



A Toolkit for Status Offense System Reform

# MONITORING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE



MODULE

4

STATUS OFFENSE | REFORM CENTER

The Status Offense Reform Center is a project of the Vera Institute of Justice and is supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as part of its Models for Change Resource Center Partnership.

## ABOUT THE MODELS FOR CHANGE RESOURCE CENTER PARTNERSHIP

The Resource Center Partnership works to advance juvenile justice systems reform across the country by providing state and local leaders, practitioners, and policymakers with technical assistance, training, and the proven tools, resources, and lessons developed through the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice initiative.

The Partnership is anchored by four complementary, connected Resource Centers that address four important issues in juvenile justice:

- Mental health: **The Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Collaborative for Change**, led by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. For more information, visit: [cfc.ncmhjj.com](http://cfc.ncmhjj.com).
- Stronger legal defense for indigent youth: **National Juvenile Defender Center**. For more information, visit: [njdc.info/resourcecenterpartnership.php](http://njdc.info/resourcecenterpartnership.php).
- Appropriate interventions for youth charged with non–delinquent—or status—offenses: **The Status Offense Reform Center**, led by the Vera Institute of Justice. For more information, visit: [www.statusoffensereform.org](http://www.statusoffensereform.org).
- Coordinated systems of care for young people involved in both the juvenile justice and child protective systems: **The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice**, led by the RFK Children's Action Corps. For more information, visit: [www.rfknrcjj.org](http://www.rfknrcjj.org).

The Partnership also includes a strategic alliance of national experts and organizations representing state leaders, mayors, judges, law enforcement, prosecutors, corrections professionals, court personnel, and justice reform advocates. These partners further enrich the tools, best practices, and training offered by the Centers and provide direct connections to professionals working in juvenile justice.

For more information about the Models for Change Resource Center Partnership, visit: [modelsforchange.net/resourcecenters](http://modelsforchange.net/resourcecenters).



[www.statusoffensereform.org](http://www.statusoffensereform.org)



[www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)



[www.modelsforchange.net/  
resourcecenters](http://www.modelsforchange.net/resourcecenters)

# TOOLKIT

## INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, states and localities are seeking to develop and implement strategies for safely and cost-effectively diverting youth from the juvenile justice system. Perhaps nowhere is this more necessary than in the response to youth who have committed what are called status offenses— a range of behaviors, such as running away from home, skipping school, or violating curfew, which are prohibited under law because of an individual’s status as a minor. Across the country, these young people are frequently referred to juvenile court and subject to the same punitive interventions as youth charged with criminal activity. According to the most recently available national estimates, 137,000 status offense cases were processed in court in 2010, and youth in more than 10,000 of those cases spent time in a detention facility.<sup>1</sup>

Using justice system interventions to respond to behaviors that are problematic, but noncriminal in nature, is costly and often does more harm than good.<sup>2</sup> Overburdened with more cases than they can handle expeditiously, courts are ill-equipped to provide the assistance youth and families in crisis urgently need.

There is a better way. Several states and localities nationwide have implemented community-based and family-focused alternatives to court intervention that are reducing family court caseloads, lowering government costs, and providing meaningful and lasting support to children and families. These community-based systems feature the following hallmarks:

- **Diversion from court.** Keeping kids out of court requires having mechanisms in place that actively steer families away from the juvenile justice system and toward community-based services.
- **An immediate response.** Families trying to cope with behaviors that are considered status offenses may need assistance right away from trained professionals who can work with them, often in their home, to de-escalate

<sup>1</sup> Charles Puzzanchera and Sarah Hockenberry. *Juvenile Court Statistics 2010*. (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Annie Salsich and Jennifer Trone. *From Courts to Communities: The Right Response to Truancy, Running Away, and Other Status Offenses*. (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, 2013).

the situation. In some cases, families also benefit from a cool-down period in which the young person spends a few nights outside of the home in a respite center.

