



THE ANNIE E. CASEY  
FOUNDATION

# JUVENILE JUSTICE MESSAGING TOOLKIT







# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## **WELCOME.....03**

## **BUILDING A STRATEGY.....04**

Why and When to Engage with Outside Audiences.....05

Identifying Your Goals to Achieve Success.....06

Reaching Your Audience.....07

Identifying Your Messengers.....07

## **ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA.....08**

The Three Tools for Persuasive Communications.....09

Approaching a Crisis.....13

## **MESSAGING MATTERS.....16**

What Makes a Strong Message?.....17

Messaging DO's and DON'Ts.....19

Research-Driven Message Development.....20

Arguments to Use and Lose.....21

Race-Specific Messages.....23

JDAI Message Bank.....26





# WELCOME



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

03

Your clear and compelling messaging is what builds and sustains support for juvenile justice reform. This toolkit guides you in making the case for juvenile justice reform, using data to back up your talking points and putting a human face on the numbers. Enclosed, find [sample messages](#) and scenarios that prepare you to interact with key audiences, which might be policy makers, impacted communities, the [media](#) or people within your own agencies. The guidance is based on research by Fenton and Global Strategy Group and the expertise of communicators and public information officers.

Some juvenile justice professionals think they can put their heads down and just do the work. But we know that misunderstandings about the juvenile justice system persist in the public's mind — like the falsehood that youth crime is soaring — and can impede reform efforts or jeopardize hard-won gains. We want you to be prepared to engage, which is why this toolkit includes short, simple talking points in a [message bank](#) ready for you to grab and go.

[JDAIconnect](#) is home to this toolkit. JDAIconnect is a place for you to share your communications-related experiences with your colleagues across the network and ask for advice and inspiration. It's a good place to turn the next time you're wondering how to express the nuance of a decision or get ahead of anticipated pushback. It's a brain trust at your disposal.

Sincerely,

**Nate Balis**

*Director*

Juvenile Justice Strategy Group

## Situation Analysis

There is an emerging awareness among policy leaders that the juvenile justice status quo does not work for America's kids, and not just from typical voices. Bipartisan voices, including conservatives like Newt Gingrich and the organization Right on Crime, have advocated for better approaches for youth in trouble with the law. These approaches, like JDAI, contend that alternatives to detention and incarceration are more effective than confinement in protecting communities and changing the trajectories of kids' lives for the better.

To push farther and achieve greater fairness and impact, we need to reach both JDAI insiders and outside audiences. This means undertaking a more proactive effort to educate and inform — using targeted messages, data, engaging visuals, and most importantly, stories of individuals, families and communities. We need to share what works because research shows that most Americans form their opinions of the juvenile justice system from TV, movies and social media. When that's their source of information, they develop false impressions, such as youth crime increasing over the past decade, which we know to be untrue.







## BUILDING A STRATEGY



## Why and When to Engage with Outside Audiences

Get ahead of problems or requests by keeping your stakeholders in the loop, with both successes and challenges. Reporters may turn to them as sources to validate the direction your agency is taking. Many of the following groups may be key stakeholders and need to hear from you:

- **Your local JDAI Collaborative**
- **Executive and legislative branch of state and/or local government** — Elected representatives who regularly make decisions on policy, budget and funding, and capital or facilities' issues, all of which must be informed by the needs of youth
- **Government agencies** — Agency staff, especially those working in related systems such as child welfare, education, human services, workforce development and law enforcement
- **Community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, neighborhood groups and advocates** — Potential partners who can disseminate information, reach youth and families and rally supporters
- **School systems** — Much attention has been given to school discipline policies as feeders to the juvenile justice system
- **Local organizations focused on people of color** — Race and equity advocates are allies in improving equity and fair decision making at every stage of the system
- **Academics/researchers** — Experts who can assist in case making and explain subjects such as the unique nature of adolescents or the diminishing returns of long sentences to judges, policy makers and others
- **Grantmaking institutions** — Philanthropic entities, including local community foundations, that may be the source of financial or technical support
- **Families of youth involved in the system** — Families can be key allies in helping youth return to the community with guidance and support

### Engaging the Families of System-Involved Youth

Many systems increasingly recognize the importance of effective communications with **the families of system-involved youth**. Public information officers and other communicators might want to consider the following recommendations from Justice for Families, a technical assistance provider whose leaders themselves have had family members in the juvenile justice system.

