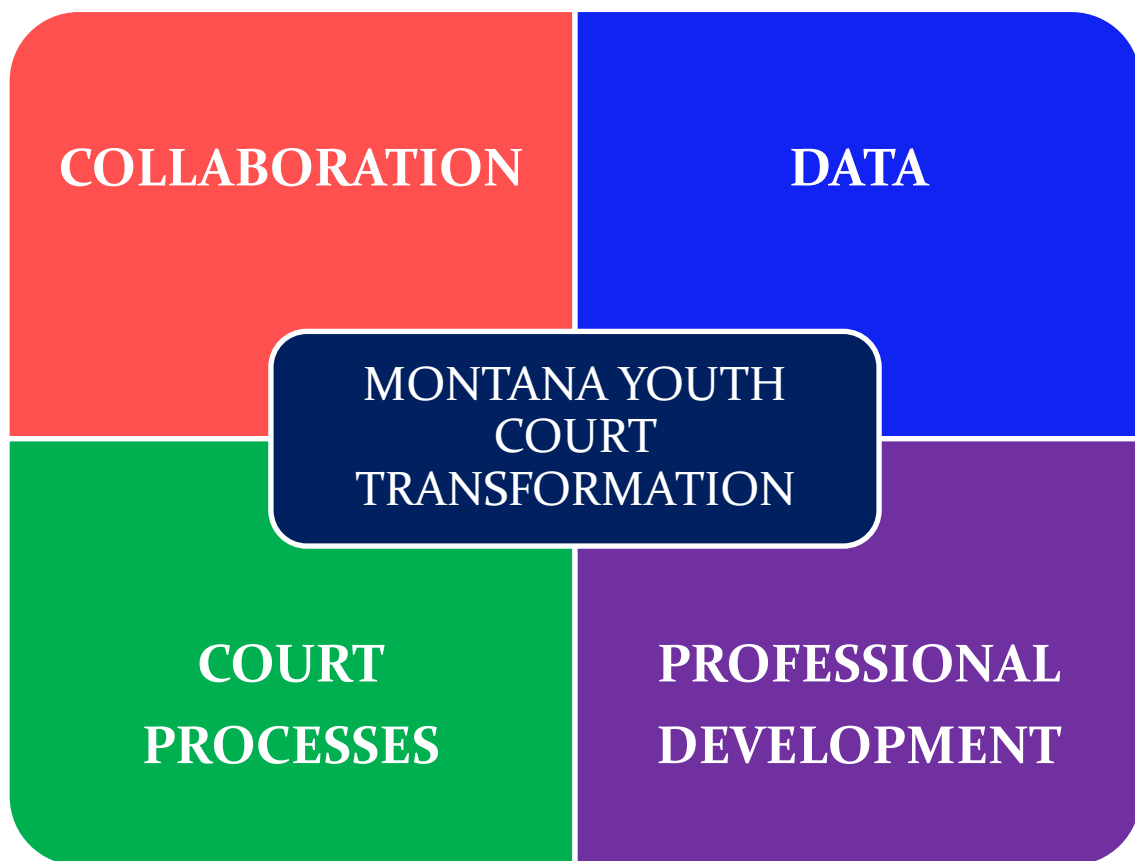


Montana Youth Court 12-Month Action Plan

2024



Justice Center
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

Program History

In 2021, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) conducted an analysis of how courts in all 50 states structure and operate juvenile delinquency cases which led to the Courting Judicial Excellence report.

Expanding upon that report, Montana was selected as one of three states to pilot an intensive assessment into juvenile delinquency court systems while receiving technical assistance from the CSG Justice Center and NCJFCJ. In September 2023, key findings of this assessment were presented to the Montana Court Administrator's Office (CAO) and Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (CJPO) for all of Montana's 22 Judicial Districts.

Based on the key findings, four prioritized working groups (Data, Collaboration, Professional Development, & Court Processes/Policy) were established. Each group was initially composed of two Chief Juvenile Probation Officers serving as group facilitators, various Chief and Deputy Juvenile Probation Officers and support staff serving as participants of the working group, and continued collaboration with the CSG Justice Center and CAO to maintain program continuity and facilitate ongoing progression of the action steps to implement recommendations from the key findings.

The purpose and scope of this 12-month action plan is to serve as the strategic framework for executing the vision while sharing program information with Youth Court staff, judges, and various stakeholders engaged in collaboration with Youth Court.