- **A triage process.** Through careful screening and assessment, effective systems identify needs and tailor services accordingly. Some families require only brief and minimal intervention – a caring adult to listen and help the family navigate the issues at hand. At the other end of the spectrum are families that need intensive and ongoing support to resolve problems.
- **Services that are accessible and effective.** Easy access is key. If services are far away, alienating, costly, or otherwise difficult to use, families may opt out before they can meaningfully address their needs. Equally important, local services must engage the entire family, not just the youth, and be proven to work based on objective evidence.
- **Ongoing internal assessment.** Regardless of how well new practices are designed and implemented, some are bound to run more smoothly than others, at least at first. Monitoring outcomes and adjusting practices as needed are essential for sustaining support.

While these practices are critical for developing an alternative system for responding to status offenses, leaders and officials interested in making change are often stymied by a lack of guidance and tools. Questions they commonly raise include: Who should be involved in this work? What policy and practice changes should we make? And, most critical, how will we know if the reforms are working?

A product of the Status Offense Reform Center (SORC), this toolkit addresses those questions and many more. With funding and support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) launched SORC as a one-stop shop of information and practical guidance for policymakers and practitioners seeking to prevent youth who engage in noncriminal misbehavior from entering the juvenile justice system and provide them with services and supports in the community. A Toolkit for Status Offense System Reform draws on Vera’s work with policymakers and practitioners in more than 30 jurisdictions across the country to improve local status offense systems. It is also grounded in the lessons learned through the MacArthur Foundation’s flagship juvenile justice reform initiative Models for Change and informed by sound planning and implementation practices identified in research literature and policy reports.



The toolkit is organized into four modules, each of which covers a discrete phase of the system change process.



**MODULE ONE: STRUCTURING SYSTEM CHANGE** describes how to lay the foundation for productive engagement with stakeholders that leads to action and meaningful system change. Given the complex and often fragmented nature of status offense systems, this module helps you think about who should be involved in the change process, how they should be engaged, and what information will help them along the way.



**MODULE TWO: USING LOCAL INFORMATION TO GUIDE SYSTEM CHANGE** describes how stakeholders spearheading the reform effort can assess their current system to promote a reform planning effort that is data-driven and attuned to the unique strengths and needs of their jurisdiction.



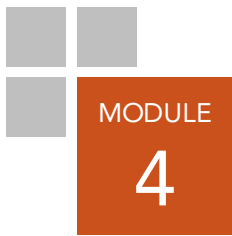
**MODULE THREE: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING SYSTEM CHANGE** describes how to use the information gathered through the system assessment, along with best practice insights from across the country, to develop and implement a well-informed plan for system change that fosters sustainability and continual learning.



**MODULE FOUR: MONITORING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE** describes how to monitor whether the reform plan is being implemented as designed, measure whether the changes are leading to improved system outcomes, and modify as needed.

Woven throughout each module are tips, spotlights and resources. Tips are bite size pieces of advice intended to help you effectively implement a step. Spotlights are examples of jurisdictions that have translated a step into meaningful action. And, resources (which are listed in the accompanying appendix and available through SORC's library) run the gamut from publications that you may want to consult as you implement a step to customizable datasets and PowerPoint presentations.

The toolkit modules follow an order common to many processes that aim at system reform; however, the ordering is not intended to be prescriptive. System change is not always linear in nature and is often iterative. Practitioners are encouraged to use the modules in the order that is most logical for a particular situation and community. For example, officials in jurisdictions that are just beginning to get their feet wet with system change, may wish to start with module one and make their way through the series in full, whereas those that have already implemented a reform may be interested in going directly to module four and perhaps going back to the others as the need arises. Keep in mind that each module is written with the assumption that jurisdictions are taking on this work on their own, without the benefit of an outside technical assistance provider. If you do have the resources for outside help, work closely with that provider to map out his or her role in the process and what order will work best for you.



# MONITORING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE

Long lasting, meaningful change to your status offense system requires an ongoing commitment to systemic assessment and improvement. For this reason, it is essential that early on in your planning process, you spend some time considering what approach you will take in monitoring and sustaining system change. How you do that will depend on several factors, including what reform strategy you have chosen to implement (are you focused on a specific program, or have you made changes to policies and practices across your system?), the stage of reform implementation you are in (is it still relatively new, or has it been completed?), and how much information, if any at all, is currently collected about performance.