- Define “family” broadly to include traditional and non-traditional caregivers and other supportive adults. The family and youth should name those who are considered family.
- Supply family guides to introduce family members to the structure, procedures, staff roles and terminology of the juvenile justice system and how they may advocate for and support their children within that system. (Find a sample at [http://www.pachiefprobationofficers.org/docs/Family Guide to PA Juvenile Justice System.pdf](http://www.pachiefprobationofficers.org/docs/Family%20Guide%20to%20PA%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System.pdf))
- If your system has flexible and inclusive family visitation hours and policies, communicate them broadly.







## Identifying Your Goals to Achieve Success

Develop communication strategies in support of policy, program or reform goals. When setting communication goals, you should be able to answer three key questions:

### Who do I want to reach?

Your target audience(s) should be the groups and/or individuals whose beliefs and behaviors you need to change to reach your intended goal. Think about whose support you truly need to be successful in achieving a particular goal. For example, if you are seeking to build a base of support for a community-based detention alternative, community-based organizations may be your first priority.

### What do I want them to do?

When identifying the desired action, be as specific as possible. Avoid broad or vague goals, such as “being aware of juvenile justice reform.”

### What is the timeline for this?

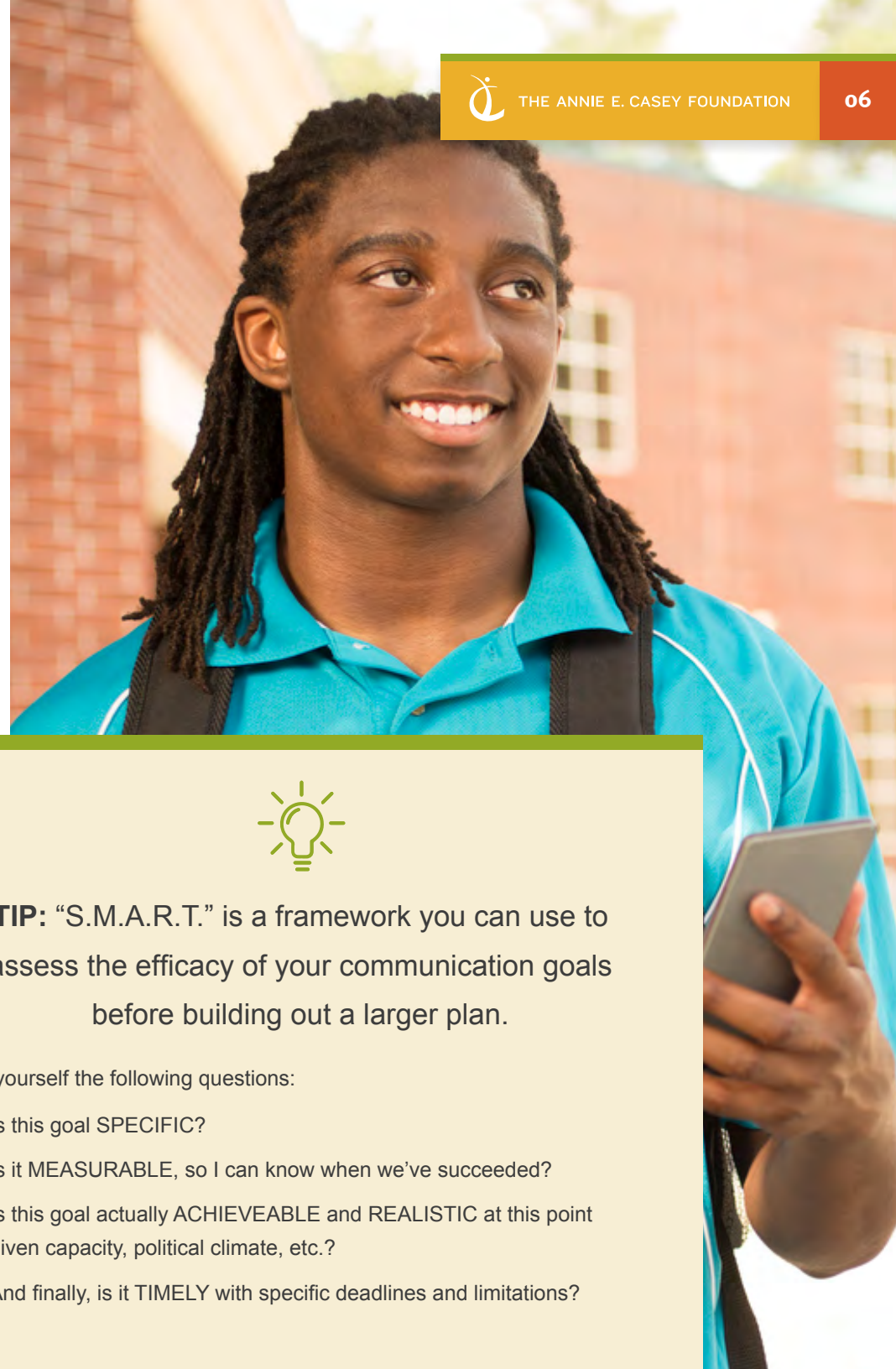
Prioritize the audiences you can realistically reach and activate given the time and resources available.