OVERALL PROGRAM GOALS

- Enhance community safety, reduce disparities, promote equity, and achieve better outcomes for youth and families involved in Montana Youth Court
- Develop, progress, and evolve action plans of the four working groups
- Identify barriers to action items and strategize how to overcome the barriers
- Engage key stakeholders in collaborative efforts to implement effective change
- Partner with Youth Court judges to improve continuity and training for judicial staff
- Advocate for fiscal resources to improve delivery of evidence-based interventions
- Implement sustainable systemic and structural changes based on CSG key findings
- Regularly convene Montana Youth Court Leadership Group to engage key stakeholders in transformational changes and areas for expanded collaboration
- Inform Legislature and other policy makers with accurate and useful data to be efficient and effective stewards of fiscal resources
- Improve policies to better align juvenile probation practices with guiding principles and emerging research

STATE LEADERSHIP WORKING GROUP

Mission: The Montana Court Administrator's Office (CAO) will work toward the development of a sustainable overarching structure for youth court improvement within the state that is inclusive of all youth court stakeholders, builds capacity, and provides oversight for all working groups and ongoing youth court related changes.

Facilitators: Tom Billteen, Youth Court Bureau Chief, Justin Giese, Technical Advisor

Key Stakeholders: CAO, Judges, Probation Officers, Attorneys, Children and Family Services Department (CFSD), detention staff, law enforcement, education, MT State Advisory Group, MBCC, advocates, Children's Mental Health Bureau (CMHB), youth, family, and community members

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: youth court improvement coordinating council; bench cards/tools and resources; permanent CAO youth court/delinquency improvement program; internal CAO administrative, funding, and resource improvements; legislative priorities; public-facing youth court dashboard, tracking progress of all group action plans.

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Create a small youth court improvement coordinating council within the CAO. (I)
 - a. Initial membership to include judges, Chief JPO's and CAO staff. (Long term and eventual membership should also CFSD, CMHB, Office of the Public Defender (OPD), County Attorney's Association, and Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC))
 - b. Develop guidelines/bylaws/clear goals for the group to oversee the rest of the work happening under these action plans
 - c. Develop recommendations for making this group sustainable (e.g. statutory authority, funding for staff, etc.)
 - d. Create a structure and regular schedule for liaising with judges and other stakeholders until this is up and running.
2. Explore feasibility and utility of "Bench Cards" for Montana Youth Court judges and probation line staff to aid in readily available resource for court process and practices; may be done in conjunction with Policy Working Group MJPOA P&PM revision. (I)
3. Track/measure goal progress and relationship of all working groups to identify additional staffing/resource needs either from within JPO offices or from CAO to fully implement action plans.
 - a. Ensure activities remain connected to key findings from CSG assessment.

Medium-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Develop the internal framework and initial funding/staffing plan to build the infrastructure for a permanent youth court/delinquency improvement program within the CAO akin to CIP: (I);
2. With input from all working groups, develop any administrative recommendations for internal CAO changes, including: (I);
 - a. Funding allocations for additional staff positions, including a youth court training specialist, someone to staff the youth court coordinating council
 - b. Reviewing and adjusting funding strategies, including adjusting the PIF/JDIP funding formulas to improve equity in resource allocation and ensure that funds are best utilized in a way that aligns with research and best practices; consider whether there is an option to pool funding to invest in evidence based, community-based programs that can be scaled statewide as options for higher risk kids to keep them in the community as a more efficient use of resources.
 - c. Strategies to advance racial equity and improve youth/family partnership and engagement
3. With input from all working groups, develop a slate of legislative priorities for the 2025 session. Items to consider include: (I) (L)
 - a. Minimum age of court jurisdiction/detention/commitment
 - b. Timelines and policies around youth who are in detention for more than 30 days
 - c. Standardized definitions (e.g. diversion) to be included/updated in the Youth Court Act

Long-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Create a permanent youth court/delinquency improvement program within the CAO, akin to CIP.
 - a. Identify the necessary components and steps to do this, including staffing, funding allocations, any necessary policy changes (internal, court rules, statute) to allow for this.
 - b. Build out the goals for the program.
 - c. Create website.
2. Develop/update a youth court public facing dashboard for use by judges and other stakeholders providing both statewide and judicial district data.
 - a. Review NCJJ Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice and develop Montana-specific components for the dashboard, including court performance measures
 - b. Create a user guide, definitions, training, and resources to educate youth court stakeholders on how to utilize the dashboard and existing data

Data Working Group

Mission: Gather, organize, analyze, and leverage existing data points to inform decision making process and interventions on micro and macro levels of practice while identifying areas to better capture and utilize future data.