Evaluating system-level reforms can be challenging, particularly given their complexity. In this module, we outline three common strategies for evaluating reform efforts: (1) performance monitoring, (2) process evaluations, and (3) outcome evaluations. Although each strategy differs in notable ways, all of them can yield valuable information about the progress of your reform. This module aims to help you determine the most appropriate approach for assessing your reform efforts right now and provide you with ideas about how to continue monitoring your reform down the line.



# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Below are some common terms used when discussing research and evaluations. Additional discussions of these terms may also be found in the various resources listed in this module's appendix.

A **PERFORMANCE MEASURE** or performance indicator tells you in quantifiable terms how well the goal of a particular reform has been met. For example, if your reform aims to improve school attendance, then a reduction in the number of student absences after implementation will be a measure of the reform's success. It is, therefore, important to identify your goals (see Module 3) and performance measures early in the reform planning process to allow for the timely collection of relevant information needed later for evaluations.

A **PROCESS EVALUATION** assesses whether your reform is being implemented with fidelity or carried out as originally designed. This type of evaluation focuses on how the reform is meeting its stated goals and objectives, and whether it is serving the intended target population.

An **OUTCOME EVALUATION** measures the impact of your reform and is particularly valuable when your reform includes the implementation of a specific program. What differentiates this type of evaluation is that it compares a treatment group—i.e., young people who participated in your program—with a control group—i.e., similarly situated young people who did not participate in your program, – allowing you to compare outcomes between these groups. This type of design enables you to isolate the effects of the program and attribute changes to particular outcomes (e.g., school attendance) to program participation and not other factors that may influence behavior.

**ADMINISTRATIVE DATA** refer to information collected and regularly updated in the course of a program's or agency's operations. Administrative data can be either qualitative or quantitative. Generally, when people refer to administrative data, they are describing information that can be easily quantified (which people commonly call "quantitative" data), such as the number of clients served by a program or the number of clients that received substance use counseling. Within administrative databases, information is typically organized either by case or person, and often covers information such as demographics, services

provided, assessment scores, start and end dates, and, if case management services are provided, case manager notes about the case.

**SUMMARY STATISTICS**, such as the mean, median, and mode, can be useful ways to summarize and communicate observations about a set of data. The mean is another term for average, in which several values are added together and then divided by the total number of values in that data set. Calculating the mean enables a single value to describe a set of data by identifying the central position within that set of data—for example, you may determine that the average length of time for probation to receive a truancy referral in your jurisdiction is two days. It is important to note that averages are often susceptible to outliers, which are values that are unusually large or small compared to others within the dataset. The median is the middle value for a set of data arranged in order from lowest to highest. The median is less affected by outliers than the average. The mode is the most frequent value found in a data set. This information may be useful when trying to assess how often an event may be occurring—for example, whether intakes are consistently being completed in 24 hours for each status offense case.


**QUANTITATIVE DATA** include information that can be counted or quantified—for example, counts of the total number of student absences per school or client scores on assessment tools. If your administrative data system is well-developed, you may be able to access a fair amount of quantitative data there. If it is not, you may need to find alternate means of collecting information, such as creating a survey.

**QUALITATIVE DATA** include information that cannot be measured. This kind of information can be especially valuable when evaluating your reform, because it can help explain why certain phenomena occur. For example, you may see that assessments were not completed for a large proportion of clients and learn in interviews that case workers do not find the assessments useful and are, therefore, not completing them. In addition to interviews, focus groups, site visits, and reviewing case notes (in either administrative databases or case files) are methods commonly used to collect qualitative data.



## STEP 1

# MONITOR PERFORMANCE



As soon as your reform launches, you'll want to monitor its performance. If you don't already have staff with a background in performance monitoring, it's important to develop this capacity in-house. The ability to collect and analyze your data will help you stay up-to-date on your reform's progress, enabling you to pinpoint and respond to issues in real-time. While a background in research and evaluation is not necessary, it is essential that any in-house staff tasked with this responsibility have a strong understanding of basic statistics. If performance monitoring is a new endeavor for your organization or agency, you may consider contracting with an outside researcher or technical assistance provider to get you started. They can help you identify which data to collect and develop processes for collecting and reporting them.