**TIP:** “S.M.A.R.T.” is a framework you can use to assess the efficacy of your communication goals before building out a larger plan.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this goal SPECIFIC?
- Is it MEASURABLE, so I can know when we've succeeded?
- Is this goal actually ACHIEVEABLE and REALISTIC at this point given capacity, political climate, etc.?
- And finally, is it TIMELY with specific deadlines and limitations?



## Reaching Your Audience

Important questions to ask include:

- What do my target audiences care about? For example: public safety, reducing costs, eliminating disparities?
- Where do they get their information?
- Which arguments and messages resonate best?
- Are there blocks and/or biases to account for?

### Public Opinion Research

Opinion research techniques range from informal discussions to focus groups or large national surveys. For example, this toolkit contains findings from internal interviews, focus groups and a national survey to determine which messages and frames resonate the best with different audience groups. Issue-relevant organizations, think tanks and foundations may have published research, so seek out what information you need to make your case.

### Media Research

For people who have no knowledge of or experience in the juvenile justice system, what they read, see or hear in media might be all they have to go on.

Media coverage of the juvenile justice system is an important window into the messages, arguments and data that your target audience groups regularly encounter. Conducting regular media monitoring and analysis will reveal coverage trends, provide the means to measure your own success in pushing messages to the press and help identify receptive members of the media.

### Using the Field

Fortunately, JDAI provides a natural peer network. Check out JDAIconnect and use it to ask a question or start a discussion with colleagues in other jurisdictions as well as to find resources. The KIDS COUNT Data Center contains reports, data and graphics on child and family well-being that gives you access to charts that show both state-specific and national data points.

## Identifying Your Messengers

Messengers who have past personal experience with the system and make an emotional appeal are seen as most credible. This includes youth and their parents and guardians. For example, opinion research shows that in comparison to whites, African Americans put less trust in corrections officers and more trust in religious leaders.







## ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA





# The Three Tools for Persuasive Communications

Remember three key elements: sound bites, stories and data.

## Sound Bites (••)

**Sound bites** are concise, memorable, very short messages to use and repeat in media interviews. They can be adapted for specific events, media and speaking opportunities. Ensure that they are simple, compelling and “sticky.”

Below are sample juvenile justice sound bites. You can find additional resources in the [Message Bank](#).

- “We can keep the community safer by helping youth who get into trouble stay in school and connected with family.”
- “All youth make mistakes, but we don’t give up on them.”
- “Youth in trouble should be at home with guidance, education and a network of support in their community to get back on track.”



Share a story that illustrates a larger truth about how specific policies or practices contribute to a young person’s success. While you’re lifting up an individual — research shows that lifting up an individual’s story, rather than speaking generally about a large group, evokes more audience empathy — your goal is to demonstrate how the system’s policies or practices benefit young people, not to tout a talented and lucky exception.

## Stories

**Stories** are one of the most effective communications tools that we have at our disposal. When you’re doing media outreach, for instance, lead with the story of one youth’s experience with the juvenile justice system, ideally a success story that shows young people can change and pursue a brighter future.

