

— Chanda Funcell

grew from 21.6 to 28.5 days, reflecting a 32 percent increase. Bookings decreased 21 percent from 1,544.8 to 1,225.7.

Time 2: COVID-19

Throughout the COVID phase, ADP declined modestly from 823.7 at the outset to 798.7 by the end of T2 – a 3 percent reduction. Simultaneously, ALOS decreased by 25 percent from 32.8 to 24.5 days. Bookings decreased by 8 percent from 1,016.7 to 939.

Figure 4, Charleston County, SC Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	987.8 to 878.0 11% decrease	823.7 to 798.7 3% decrease	823.0 to 989.0 20% increase
ALOS	21.6 to 28.5 days 32% increase	32.8 to 24.5 days 25% decrease	32.2 to 21.9 days 32% decrease
Bookings	1,544.8 to 1,225.7 21% decrease	1,016.7 to 939.0 8% decrease	906.0 to 1,023.0 13% increase

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

Trends diverged in the post-COVID phase of T3. ADP rose from 823 to 989, marking a 20 percent increase, while ALOS fell from 32.2 to 21.9 days, marking a 32 percent decrease. Bookings rose from 906 to 1,023 – a 13 percent increase.

Charleston County's reform journey was anchored by the creation of its Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), which formalized collaboration among system leaders, community members, and individuals with lived experience. Development of robust bylaws and governance protocols enabled the CJCC to provide a durable framework for decision-making that transcended changes in elected leadership. Administrative oversight for the CJCC was transitioned from the Sheriff's Office to county administration, which broadened ownership and reduced dependence on a single elected official.

Members adopted practical meeting rules – like the “ELMO” (Enough Let’s Move On) principle – to maintain focus and foster an environment where stakeholders set aside individual agendas in service of collective goals.

Charleston also conducted two Sequential Intercept Model mappings to assess how people move through the system, identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Data-guided decision making became central to Charleston's approach. County

leadership built a centralized database linking previously siloed information and gradually shifted from manual analysis to automated dashboards. CJCC staff conducted extensive one-on-one consultations with data contributors to build trust, ensuring transparency in how metrics would be used prior to openly sharing dashboards.

The CJCC's use of dashboards with targeted areas of interest – such as jail use, case processing, or familiar faces – kept all partners accountable and enabled real-time adjustments based on emerging trends.

Building on its use of data, the CJCC proactively engaged local media to disseminate published reports about system trends, progress, and challenges.

Engagement of the broader community evolved from passive information sessions to meaningful collaboration. The CJCC exceeded its goal of involving more than 1,000 community members in strategic plan development through targeted dialogue sessions and a series of public forums, as well as surveys for those uncomfortable speaking publicly.

Individuals from civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and ACLU joined as full CJCC members, and a community representative with lived experience was eventually appointed co-vice chair, underscoring the shift from stakeholder consultation to shared governance.

To reduce unnecessary jail use, Charleston implemented a suite of practical alternatives to incarceration without mandate-heavy policy change.

These included citation policies for minor offenses, a sobering center for public intoxication, and a crisis stabilization center for individuals experiencing mental health emergencies.

Pretrial reforms featured a risk assessment tool and expanded representation in bond hearings, with ongoing research to guide pretrial advancements such as a small-scale interdisciplinary pilot program for the most visible persons cycling repeatedly through the jail.

Procedural improvements, such as expedited discovery exchanges and assignments of counsel supported early release decisions through jail population review procedures.

Underpinning these initiatives was a concerted effort to change mindsets and language across the system. Recognizing the importance of centering behavioral health needs, the first CJCC vice-chairs included mental health and substance use disorder agency executives.

Leaders championed person-first terminology, challenged punitive assumptions with the “Is it the right thing to do?” test, and cultivated cross-system relationships between law enforcement, prosecution, defense, treatment providers,

crime survivors, people with lived experience, and community advocates.

This strategic leadership approach built trust through follow-through, flexibility around tactics, and persistent advocacy in the face of institutional resistance.

Leaders championed person-first language and challenged punitive assumptions with the, “Is it the right thing to do?” test.

Cook County, IL

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Cook County's average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics demonstrated pronounced declines across the study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) reduced from 8,346.3 to 5,672.7, reflecting a 32 percent decrease. Average Length of Stay (ALOS) – measured from a later baseline period

“ There has to be a level of curiosity that allows you to continually ask questions. That curiosity allows for voices that traditionally wouldn't be in the room and the humility to shut up and listen when those voices are present.