To begin, you'll need to set performance goals, which should be directly tied to your reform objectives. We recommend developing these during the planning stage because, as discussed in Module 3, this process can help you more clearly connect what your reform will do to its anticipated impact on youth and families.

Goals may relate to such areas as case processing time, service completion, youth and family outcomes, court involvement and diversion, and the use of detention or placement. (For more information, see Module 3, Step 4 on "How will you measure success?") For each goal, you should (1) develop a standard definition for what the goal is seeking to measure, (2) collect and analyze data, and then (3) dig deeper—using both quantitative and qualitative data as needed—to add nuance to your finding(s). Looking closely at the data will help you determine whether and to what extent you are meeting a performance goal. It will also help you distinguish between well-established trends and outlier events as well as uncover any unintended consequences of your reform.

## SPOTLIGHT: HOW CONNECTICUT MONITORS THE PERFORMANCE OF ITS STATUS OFFENSE PROGRAMS

In 2009, following a pilot period, the Connecticut State Legislature adopted the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) system to track and report outcomes of the work performed by all state agencies, with the goal of understanding how much was done, how well it was done, and whether anyone benefited as a result of the work performed. The state's judicial branch, which oversees programming for youth charged with status offenses, collaboratively developed a series of indicators with system stakeholders to help answer these questions. Among the indicators that are tracked include: the number of youth who go through the intake process; the number of participants who complete the program; the number discharged with a collaborative treatment plan; the number referred to other services in the community; and the number of youth referred to court on a new status offense complaint. After collecting initial baseline data on the agreed-upon indicators for one year, the judicial branch then set performance goals to see a one percent improvement over the baseline for each indicator. The judicial branch also gathers feedback from a quarterly client survey and quality assurance coaches who help guide local intervention specialists. Progress towards system-wide and local goals is formally reviewed each quarter by judicial branch management. In this way, program staff can get "the story behind the numbers" and regularly follow up on key issues. Annually, contracted service providers from across the state gather to review their own outcomes side-by-side those of their peers.

For example, if one of your performance goals is to respond to 90 percent of referrals within a 72-hour period, then your assessment of that goal may look something like this:

- **Develop a standard definition.** Determine whether your jurisdiction is defining "response time" as the duration of time from the point of referral to the point when a staff member makes an initial phone call to the referred family or the point when a staff member conducts an in-person intake interview with the family.
- **Collect and analyze data.** Information about "response time" may be available through a centralized data system, or you may have to gather it

through a case file review. You may also consider conducting interviews with staff to identify factors that facilitate successful outreach during the specified 72-hour period as well as any barriers preventing staff from meeting this requirement. For example, you might learn that intake officers have difficulty scheduling interviews with families referred from a certain high school because the referral forms are often missing necessary contact information.

You will also want to determine if your findings are influenced by outliers. If you find that the average response time across all cases exceeds 72 hours, you may discover that a small handful of cases in which the intake interview occurred a week or more later, is driving up your response time's overall average. Look at the entire range of response times to assess whether they are skewed in any way. Because outliers may be a problem, be sure to calculate both the median and mode response times. For example, you may observe that most cases are resolved within 24–48 hours, and the number of cases addressed after that period begins to steadily drop off.

- **Compare post-reform measure(s) to pre-reform measure(s).** To learn whether your response time, even if you have yet to meet your stated goal, has improved post-reform, look back to the information you gathered pre-reform during your system assessment (see Module 2). There is often a period of flux after the implementation of any new initiative; therefore, it is not always possible to observe immediate changes. It's important to revisit this exercise later when practices have settled. In addition, while it won't be possible to draw definitive conclusions by comparing pre-reform response time to post-reform response time without considering other potential explanatory factors, you can at least gain some sense of whether you are headed in the right direction.

- **Keep an eye out for unintended consequences.** It is important to analyze your reform's performance within the context of broader system trends. For example, you may find that although your average response time is aligned with your stated goal, it is not the result of your reform working as intended. Rather, you discover that the more complex status offense cases are getting funneled into the child welfare system bypassing your intake officers altogether. Assessing for unintended consequences, such as increased child welfare or mental health system involvement by your target population, is a necessary component of the monitoring process.