### Key Elements of a Story

- **Protagonist or Main Character**
  - Who will your audience(s) relate to or be inspired by?
  - Will her/his values or life experiences build support for what it takes to change the odds for kids throughout a system?
- **Challenges**
  - What challenges has she/he gone through?
  - Will those challenges speak to your audiences?
  - What were the system challenges to helping this young person succeed?
- **Transformation**
  - How has the protagonist changed as a result of their journey?
  - How has the system achieved its goals with the policies and practices that helped this young person be successful?
  - How can the world be a better place if we learn from their story?

## Storytelling Best Practices

- **Have a clear message.** Know what you want your target audiences to DO after they hear the story. Whenever possible, pair your story with a call to action so the engagement continues.
- **Determine how the story will illustrate your core messages and reform goals.** Highlight stories where youth have received the support they needed to get back on track.
- **Choose a main character.** When possible, highlight first-person narratives from youth and family involved with the juvenile justice system.
- **Describe how practices and policies contribute to success.** Make sure these practices and policies are explained simply so audiences can quickly understand.
- **Paint a picture.** Adding a few small, descriptive details to a story helps it feel more authentic.
- **Be succinct and clear.** There's no need to tell every single detail in a story. Stick to the elements that make it emotional and help your audience identify with the storyteller. Also, make sure you've scrubbed it clean of any jargon.
- **Be relevant and compelling.** Select stories that are pertinent to your target audiences or connect to trending issues.
- **Lead with stories and punctuate with data.** Don't start with the data, or overwhelm stories with data points, but do have a succinct data point that drives the message home.
- **Use visuals.** When possible, enrich written stories with visuals or audio. Making them multi-media broadens your dissemination options.
- **End with a call to action.** Make clear what you want the audience to do or takeaway from the story.

## Lessons from the field: Balancing storytelling efforts with privacy issues

While stories are powerful tools to demonstrate reform, sourcing these stories often runs up against very real privacy concerns because none of us want to stigmatize a youth or jeopardize his or her future prospects. Here are some of the tactics that public information officers use to safeguard youth privacy when engaging with the media or telling stories themselves:

- Understand the media outlet's policy for identifying youth charged with crimes before providing access. Consider limiting access to outlets that do not use names or that will only use first names of youth. Take photographs in silhouette or in ways that do not depict faces, identifiable tattoos or features.
- Explore audio storytelling mediums like podcasts where youth can share their own story without their image or name appearing.







## Data

**Data and facts** can be important proof points for your stories and sometimes break positive news for you to share. They can be hard to remember, but provide validation. If you do refer to data with the media, try to use facts that are simple and tell the story at a glance — not complicated statistics that require people to do math in their heads. And one or two data points at once is enough; too many competing statistics can muddle the story line.

### **A sample of combining messaging and data below, on youth detention:**

- Whether a youth is held in a detention facility or allowed to remain at home while awaiting a hearing or placement has a big impact on that young person's future. Every year about 300,000 young people are in a youth detention with 20,000, held on any given night. [Substitute local data if available]
- Research shows that the kids who are detained before their hearings are far more likely to end up committed to youth prisons than those kids who were allowed to stay at home. Kids pulled from their families and communities are ultimately less likely to complete high school and find employment, and more likely to face mental health problems.
- Looking at youth detention, it's clear JDAI's efforts are making a positive difference in the lives of young people. Our sites show a 43 percent decrease for all youth detained from before reforms began, with no decrease in public safety. That's thousands of kids given a solid chance to get their lives back on track.
- [In our community, we've kept X more young people from entering the juvenile system by developing effective alternatives to detention. We're proud to help kids, keep our community safe and avoid the overuse of lockup facilities that can hurt rather than rehabilitate youth.]



Before sharing data externally, vet the information with your agency data expert to ensure it is both accurate and helpful to the larger story you seek to tell. Prepare yourself to answer follow-up questions on how specific data points are gathered and measured over time. If you have a choice between several different indicators, lead with the data points which build the strongest case and are the least vulnerable to undermining.

## Spokesperson Preparation and Interview Tips

When prepping for a print, radio or TV interview, review the seven tips below with whomever will be speaking on behalf of the agency to maximize the spokesperson's control of the message and the conversation.