— Kimberly Foxx

(November 2017–January 2018) – declined from 39.3 to 25.3 days. Bookings decreased by 11 percent from 6,643.3 to 5,906.

Time 2: COVID-19

During the COVID phase, ADP shifted from 5,147.2 at the outset to 5,585.3 by the end of T2 – marking a 9 percent increase – while ALOS edged upward from 35.7 to 38.7 days, marking an 8 percent increase. Bookings also increased in T2 by 4 percent from 3,967.7 to 4,106.3.

Figure 5, Cook County, IL Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	8,346.3 to 5,672.7 32% decrease	5,147.2 to 5,585.3 9% increase	5,625.0 to 4,832.0 14% decrease
ALOS	39.3 to 25.3 days 36% decrease	35.7 to 38.7 days 8% increase	40.7 to 36.5 days 10% decrease
Bookings	6,643.3 to 5,906.0 11% decrease	3,967.7 to 4,106.3 4% increase	3,784.3 to 4,111.3 9% increase

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period of T3, Cook County recorded a 14 percent reduction in ADP from 5,625 to 4,832 and saw ALOS decrease from 40.7 to 36.5 days – a 10 percent reduction. Bookings increased by 9 percent from 3,784.3 to 4,111.3.

Cook County's transformation unfolded through structured collaboration, strategic leadership, and persistent reform efforts that bridged traditionally adversarial agencies and altered the “conveyor belt” mindset – encouraging stakeholders to see each step as part of a unified system rather than isolated silos.

Under the influence of the SJC, the county established a formal steering committee that convened weekly to provide a forum for mid-level staff from the Office of the Chief Judge, Justice Advisory Council (Board President's Office), Sheriff's Office, State's Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, Clerk's Office, and the Chicago Police Department, to build trust and align on shared goals.

Leadership emphasized humility and a focus on the mission by empowering staff to make data-informed decisions.

Stakeholder engagement strategies were tailored to individual motivations and concerns, ensuring that each leader remained invested in reform objectives.

The steering committee collaboratively identified target areas for improvement, negotiated common definitions for metrics,

such as average daily population (ADP), average length of stay (ALOS), and other key indicators, ensuring consistent interpretation across all partner agencies. They also established shared data dashboards to maintain transparency and alignment. This commitment to transparency coupled with the publication of dashboards and external validation of metrics reinforced stakeholder confidence and countered reform skepticism.

The commitment to transparency reinforced stakeholder confidence and countered skepticism about reforms.

Policy levers accelerated early gains. In 2017, the Chief Judge issued a General Order that mandated changes in Bond Court, (including the use of the Pretrial Safety Assessment and consideration of ability to pay cash bond amounts) which contributed to immediate reductions in the jail population via reduced cash bail amounts. Early collaboration between the State's Attorney and Public Defender offices contributed to increases in the volume of nonfinancial recognizance releases (I-Bonds) that further reduced reliance on cash bail.

Subsequent legal reforms through the statewide implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act's (PFA) pretrial reform and elimination of cash bail marked a turning point in pretrial policy nationally.

Cook aligned local rules and practices with the PFA requirements, revising court processes and release protocols, and training all stakeholders in the implementation of the new laws.

Established networks and communication channels enabled rapid responses during the COVID crisis, reducing the population by approximately 1,000 individuals within a few months.⁵

Cook County broadened its reform coalition by including community organizations and advocacy groups in planning workgroups, which applied external pressure and elevated conversations on racial equity. Technical assistance providers supplemented local efforts by offering messaging guidance and ensuring accountability, which further supported the cultural shift from siloed operations to system-wide collaboration.

Community organizations and advocacy group allowed a broadening of reforms by applying external press and elevating conversations about racial equity.

Los Angeles County, CA

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Los Angeles County recorded contrasting trends in its average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics over the three study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) rose from 16,704.7 to 17,045, marking a 2 percent increase. Average Length of Stay (ALOS) also increased from 56.3 to 65.7 days, marking

“*To make anything new happen, you have to open your mind up to other perspectives.*

— Paula Tokar

a 17 percent increase. However, bookings decreased by 19 percent from 9,639.7 to 7,823.