Eventually, you will want to collect data and develop processes to monitor performance across all goals. For the purposes of your initial monitoring

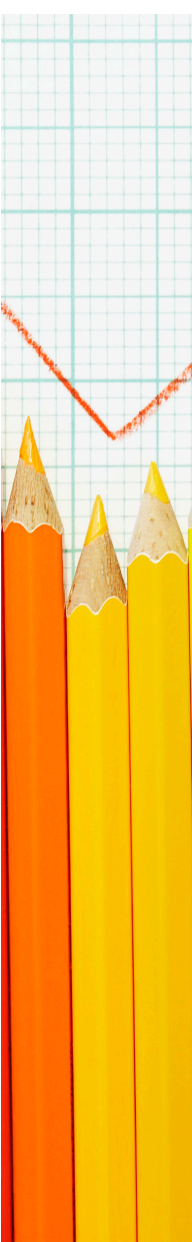


exercise, however, prioritize the investigation of two to three goals that most directly relate to the key problems your reform seeks to address (see Module 3, Step 2). Doing so will help ensure that you learn to monitor effectively and keep the process from becoming overwhelming. After applying this process of defining, measuring, and analysis to each of your prioritized performance goals, develop an action plan to sustain those practices that are producing positive outcomes and recalibrate those that are not.



## STEP 2

# CONDUCT A PROCESS EVALUATION



Once your reform is underway, you will want to assess whether it is working as originally intended. A process evaluation is the best way to do this. This approach allows you to determine how practices in the field match up to the goals, objectives, and processes detailed in your reform blueprint and logic model. (For information about developing a reform blueprint or logic model, see Module 3.) Although you may be tempted to start assessing the impact of your initiative right away (through an outcome evaluation), focusing first on whether you've followed your original plan is critical. Taking this step provides you with the in-depth information necessary to modify operations as needed so that your reform addresses the needs of youth and families as effectively as possible.

Generally speaking, process evaluations are best conducted by outside researchers or technical assistance (TA) providers who have not been directly involved in planning or implementing your reform. Regardless of whom conducts the evaluation, it is important that you determine what information will be collected and analyzed as part of the work. In preparation for any conversations with researchers and TA providers, we recommend that you consider the following key questions commonly addressed by process evaluations, types of data commonly used to answer those questions, and the manner in which those data may be obtained.



- **Are you serving your target population?** Before you can assess what impact your reform is having, you must first learn whether you are serving the population you intended to. There are a number of ways you can do this. For example, you can assess the proportion of cases meeting your program eligibility criteria by measuring your clients' demographics, risks, and needs, and comparing them to the target population set forth in the program design. If you find

that you are not serving the target population as intended (instead of reaching truant youth, for example, a significant proportion of the youth are being referred for “ungovernability” or acting out in school without an associated truancy record), consider an in-depth review of your intake and referral protocols, which should include interviews with staff. Among the possible reasons for divergence in this scenario include: some important referral sources have not been fully informed about program eligibility; intake staff do not fully understand or adhere to the eligibility criteria; or truant youth and their families referred to the program are choosing not to participate.

- **Are you screening, assessing, and matching youth and families to services as intended?** Although you may have developed screening and assessment protocols to help staff obtain the information needed to triage and manage cases appropriately, in practice these protocols may not be consistently or thoroughly followed. Reviews of administrative data and case files can help identify whether all referred youth and their families are being screened and assessed, whether screening and assessments are occurring in a timely manner, and whether staff are making case management decisions aligned with the results of the specified screening and assessment protocols (e.g. linking youth to services best matched to meet their assessed needs for the necessary duration of time)?
- **Are you providing case management services as intended?** If your reform plan included case management for those youth and their families assessed to need supports and services, you’ll want to determine whether the policies and procedures governing case management are working as intended, and if the support and services they were matched to were appropriate. To do this, you can review case files, observe case management practices, and interview staff, youth, families and service providers.
- **Are you gathering data about program operations and using it to monitor progress?** Reviewing administrative and case file data can reveal whether program performance measures are being tracked consistently and accurately. In addition, interviews with staff will help identify barriers to data collection and reporting. Do the necessary monitoring systems exist? Are staff trained sufficiently on how to use the systems and why doing so is important? Do staff have the

time to track data as required, or are they stretched too thin and prioritizing other responsibilities? If you find that data are being collected and reported appropriately, then investigate whether staff and leadership are using them to monitor and modify practice as needed. Are there mechanisms in place to help staff identify deficiencies in operations and develop strategies to address them?