### 1. You Don't Have to Answer Every Question

No one can put words in your mouth but you. If the question helps you, go for it. If the premise of the question is too negative or challenging, simply frame your answer to the question you want to answer. You are in control of what you say.

### 2. Nothing is "Off the Record"

There are no rules that govern this or ensure safety. Don't say anything that you wouldn't want to hear or read on the news.

### 3. Remember Who You're Really Talking To

*(Hint: It's not the reporter.)*

When you're talking, remember the people who will ultimately hear or read what you say: your organization's staff and supporters, elected officials, community leaders and others. The media is a conduit to getting out the message to those you wish to reach.

### 4. Know What You Want to Say First

Before talking to a reporter, think about the most important message people need to hear. Make it simple. If you try to say too much, you'll water down what's most important.

### 5. Repeat and Use "Flagging"

Once you know what the most important thing is to say, look for opportunities to repeat it over and over so there's no chance someone misses it. "Flagging" is using phrases that get people's attention, like "The most important thing is..." or "What people really need to know is..."

### 6. Use "Bridging" to Control the Conversation

You don't have to answer every question. Also, you don't have to accept a question framed against you. Instead, use "bridging" so you can talk about what you want to talk about. "Bridging" is using phrases that help you go to another place, like "What's really important is..." or "The research shows that..."

For example, if a reporter were to pose the question, "What measures need to be put in place to keep communities safe as juvenile offenders are increasingly being released back into their neighborhoods rather than held in facilities?"

This question begins with premise that community-based alternatives are at odds with public safety. Bridging can be used to immediately draw attention to contrary evidence, thereby refusing to answer a question framed against you. A good response would be, "As research has shown, youth being served and supervised in their communities hasn't negatively impacted public safety."

### 7. Don't Talk to Fill the Silence

This is especially true for TV or radio interviews. When you're done making your point, stop. It's normal to be nervous, but chatting can get you in trouble.

### 8. It's Okay to Say "I Don't Know"

Never make something up because you don't know the answer. Reporters don't want to publish information that isn't true. It's better to say you'll find out what the answer is and get back to them or tell them who would know the answer.





## Approaching a Crisis

The best way to avoid a crisis is to be well prepared. Any situation can turn negative or escalate if it's not handled appropriately. That's why it's important to prepare and rehearse in advance — before a situation emerges.

The best defense is a good offense. It's critical that you do not wait until something happens to communicate the progress and challenges of reform to your stakeholders and to the media. Public information officers should engage in year-round efforts which can help set systems up for success:

### Build a base of support among validators

By making your broadest group of stakeholders aware of your agency's direction, you are giving them information they might need if they are asked by a reporter to comment on an incident at your agency. They would be more likely to see a critical incident as an aberration as opposed to a deterrent to a more rehabilitative approach.

### Build your credibility with reporters

It's critical to cultivate relationships with members of the press so they are familiar with you, consider you a credible, responsive source of information and understand the basics of your local JDAI efforts and what they have achieved.

## Know your data and keep current data accessible

Critical incidents might happen outside of normal business hours. Be prepared to respond wherever you are.

## Establish the chain of command for response

While it's not possible to predict the exact circumstances of a crisis, systems should establish protocols for potential crises, including identifying the chain of command for notification, identifying and preparing potential spokespeople and planning for keeping key JDAI stakeholders informed ahead of the press. Depending on the severity of an issue, it may be appropriate for a department official to be the public face of the agency during an incident. Identifying criteria for this in advance will streamline decision making in the midst of a crisis.

As spokespeople for government agencies and proponents of JDAI reform goals, public information officers often find themselves balancing the need to defend or protect “the system” while also communicating the goals of JDAI reform. In times of crisis, this can be an especially delicate balance.

**The following is a short guide your team can use to approach and evaluate communications risks and develop your communications capacity through five distinct phases of risk management and crisis response.**

## PHASE I: PREPARE.

What systems need to be in place before a problem emerges? Lay the groundwork for effectively managing and responding to an expected or unexpected crisis ahead of time.