Time 2: COVID-19

During the COVID phase, ADP declined from 15,257 at the outset to 13,252.3 at the end of T2, reflecting a 13 percent decrease. ALOS remained relatively stable, with a 0.5 percent reduction moving from 82.7 to 82.3 days. Bookings reduced by 3 percent from 5,369 to 5,214.7.

Figure 6, Los Angeles, CA Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	16,704.7 to 17,045.0 2% increase	15,257.0 to 13,252.3 13% decrease	14,615.7 to 12,483.7 15% decrease
ALOS	56.3 to 65.7 days 17% increase	82.7 to 82.3 days 0.5% decrease	78.0 to 85.0 days 9% increase
Bookings	9,639.7 to 7,823.0 19% decrease	5,469.0 to 5,214.7 3% decrease	5,576.3 to 5,154.3 8% decrease

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period of T3, LA County achieved a 15 percent decrease in ADP from 14,615.7 to 12,483.7 while ALOS increased by 9 percent from 78 to 85 days. Bookings dropped from 5,576.3 to 5,154.3, reflecting an 8 percent decrease.

Los Angeles County's reform was guided by a philosophy of "Care First, Jails Last" and supported by coordinated policy change, infrastructure enhancements, interagency collaboration, and public engagement. The county established mechanisms for cross-agency collaboration by aligning the Sheriff's Department, Public Defender's and Alternate Public Defender's Offices, Prosecutor's Office, and the Office of Diversion and Reentry to ensure that responsibilities were assigned to the actors best positioned to deliver specific interventions.

A centralized Pretrial Data Workgroup institutionalized transparency and oversight of population trends and program outcomes.

Data-driven decision-making underpinned Los Angeles's approach despite constraints from outdated systems. County leaders tracked jail metrics and program impacts, including the Rapid Diversion Program's low recidivism rates, while publicly countering misconceptions about crime risks following COVID-era decarceration.

These efforts reinforced stakeholder trust and supported incremental policy shifts, such as bail deviation strategies evolving

into broader bail reform, and expanded mental health screening and diversion protocols that reached more facilities over time.

Policy and legal catalysts played central roles. Endorsements from the Board of Supervisors and district attorney priorities aligned around jail reduction, alongside state legislation recategorizing certain offenses from felonies to misdemeanors.

External legal pressures – including multiple settlement agreements addressing jail overcrowding, lawsuits that upheld COVID-era bail reforms, and court mandates requiring improvements in jail conditions – created urgency and sustained momentum for change beyond political cycles.

Los Angeles County's reform was guided by a philosophy of, "Care First. Jails Last."

A concerted focus on mental health and underlying needs complemented these changes. The Mental Health Diversion statute created the legal framework for treatment-based alternatives. Screening procedures identified diversion candidates among the nearly 47 percent of the jail population receiving mental health treatment. Social service models prioritized care over custody and these efforts altogether underscored the county's commitment to addressing root causes to advance public safety.

Lucas County, OH

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Lucas County recorded significant shifts in its average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics across the three study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) dropped from 838 to 603 – a 28 percent decrease.

Concurrently, Average Length of Stay (ALOS) decreased from 15.7 to 13 days – a

“ *To be a changemaker, you need to know when to talk and when to listen. I'll share ideas, but I'll also sit back and listen. I'll try to figure out how I can plug in my ideas that align with theirs.*

— Holly Matthews

17 percent decrease. Bookings also decreased by 15 percent from 1,657.8 to 1,405.3.

Time 2: COVID-19

During the COVID phase, ADP shifted from 506.3 at the outset to 532.3 at the end of T2, reflecting a 5 percent increase, while ALOS declined from 14.7 to 13.5 days, reflecting an 8 percent decrease.

Figure 7, Lucas County, OH Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	838.0 to 603.0 28% decrease	506.3 to 532.3 5% increase	542.7 to 510.0 6% decrease
ALOS	15.7 to 13.0 days 17% decrease	14.7 to 13.5 days 8% decrease	14.4 to 12.4 days 14% decrease
Bookings	1,657.8 to 1,405.3 15% decrease	1,052.7 to 1,217.0 16% increase	1,166.7 to 1,267 9% increase

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period, the county saw a 6 percent reduction in ADP from 542.7 to 510 by the end of T3, and ALOS fell by 14 percent from 14.4 to 12.4 days. Bookings rose by 9 percent from 1,166.7 to 1,267.

Lucas County engaged in SJC reforms against a backdrop of long-standing federal consent decrees, a decades old CJCC, and a public commitment from leadership to address jail overcrowding and inhumane conditions.