Facilitators: Clint Arneson, CJPO- 21st Judicial District

Kelly Elder, JCATS Data Analyst- Office of Court Administrator

Key Stakeholders: Law enforcement, courts of limited jurisdiction, education systems, probation officers, attorneys, judges

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: deep dive status offense analysis, review of undefined terms in JCATS, recommendations for internal CAO and broader Youth Court Act policy changes, collaboration with training and policy/process groups to identify key indicators for change

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Analyze existing JCATS data on status offenses, by district and throughout the state, to identify various trends, inconsistencies, and outcomes. (I)
 - a. Summarize findings from above and highlight focus areas to guide interventions, policy, and internal quality assurance measures. (I)
2. Amass list of common language that is statutorily undefined (i.e. diversion) and relay list to Court Policy and Processes Working Group for further action. (I)
 - a. Once other workgroups have developed any guidance/standard definitions, in collaboration with training and professional development group, develop JCATS dictionary/guidance and update JCATS as necessary

Medium-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Collaborate with key stakeholders and Montana Leadership Group to share data findings and develop support for recommendations of policy change. (C)

Long-term goals (12+ months):

1. Develop recommendations for internal policy change consideration and potential legislative reform. (I), (L)

Collaboration Working Group

Mission: Improve existing internal structures and processes to strengthen access to behavioral healthcare resources, bridge service gaps, and bolster cross-system relationships to enhance resource access and effectiveness.

Facilitators: Kindra Lima-Hageness, CJPO- 19th Judicial District

Christine Kowalski, CJPO- 4th Judicial District

Key Stakeholders: DCFS, CMHB, Behavioral Health Alliance of Montana (BHAM)- Children's subcommittee, OPD, County attorneys, private contract attorneys, various inpatient & outpatient behavioral health providers, judges, detention staff, law enforcement

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: recommendations around lengthy detention stays, development of collaborative structures and cross-systems strategies to improve outcomes for youth

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Develop internal frameworks to better address systemic trends that negatively impact youth involved with the Youth Court. (I)
 - a. With support from Data Workgroup, gather data on factors which contribute to lengthy court processing times that do not align with current best practices and guiding principles. (I)
 - b. With support from Data workgroup, Develop JCATS “tickler” system to flag short-term detention length of stays exceeding 30 days. (I)
 - i. Summarize findings from above and highlight main gaps and inconsistencies statewide. (I)
 - ii. Look into possibility of notification to placement specialist, jpo, youth’s attorney, and judge of lengthy detention
 1. Develop guidance/recommendations for a process/case staffing/additional court hearings/etc/ at key points in a youth’s detention stay
 - a. Include how/to whom notifications go and whether they trigger a “status” hearing
 - iii. Collaborate with DCFs, prosecutors, defense counsel, and stakeholders to develop case processing strategies, with particular focus on reducing detention length-of-stay times and rate of younger youth (12 and under) in detention, as well as strategies for complex cases (C)

Medium-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Develop statewide structure(s) (i.e. reconstitution of Youth Court Placement Specialist) to support probation line staff in accessing resources for residential behavioral health treatment services. (I)
2. Create a mechanism/structure for ongoing dialogue between JPO’s and CFSD workers, as well as between JPO’s and attorneys about their challenges in collaboration and to identify priorities and develop recommendations
 - a. Consider reaching out to CFSD, CMHB, OPD, and County Attorneys Association and ask them to identify 1-2 representatives willing to commit to meeting regularly with this group.

Long-term goals (12+ months):

1. Sustain systemic framework(s) to strengthen services for cross-system youth and to better serve youth with complex behavioral health needs. (C)
 - a. Develop recommendations for how to use Governor’s new investment of funding for behavioral health for youth across CAO, CMHB, and CFSD

Training and Professional Development Working Group

Mission: Create a permanent education committee to improve existing training and professional development structures, expand breadth of training resources and advocate for

ongoing, sustainable internal and external training resources for probation officers and other youth court stakeholders.

Facilitators: Jason Riphenburg, CJPO- 8th Judicial District
Sarita Fenner, CJPO- 16th Judicial District

Key Stakeholders: CAO, probation officers, judges, attorneys

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: identification of training priority needs, revised training academy for new JPO's, revised training manual/plan for Chiefs, collaboration with other stakeholders to identify needs and opportunities for cross-systems/stakeholder training; recommendations for training sustainability plan

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Assess and analyze existing training structures to identify core competencies for new DJPOs and CJPOs and strategize method(s) of expanding internal training and professional development tools. (I)
2. Collaborate with Court Processes working group to strategically plan integration of shared vision/goals for enhancement of current training resources. (I)
3. Receive list of statutorily undefined words (i.e. Diversion) from Data Working Group and related recommendations from policy group and develop a plan for establishing improved continuity amongst all districts on training, data entry, etc.