- Evaluate current capacity to handle a crisis, using knowledge of your work and the field to anticipate what situations could arise and present significant challenges.
- Form a crisis response team and draft a crisis response plan that specifically outlines the communications aspects of a critical incident.
- Update your messages/talking points, focusing on sample crisis responses that can come jointly from the JDAI collaborative.
- Create a plan for keeping key stakeholders informed, including agency staff as well as key staff of other agencies or organizations who are part of the JDAI collaborative.
- Create media lists and protocols.
- Identify and train spokespeople.
- Monitor media coverage and online conversations.

## PHASE II: PREVENT.

How are you going to establish the facts and assess the risks?

- Identify the problem. Keep your eyes and ears open to internal channels of information, along with what is happening in the news media and social media.

- Establish the facts. It is important that the facts are quickly established so that the crisis response team can develop appropriate strategies and adapt the prepared crisis response plan to address the situation at hand.
- Assess the risk. Once a situation has been identified and the facts have been confirmed, it is important to assess its risk.
- Minimize and contain a problem before it escalates into a full-scale crisis.

## PHASE III: ALERT.

Who needs to know early on that a situation is brewing? Follow your plan for alerting the appropriate contacts among your staff, legal, chain of command, spokespeople and key partners so that everyone with a role in implementing the crisis response plan can do so quickly and effectively.

## PHASE IV: RESPOND.

What steps need to be taken to manage the situation?

- Inform stakeholders and address their concerns in your response.
- Issue a coordinated response across multiple media platforms.
- Monitor media so you know what information is circulating, bearing in mind that some of what you are hearing may be incorrect or incomplete. You may need to correct or clarify what is being reported.
- Prepare spokespeople with the latest news and messages.

## PHASE V: IMPROVE.

What lessons should be learned from the experience? Document and communicate key lessons in order to improve crisis response plans and protocols for future situations.





## Crisis Scenario:

### A youth in a community-based diversion program is accused of committing a violent act

While JDAI has safely reduced the use of detention, it is an unfortunate reality that on occasion systems will have to respond to an issue of public safety or violence concerning a diverted youth. What follows is a crisis scenario and guidance on how to approach it from a crisis communications perspective:

*A 17-year old young man was arrested for a non-violent offense. Based on his assessed risk level, he was not detained before his trial and instead required to check in at an evening reporting center. Before his trial date, this youth was arrested and charged with aggravated assault (according to police, he had attempted to pull a woman's purse from her arms and when she resisted, he struck her across the face repeatedly, knocking her down). This time, the youth was detained pending trial for his initial offense as well as the new one. You are in a state where juvenile arrests are public information. You see on Facebook that a local councilmember has posted images of the victim — and her fresh bruises — demanding a crackdown against “young predators who are running amok because the system’s too soft on crime.” The Facebook post has 200 likes within an hour and lots of shares. You anticipate media inquiries will start coming in soon.*

Scenarios like the above can be particularly challenging for systems to respond to because 1) they are unpredictable and 2) response options may be limited at the time of occurrence.

As a professional in the juvenile justice field, you are able to put one incident, even a particularly disturbing or violent one, into perspective and know that it doesn't undermine the larger positive results of the detention alternatives.

However, for an audience just being introduced to the juvenile justice system through one breaking news event, or for a crime reporter, attempts to pivot to a more positive story may come across as evasive or even dismissive of public safety concerns.

Immediately following a violent or critical incident, it's important to:

- Let people know what the current threat level is to public safety
- Keep all stakeholders apprised of the situation and updated on planned responses
- Do not cast blame on key partners; think about how the JDAI collaborative as a collective would respond
- Be clear that all youth are held accountable
- Review your data in anticipation of questions. In this scenario, you could anticipate questions about how often youth who are assessed as low-risk commit violence. You need to get a sense of the data before you can assess how and if to use it.

The best outcome is that this “outrage” doesn't jump from Facebook to the press, but given that the person who posted the item seems to be a vocal and visible opponent of detention reform, it is likely that the media could become involved in the future. You would want to facilitate your agency head and other credible messengers to be proactive with elected officials and other key partners, including communities, about what JDAI does, why objective risk screening makes sense and the effectiveness of alternatives. You would want to get ahead of this vocal and visible opponent by meeting with editorial boards about the progress you are making, submitting op-eds and keeping your potential validators current on compelling talking points about where you are.