Lucas County's transformation was driven by a foundational shift in philosophy, moving from jailing individuals because the system was "mad at them" to jailing people when the system was "afraid of them" which prioritized public safety over punishment.

Under the stewardship of its reform leadership, the county adopted the Public Safety Assessment (PSA) tool to guide risk-based decisions and tracked incarceration patterns at the judge-by-judge level to foster accountability. Financial restructuring measures, such as reducing contracted beds by 50% at the regional correctional facility, serving primarily as the sentenced jail, and reallocating pretrial incarceration costs from city to county budgets, created fiscal incentives for further reductions.

Mental health integration formed a central pillar of Lucas's strategy. The county developed a HIPAA-compliant roster-sharing system with community mental

health providers, embedded social workers in the public defender's office through the Opportunity Project, and expanded inpatient treatment beyond substance use to include broader mental health needs.

Streamlined court processing improvements complemented these efforts and increased efficiency. Same-day case resolutions were implemented at arraignment and occur in 40 percent of cases, detention timeframes were extended to align with resolution windows, and a specialized warrant enforcement unit delivers individuals directly to court rather than jail.

The creation of a Justice Advisory Council (JAC) formalized collaborative leadership, convening 40–50 stakeholders from across the criminal justice system and supported by a focused workgroup to refine policy details.

Mental health integration formed a central pillar of Lucas County's strategy.

Leaders prioritized relationship-building through informal communication channels alongside structured convenings.

The county deployed strategic public messaging by leveraging data to demonstrate successes and contextualizing temporary crime upticks during COVID to maintain public and stakeholder buy-in.

Minnehaha County, SD

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Minnehaha County's average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics fluctuated across the three study phases, reflecting both early gains and later reversals based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) decreased by 7 percent from 400.7 to 371.7 while Average Length of Stay (ALOS) rose by 72.5 percent

“ *If everybody understands what the goal is, how much the cost is, what's going on, it helps break down the silos to discuss how to leverage and piece together funding to execute or make something sustainable.*

— Erin Srstka

from 4 to 6.9 days. Bookings declined by 10 percent from 1,608 to 1,442.3.

Time 2: COVID-19

During the COVID period, ADP increased from 349.7 at the outset to 443.7 at the end of T2, reflecting a 26 percent increase, while ALOS climbed 27 percent from 8.9 to 11.3 days. Bookings dropped from 1,281.7 to 1,047.7 – an 18 percent decrease.

Figure 8, Minnehaha County, SD Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	400.7 to 371.1 7% decrease	349.7 to 443.7 26% increase	466.0 to 350.3 25% decrease
ALOS	4.0 to 6.9 days 72.5% increase	8.9 to 11.3 days 27% increase	13.9 to 11.1 days 20% decrease
Bookings	1,608 to 1,442.3 10% decrease	1,281.7 to 1,047.7 18% decrease	1,004.0 to 1,058.7 5% increase

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period of T3, Minnehaha County recorded a 25 percent decrease in ADP from 466 to 350.3 and saw ALOS decline by 20 percent from 13.9 to 11.1 days. Bookings shifted from 1,004 to 1,058.7 – a 5 percent increase.

Minnehaha County's reforms focused on enhancing pretrial services, expanding alternatives to detention, streamlining court processes, and deepening community partnerships.

The county adopted the PSA tool to inform release decisions and built structured pretrial monitoring programs, later transitioning oversight to the Sheriff's Department under formalized policies. Bond schedules were reviewed and adjusted in response to shifting conditions during COVID.

Alternative treatment pathways complemented these efforts. A Behavioral Health Triage Center opened in 2021 to divert individuals in crisis to treatment, and partnerships with the South Dakota Urban Indian Health program delivered culturally specific services. The Just Home initiative provided 80-90 housing units for justice-involved individuals, with coordinated outreach to landlords to reduce reentry barriers.

Court processing improvements, including the establishment of a specialized competency court and collaboration with state authorities to expedite case handling,

maintained essential services throughout disruptions.

Simultaneously, Minnehaha invested in sustainability by transitioning programs from grant funding to county budgets, which embedded initiatives into existing systems, as well as adapting approaches as community needs evolved.

Community engagement underpinned these reforms. Justice-impacted members participated through programs like 3D Leaders of Tomorrow, and a series of hosted community events fostered dialogue between residents and system actors. These interactions built trust, strengthened relationships, and promoted shared ownership of reform goals.