In the course of their process evaluation, it's likely (and common) that evaluators will identify instances in which practice deviates from your reform plan. It is also likely that they will have uncovered information about why and how practice deviates from the original plan. For example, you may learn deviations in practice are the result of staff failure to adhere to new procedures or that the original plan didn't anticipate certain challenges, causing innovations in practice. Regardless of the reason for these deviations, the information revealed by the process evaluation will help you recalibrate practices and improve your approach for serving your target population. More often than not, recalibration entails enhancing staff training, coaching and supervision; fine-tuning existing or writing new policies and procedures; and clearly and consistently communicating with all stakeholders. On occasion, process evaluation findings could prompt the dedication of additional resources or the reexamination of your program's mission, goals and objectives. Bear in mind that practice recalibrations and enhancements may take extended time and multiple attempts.

## SPOTLIGHT: RECALIBRATING MARC PRACTICES IN CALCASIEU, LOUISIANA

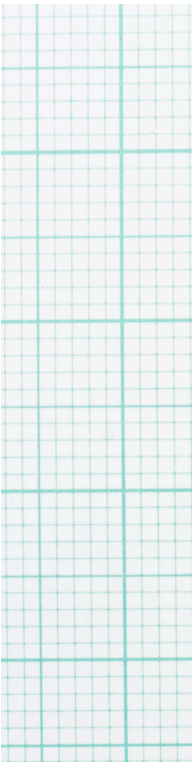
As part of the MacArthur Foundation’s Models for Change initiative, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) conducted a process evaluation of Calcasieu Parish’s Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) – a one-stop shop offering immediate assessment and service referrals for youth and families in crisis – to explore how well MARC practices aligned with the program model and understand the factors that influenced implementation, either positively or negatively. The parish’s Office of Juvenile Justice Services used the evaluation findings to improve and expand on the MARC’s policies and practices—a necessary step before assessing the program’s outcomes. For example, in response to finding that staff were challenged by a lack of guidance in how to effectively handle cases when a youth or family is in crisis, MARC administrators started weekly “scenario training” exercises where staff get together to discuss a case study and brainstorm ideas on how to deal appropriately with the situation. In addition, since the process assessment found that expert psychological staff were unavailable after-hours when most crises occur, MARC administrators hired two licensed professional counselors to be on-call during this time. To reduce incidences of service mismatches that the evaluation also revealed, administrators hired a program specialist to ensure that youth receive services in a timely manner and monitor their progress. And, when administrators learned through the process evaluation that law enforcement officials were not taking full advantage of MARC services, they developed a series of trainings for law enforcement officers and enhanced communication with law enforcement leadership.






## STEP 3

# CONDUCT AN OUTCOME EVALUATION



Although performance measurement and process evaluations are important first steps in learning about how your reform is progressing towards its intended goals, the only way to assess its actual impact is through an outcome evaluation. As more state and local agencies and community-based practitioners face pressure to validate that they are engaging in evidence-based practice (proof that they are delivering the services their clients require and that the program yields the desired outcomes for youth in their care), conducting an outcome evaluation will help establish not only what the outcomes are (e.g., improved mental health or reduced school absence) but also whether they are the result of your intervention or due, in whole or part, to other factors unrelated to your reform.

Conducting an outcome evaluation is a resource-intensive task that requires significant funding, planning, and data. If you don't have sufficient capacity available in-house, it is advisable to hire an independent consultant, organization, or university to conduct an outcome evaluation of your reform. Even if your organization or agency has robust in-house research and evaluation capacity, partnering with an outside researcher to lead your evaluation process may help safeguard against implicit or perceived bias in its findings.