Medium-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Coordinate with key stakeholders and judicial leadership to align training at Montana Judges Association in October 2024. (C)
 - a. Identify key priority areas for judges, for chief po's, and for multi-stakeholder training.
 - b. Participate in planning and facilitating training for multi-stakeholder panels.
 - c. Develop a plan to make this training annual and sustainable.
2. Explore development of centralized Montana Youth Court pre-service and in-service training requirements and opportunities. (I)

Long-term goals (12+ months):

1. Revamp New JPO Training Academy curriculum and create ongoing system of professional development, mentoring, peer learning for DJPOs and CJPOs. (I)
 - a. Review existing training curriculum, as well as national best practice resources for training and new JPO training curricula from other states.
 - b. Make recommendations for revisions.
2. Implement centralized Montana Youth Court training program to enhance delivery of probation interventions and competency building. (I)

Court Policy and Processes Working Group

Mission: Thoroughly evaluate existing youth court policies and processes and collaborate with vested parties (i.e. judges, attorneys, probation line staff, etc.) to revise current policies

and practices to better equip court decision makers with tools to efficiently operate Montana Youth Courts.

Facilitators: Nick Nyman, CJPO- 11th Judicial District

Key Stakeholders: JPO's, CAO, MBCC, law enforcement, judges, attorneys

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: Revise MJPOA policy and procedural manual to be current and aligned w/best practices; identification of specific areas of inconsistent policy implementation and recommendations for improvement including guidance, standardized forms, etc.; recommendations for improved/updated use of DRAI.

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Coordinate with Professional Development working group to discuss overlapping goals (i.e. manual for guiding principles and best practices). (I)
2. Coordinate with Data working group to develop policies around any areas they identify as a need for more consistency (e.g. Receive list of statutorily undefined words (i.e. Diversion) from Data Working Group and develop a plan for establishing improved continuity amongst all districts on training, data entry, etc.)
3. Complete initial review of the MJPOA Policies and Procedures Manual (last updated 1999) to strategize plan for revision. (I)
 - a. Review national resources such as APPA 10 core principles and NCJJ Desktop Guide to Good Probation and compare with existing manual
 - b. In collaboration with data group, review various sections within policy as well as definitions and how things are entered in JCATA (e.g. diversion, detention, disposition, informal supervision, etc.)
4. Collaborate with MBCC for determining how to better utilize detention risk assessment(s) (i.e. DRAI) for law enforcement and detention decision makers. (C)

Medium-term goals (6-12 months):

1. Prioritize findings from short-term goals to concentrate efforts to guide interventions, and, possibly, dispositional guidelines (i.e. diversion standards). (I)
2. Complete an initial re-write of the MJPOA Policies and Procedures Manual and disseminate to probation staff for feedback. (I)
3. Review all existing screening and assessment tools and identify whether they are effective, duplicative, or need any changes. Develop guidance and recommendations for quality assurance, and in collaboration with the training group recommendations for training of other stakeholders on the tools.
4. Identify any common forms, tools, templates, etc. that are needed or that are different across jurisdictions and could be developed to increase consistency across the state.

Long-term goals (12+ months):

1. Complete the MJPOA Policies and Procedures Manual and/or Montana specific manual to aid probation and judicial staff in effectuating guiding principles & best practices. (I)
2. Develop standardized protocol for utilization and implementation of the DRAI. (C)

Judicial Working Group

Mission: A select group of dedicated District Court judges committed to improving outcomes of youth will liaise with CAO on all these action planning items, share judicial expertise and recommendations, and focus on judicial training for youth court cases.

Facilitators: Judge John Parker
Judge Leslie Halligan

Key Stakeholders: District Court Judges

12-Month Action Plan

Achieved: Internally (I); collaboratively (C); Legislatively (L) (possibly)

Key Deliverables: Create liaisons to CAO for action plans, collaborate with CAO to create youth court coordinating council, develop youth court specific judicial training and other opportunities for enhancing youth court expertise, address long stays for youth in detention.

Short-term goals (0-6 months):

1. Identify liaison(s) to CAO working groups and set up regular communication structure to receive updates and provide feedback on action plans and implementation.
2. Provide input to development of youth court judicial institute components for fall annual judicial training and multi-stakeholder training opportunities
3. In collaboration with CAO, work to develop a youth court oversight body that includes judicial representation
4. Identify any areas where youth court specific bench cards might be useful and identify judges willing to participate in drafting. Coordinate with policy working group to have bench cards that align with the same topic areas as those for probation.

Medium-term goals (6-12 months)

1. Work with probation, CAO, and detention staff to ensure all judges receive notice of youth in detention for long periods of time and work to develop guidance and recommendations for judges about how to handle.

Long-term goals: 12+ months

1. Identify any locales where the population may warrant a dedicated youth court judge