Community engagement during reforms built trust and promoted shared ownership of reform goals.

Philadelphia County, PA

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

Philadelphia County exhibited substantial reductions in average jail population, length of stay, and booking patterns across the three study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) declined by 39 percent from 7,609.2 to 4,672.

Concurrently, Average Length of Stay (ALOS) fell by 26 percent from 103.7 to 77

“ I stayed persistent. I had my team stay persistent. We informed ourselves. And then what we did? We galvanized. So once we learned something new, we galvanized our community and educated them.

— Michelle Simmons

days. Bookings also decreased by 17 percent from 2,297.8 to 1,916.3.

Time 2: COVID-19

During COVID, ADP shifted from 4,468.3 at the outset to 4,244 at the end of T2, reflecting a 5 percent reduction, while ALOS increased by 61 percent from 91.7 to 147.7 days. Bookings dropped slightly from 1,250 to 1,220.7 - a 2 percent reduction.

Figure 9, Philadelphia County, PA Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	7,609.2 to 4,672 39% decrease	4,468.3 to 4,244.0 5% decrease	4,471.0 to 4,633.0 4% increase
ALOS	103.7 to 77.0 days 26% decrease	91.7 to 147.7 days 61% increase	114.3 to 117.0 days 2% increase
Bookings	2,297.8 to 1,916.3 17% decrease	1,250 to 1,220.7 2% decrease	1,281.0 to 1,332.0 4% increase

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period of T3, Philadelphia saw ADP rise by 4 percent from 4,471 to 4,633, and ALOS grew by 2 percent from 114.3 to 117 days. Bookings also rose by 4 percent from 1,281 to 1,332.

Philadelphia's reform trajectory derived from the deliberately crafted governance structure that integrated judicial leadership, courts, probation services, prosecutors, public defenders, city government, health agencies, and community members into a unified coalition.

Formal workgroups empowered participants across hierarchical levels to propose and refine solutions, while communication channels between courts and jails expedited data reconciliation and case processing.

Central to Philadelphia's success was the institutionalization of community voice and accountability. The county formed a compensated Community Advisory Committee (CAC) comprising individuals with lived experience, granting them direct access to decision-makers and embedding them within implementation teams to review policies for potential bias.

Over time, the CAC evolved from a consultative body that met initial resistance from county stakeholders into a co-governing partner with meaningful collaboration, ensuring that reform efforts remained grounded in the community's priorities.

Policy innovations complemented this collaborative infrastructure. Philadelphia implemented Early Bail Review hearings and emergency bail hearings presided over by supervising judges to reduce unnecessary pretrial detention. The county established bail advocate positions within the public defender's office, launched alternative response systems for mental health crises, and introduced the "Straight Outta Trouble" program to address probation violations and outstanding warrants.

Sustainable infrastructure investments – such as expanding research and data units in courts and jails, enhancing pretrial services staffing, assigning probation officers to absconder cases, and transitioning roles from grant-supported to city-funded positions – ensured reforms could endure beyond initial grant cycles.

Central to Philadelphia County's success was the institutionalization of community voice and accountability.

Enhanced behavioral health evaluation processes within jails further embedded a treatment-oriented framework in institutional operations.

Data-driven oversight remained a constant, with public-facing jail dashboards fostering transparency and enabling rapid

responses to emerging trends. Analyses of racial disparities guided targeted interventions, while continuous data monitoring identified systemic cracks where individuals risked falling through the grid.

Finally, Philadelphia pursued a cultural transformation that valued candid dialogue and creative problem-solving. Meetings encouraged open critique of entrenched practices, shifting perceptions of jails from punitive instruments of enforcement to active participants in reform.

Through persistent relationship-building among system actors and community advocates, Philadelphia cultivated an adaptive environment capable of sustaining focus on persistent challenges.

Pima County, AZ

Metric Shifts Across All Study Phases

“Find the changemakers that are doing the work and build capacity in them, instead of trying to create the capacity yourself.

— Doyle R. Morrison

Pima County's average jail population, length of stay, and booking metrics exhibited modest shifts across the three study phases based on analysis of quarterly data provided by CUNY ISLG.

Time 1: Baseline to COVID-19

From baseline to the end of T1, Average Daily Population (ADP) moved from 1,879.3 to 1,916, marking a 2 percent rise. Average Length of Stay (ALOS) saw a 3 percent uptick, moving from 24.6 to 25.3 days.