Also, outcome evaluations are really best-suited to assessing programmatic reforms. Evaluating system-level reforms, especially if they involve changes at multiple levels in and among agencies, is much more challenging. In such cases, isolating and measuring the direct effects of your reform effort may prove too complex, making an evaluation of your reform impractical. These issues should be considered in consultation with prospective evaluators before embarking on an outcome evaluation.

In preparing for such conversations, it may be useful to consult a guide developed by Vera's Center on Youth Justice entitled *Measuring Success: A Guide to Becoming an Evidence-Based Practice*. This guide describes the process that determines whether a program qualifies as evidence-based and explains how programs can prepare to be evaluated. Specifically, it includes information on outcome evaluations, such as how they are designed, what the key elements are, and how to document and use their findings to improve your program. (See appendix for Toolkit resources.) 📖


### TIPS: INVOLVING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN THE PROCESS 📌

There is growing recognition of the importance of including youth, families, and communities in research, not simply as subjects, but as partners in the monitoring and evaluation processes. Youth and families can prove invaluable to your work, especially when trying to understand the impact of your reform. How and to what extent you involve youth and families may depend on the type of evaluation or monitoring approach you select. For example, the statistics background required for an outcome evaluation may preclude youth and families from engaging in analysis of administrative data. However, regardless of the evaluation design, youth and families can be engaged to help identify research questions, outcomes you'll want to measure, and making sense of results. They can also review survey instruments and interview guides administered as part of the evaluation, weighing in on the relevance, usefulness, and wording of questions. Establishing a youth and family advisory board that consults on the research plan, implementation, and findings is another way of including youth and families in the reform monitoring process. Although they may lack a background in research and evaluation, or even policy reform, their involvement in the status offense system (pre- and post-reform) offers insights into how the system actually functions in practice that researchers, technical assistance providers, and other system stakeholders rarely, if ever, have direct access to. As emphasized in Module 2, engaging youth and families may require some creativity to involve them in meaningful ways but is well worth the effort.



## STEP 4

# SUSTAIN POSITIVE CHANGE



Once you've implemented your reform and started to see positive outcomes for youth and families in your community, it may seem like your work is over. However, ensuring that your reform endures and doesn't succumb to organizational, fiscal, political, or even cultural challenges is the final step in this change process. Ultimately, the sustainability of your reform requires ongoing commitment to strong leadership, staff competency, and quality assurance as well as the preservation of external resources and support. In some cases, it may also call for new legislation. Each of these requirements is described below.

- **Strong leadership.** The committed and inclusive leadership cultivated during implementation (see Module 3) must be sustained post-implementation. However, a vacuum in leadership can occur at any time due to the end of a political appointment, retirement, or a career change. That is why it's important to develop a succession plan that cultivates future leaders. Identify mid-level officials within the system that support the reform and provide them with opportunities to lead and develop professionally. Creating a strong layer of support for the reform at the mid-level of your system will help prevent the reform from deteriorating when leadership transitions occurs.
- **Staff competency.** Although the initial push to train and coach staff in new practices is behind you, ensuring staff remain competent and continue to excel in their roles is not. Provide refresher trainings to existing staff on a regular basis and develop a robust on-boarding process for new staff that includes all necessary trainings. Also, make sure staff have the opportunity to receive feedback and learn from supervisors and clients on an ongoing basis.
- **Quality assurance.** Reform monitoring is not a one-time endeavor. Checks on quality should be ongoing and built into the system infrastructure. Use administrative data to monitor adherence across performance goals quarterly or semi-annually, gradually expanding the number of performance goals you

are tracking. Also, regularly solicit qualitative information from clients – via surveys and focus groups – about their experience. Share this information with system leadership and staff at monthly or quarterly meetings.

- **Preserve resources and support.** If you piloted your reform with start-up funding, it's now time to start thinking about a long-term funding plan. Once you have implemented and begun to test the impact of your reform, you are in a more favorable position to secure a dedicated funding stream. Develop a one-page overview of your reform's impact that you can share with policymakers and other potential funders. If possible, include information about cost-savings on this overview.