However, bookings dropped by 10 percent from 2,515.5 to 2,259.3.

Time 2: COVID-19

During the COVID phase, ADP declined from 1,775.3 at the outset to 1,681.6 by the end of T2 – reflecting a 5 percent decrease – while ALOS increased by 5 percent from 32.4 to 33.9 days. Bookings declined from 1,735.3 to 1,680.3 – a 3 percent reduction.

Figure 10, Pima County, AZ Metric Shifts Across All Study Periods

	Time 1: Baseline - COVID Nov 2015/2017 - Jan 2020	Time 2: COVID Feb 2020 - July 2022	Time 3: Post-COVID Aug 2022 - Jul 2024
ADP	1,879.3 to 1,916 2% increase	1,775.3 to 1,681.6 5% decrease	1,778.0 to 1,593.0 10% decrease
ALOS	24.6 to 25.3 days 3% increase	32.4 to 33.9 5% increase	31.0 to 37.1 days 20% increase
Bookings	2,515.5 to 2,259.3 10% decrease	1,735.3 to 1,680.3 3% decrease	1,733.0 to 1,547.0 11% decrease

ADP = Average Daily Population; ALOS = Average Length of Stay in Jail;
Bookings = Formal Admission into Local Jail

Time 3: Post COVID-19

In the post-COVID period of T3, Pima County achieved a 10 percent reduction in ADP from 1,778 to 1,593 and observed a 20 percent increase in ALOS from 31 to 37.1 days. Bookings declined by 11 percent from 1,733.3 to 1,547.

Pima County's strategies centered on structural and community-driven innovations that diverted individuals from jail and fortified support systems.

A Criminal Justice Reform unit was established to guide reform efforts that later became the County's Department of Justice Services.

A commitment to community-centered decision-making grounded Pima County's approach.

The county launched a Pre-Booking Modular Program, creating an alternative entry point for non-domestic violence misdemeanors, and established a Transition Center⁶ to connect individuals with services immediately upon release.

During the COVID period, administrative policies and judicial orders codified use of alternatives rather than optional discretion, which reinforced the shift away from default incarceration.

A commitment to community-centered decision-making grounded Pima's approach. Targeted listening sessions in neighborhoods most impacted by justice system involvement informed reform priorities, while "Action Summits" provided forums where residents and system leaders engaged as equals.

Over time, community members assumed leading roles within reform structures, ensuring that program design and implementation reflected lived experience.

Data-driven oversight sustained momentum. Leadership maintained continuous reporting of jail trends, leveraged cost-benefit analyses to illustrate fiscal savings, and tracked recidivism outcomes to validate program effectiveness. These metrics enabled the county to correct assumptions about the effectiveness of incarceration and employ evidence-based adjustments.

Pima also leveraged lived experience to enhance service delivery. Individuals with personal justice system backgrounds staff the Transition Center under a peer-driven model, and a formal collaborative network of 32 agencies – including 18 community-based organizations – ensured that diverse perspectives influenced planning and execution.

Strategic relationship management fortified these efforts. County officials cultivated cross-agency partnerships to address procedural bottlenecks, engaged critics from the business districts and

community coalitions to surface and resolve legitimate concerns, and managed oversight from philanthropic and state entities to preserve reform impetus. Persistent communication channels maintained cohesion even as certain transformations sparked public discomfort.

Appendix 2

Informed Consent & Interview Guide

PURPOSE

The purpose of the interview is to gather information from across the SJC to highlight how communities developed pathways to achieve change during different phases of the Safety and Justice Challenge's (SJC) 10-year history. The information gathered will be used in the development of a written SJC legacy publication that features accounts of evidence-based progress achieved during those phases, coupled with behind-the-scenes stories from diverse changemakers. The goals of this legacy publication include:

- Immersing readers in the front lines across different SJC eras,
- Providing practical guidance for overcoming obstacles to advancing safety, justice and equity,
- Highlighting individual changemakers from different disciplines and their unique experiences developing pathways to change in their communities, and
- Inspiring others to drive positive change.

PROCEDURES

We believe your experiences in changing the way SJC sites think about and use jails are important. We want to learn more about your experiences and for you to take part in an interview. The interview will be done through Zoom with a member of our project team. This interview is voluntary.

This interview will be recorded using Zoom features such as audio/video recording, transcription and summarization to aid the project team in its development of the written publication. If you agree to take part, we will ask you questions about your perspective on the evidence-based progress achieved, different pathways to change you encountered, traits and characteristics that contributed to progress, and your overall perceptions of what it takes on the front lines to change the way SJC sites think about use jails. We will send you the questions in advance. If you agree to take part, the interview will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

As a matter of professional courtesy, you will also be provided with an embargoed draft of the publication (or related content) for your review and feedback in a reasonable timeframe prior to final editing.

It is the expectation of the project team that the publication will be broadly disseminated as a featured SJC legacy document. By agreeing to participate in the interview, you are agreeing to contribute to the development of this publication.

Appendix 2

Informed Consent & Interview Guide

By taking part in the interview, you will help us highlight what it takes to change the way SJC sites think about and use jails. You will be helping to inspire others to drive positive change and offering practical guidance for overcoming obstacles to advancing safety, justice and equity.

While the details of the publication's dissemination efforts are not yet known, it is the expectation of the project team that the publication will be posted on the SJC website and broadly disseminated via the SJC network. Your contributions to the publication may also be featured in dissemination efforts such as social media posts and/or an SJC conference presentation. Please note, there is no expectation for you to actively participate in dissemination efforts. However, if you choose to do so voluntarily you may benefit from publicly elevating your contribution to the publication.

COMPENSATION

Individuals who engage in interviews and are not doing so in an official capacity representing their organization may be eligible for compensation for sharing their time and expertise. If you would like to receive compensation, you can contact Kimberly Richards at krichards@justicesystempartners.org for more information.

CONTACT

If you have questions concerning the interview, you can contact Kimberly Richards at krichards@justicesystempartners.org.

Appendix 2

Informed Consent & Interview Guide

Introduction:

1. Introduce yourself and thank the interviewees for their time.
2. Explain the purpose and scope of the interview
 - a. *Reference protocol and their introductory email*
3. Briefly recap why this person was selected (i.e., how we got to them, what their site accomplished, and the specific time of focus)
 - a. *Lift the interviewee up, being selected is something to celebrate*

Interview Question Ideas for SJC Leadership

1. Confirm your name, role, and background with the SJC?
 - a. Confirmation of site(s), name, title(s), role(s), and dates of SJC involvement
2. Tell me about what being a part of SJC has meant to you.
 - a. *Probe into their experiences of being a part of it (e.g., opportunities, challenges and lessons learned)*
3. Throughout your involvement in the SJC, what are you most proud of?
4. Tell me more about what it was like on the ground at the time. What was the environment like at the time on the front lines?
 - a. What were you trying to do at the time (define the goal or objective)?
 - b. What were the core challenges?
 - c. What went into overcoming these challenges?
 - d. *Probe for insights into why it went well and what, if anything, would they do differently if they could go back and do it again.*
5. How would you describe the key qualities, knowledge, skills, and abilities of an ideal changemaker for system improvements?
 - a. Is there someone you've met in the SJC network who fits this profile and why?
6. What advice would you give to emerging leaders seeking to improve their local criminal justice systems?
 - a. What are some practical tips you would recommend to others trying to overcome obstacles?
 - b. If you had a magic wand to do one specific thing to help these folks become successful changemakers, what would do with it?

Closing:

1. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't already covered?
2. Thank the interviewee for their contributions
3. Briefly recap what they can expect going forward (see protocol) and respond to any questions or comments raised.

Endnotes

- 1 Statistical tables retrieved from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Jail Inmates in 2023. [\[Retrieved Here\]](#)
- 2 Statistical tables retrieved from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Jail Inmates in 2023 indicates 664,800 persons held in jail at midyear and 7,627,000 annual admissions. The number of annual admissions includes multiple admissions of some individuals. [\[Retrieved Here\]](#)
- 3 Baseline for cohorts 1 and 2 is November 2015, while baseline for cohort 3 is November 2017.
- 4 Data submitted to the City University of New York Institute for State and Local Governance. Unpublished email communication. September 2024.
- 5 Safety and Justice Challenge. (n.d.). Measuring Progress: Jail Trends in SJC Sites. [\[Retrieved Here\]](#)
- 6 The Transition Center provides comprehensive support to help all judicially involved individuals navigate the justice system.



What It Takes to Change the Way America Thinks About and Uses Jails

INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation



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