Also, stay abreast of developments in the field at large and in your local area that could impact your reform, such as new research findings about effective interventions for status offending youth, pending juvenile justice and child welfare legislation, and potential budget amendments. You can do this by maintaining existing and building new relationships with fellow practitioners, faith-based leaders, advocates, legislators, and city, county and state executives. When presented with information that could impact the long-term success of your reform, be nimble and make adjustments to your reform as needed to stay ahead of the curve. Just be sure whatever changes you make align with your broader reform design and goals.

- **Put reform into legislation.** Enshrining your reform in legislation is a steadfast way to ensure it lasts. However, while the success of your reform effort may interest your state legislators in codifying the new practices into law, this is no easy task. It typically takes a groundswell of activity and support among advocates, practitioners, and policymakers to draft and pass a new bill.

- **Re-evaluate your program.** In cases where reform was focused on implementing a specific program, re-evaluating the program on a regular basis is a worthwhile endeavor. Not only can this help you ensure that the program is able to sustain positive changes over time, but it qualifies as a top-notch "evidence based" program with replicable results.

## SPOTLIGHT: SCALING LOCAL REFORMS THROUGH LEGISLATION: HOW KENTUCKY IS PROPELLING STATEWIDE STATUS OFFENSE SYSTEM CHANGE

Kentucky's original status offense system required that youth who commit status offenses be referred to Court Designated Workers (CDWs) who would try to divert them from court by helping them find appropriate community based services. Over time, however, it became apparent that families struggled to schedule and keep appointments, and their failure to comply with services led to court orders and even detention. Observing that too many youth were destined to fail under this system, Judge Karen Thomas of Campbell County decided to bring stakeholders together to rethink this approach. The collaborative effort gave rise to a revised protocol for CDWs, providing for more support to families throughout the process, and created Site Review Teams to review complex cases and formulate individualized case plans. In one year, these changes led to a more-than-50-percent drop in court referrals. Judge Thomas presented the results of this successful local model to the Juvenile Justice Reform Committee charged with reforming Kentucky's statewide system. This effort, led by Senator Whitney Westerfield and Representative John Tilley, dug deep into what was driving the high use of detention for status and other minor offenses. As a result of their investigation, the Kentucky Legislature passed S.B. 200 in 2014, which revamped the state's approach to status offenses. The bill strengthens the Court Designated Worker program and creates Family Accountability, Intervention and Response (FAIR) teams that are modeled on Campbell County's Site Review Teams.



# CONCLUSION

At this point, you have assessed whether your reform was implemented as designed and recalibrated practices as necessary. You have also begun to measure the impact of your reform, making adjustments when needed to ensure your community-based approach to status offenses is meeting its goals. With commitment to ongoing assessment and the strengthening of internal and external supports, your reform is on track for success.

# APPENDIX

## TOOLKIT RESOURCES FOR MODULE FOUR: MONITORING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE



This appendix includes a brief list of resources designed to help you take tangible steps toward monitoring and sustaining system change. These resources include existing publications and guides related to monitoring performance and measuring outcomes. While they are not specific to status offense reform, they represent good practice and process that speak to many of the topics addressed in this module. You can access all of these resources and more online at [www.statusoffensereform.org/library](http://www.statusoffensereform.org/library).

- Measurement as Learning: What Nonprofit CEOs, Board Members, and Philanthropists Need to Know to Keep Improving
- Measuring Success: A Guide to Becoming an Evidence-Based Practice
- Outcome Indicators Project (available at <http://www.urban.org/center/cnp/Projects/outcomeindicators.cfm>). This joint project of the Urban Institute and the Center for What Works provides a framework for tracking nonprofit performance. The website also links to additional resources on performance measurement and outcome management that may be helpful for those monitoring status offense reforms.





© Vera Institute of Justice 2014

This toolkit is available on Vera’s Status Offense Reform Center website at [www.statusoffensereform.org](http://www.statusoffensereform.org).

The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit organization that combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.

Design: Paragini Amin | Paragini Inc.

#### Suggested Citation

Alessandra Meyer, Vidhya Ananthakrishnan, and Sydney McKinney, *A Toolkit for Status Offense System Reform, Module Four: Monitoring and Sustaining System Change*, New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2014.