## MESSAGING MATTERS





# What Makes a Strong Message?

## Message Tower



### Shared Values

What is this issue about at its core? Frame the issue around a big idea, one that you and your audience share, so that the conversation can begin on common ground. For example, Fairness, Equity, Opportunity.



### Problem/Challenge

What is the barrier to overcome? Ideally, the problem is one that can be understood as a community or public issue. It's important to convey urgency, but not invoke a crisis frame that makes the audience feel as if the challenge is insurmountable.



### Solution

Define the solution from your perspective. Your listeners will be inspired if you can tell them you know what to do. Put your organization and its mission smack in the middle of the solution.



### Ask/Call to Action

What should the audience do? This can be as simple as a call to learn more or visit your website, or as specific as an ask to sign a petition or call an elected official. Asks for financial support also count as a call to action.



### Story Ideas

Using stories to illustrate information and establish empathy is key to persuasive communication. Make it a regular practice to collect and use real stories that make an emotional connection. But remember they need to be brief and uncomplicated.



### Data Points

Select two to three of the most relevant and easy-to-understand data points to complement the message topic. Keep data points clear and simple, just a few numbers at the most.

## Juvenile Justice Message Tower: Example



### Shared Values

Any young person can make bad decisions that get them in trouble with the law but we shouldn't give up on them.



### Challenge

Today's juvenile justice system isn't working because it focuses too much on punishment instead of rehabilitation.



### Solution

We can hold kids accountable but give them the guidance, education, and support they need to get their lives back on track toward a bright future.



### Ask/Call to Action

Find out how the JDAI initiative promotes public safety while finding opportunities for youth in trouble with the law to get a second change.



### Story Ideas

Kyle, a 15-year old, was struggling to control his anger at school. One afternoon, he was arrested for fighting in the school's parking lot. Diverted from detention and placed in a community-based alternative program, Kyle received counseling and was able to stay in and graduate from high school.



### Data Points

When 70 to 80 percent of youth are rearrested within two or three years of being released, it's clear that youth prisons don't work.





Messages are short, clear statements that convey information and emotion, opening the right door to understanding.

## Messaging DO's and DON'Ts

### ✓ Advance

- Short, concise descriptions
- Relatable language
- Positive, inspirational tone
- Demonstration of impact and outcome
- Clear, simple call to action

### ✗ Avoid

- Messages which try to capture everything
- Messages full of Jargon
- Messages which only focus on process
- Messages that ask too much

## Research-Driven Message Development

In 2015, the Annie E. Casey Foundation enlisted the support of expert communications and public opinion research agencies **Fenton** and **Global Strategy Group** to collect objective information on how voters understand the juvenile justice system. Throughout this toolkit, you can see lessons learned from our research. To begin, we gleaned critical takeaways about what the public currently understands, or even misunderstands, about the juvenile justice system and which messages, arguments and data points are most likely to shift public support toward reform.

**In order to be effective messengers for reform, it is critical to first understand your audiences.** Americans of different races, political affiliations and economic means bring varying levels of awareness and differing perspectives to the juvenile justice system. Research and everyday life experience shows us that some arguments or messages resonate more than others, and sometimes this depends on who the audience is. As many of your materials will have more than one audience, it is important to identify which messages translate best across different groups, as well as when and how to appropriately tailor messages to specific audiences.

### System Doesn't Work

The fact that recidivism is so high is the strongest argument that the current juvenile justice system doesn't work well. Americans of all stripes respond strongly to the message that the system needs improvement because it fails to do what they want it to, which is to offer youth the rehabilitation needed to get and stay out of trouble with the law.

### Lens of Race

Our research reveals that African Americans perceive nearly every aspect of the juvenile justice system and youth prisons differently than white Americans do. Perceptions of the system's fairness, concerns over conditions in youth prisons, beliefs about the root causes of the problems and what solutions are best are all impacted by race. This research did not find that the opinions of Latinos, Asians or other minority groups differed greatly from whites, and their opinions did not track with the strong reactions of African Americans.

### Awareness

Awareness of the juvenile justice system is low for many Americans, particularly among whites, Republicans and Independents. Most people's opinions are shaped by what they see in the news and portrayals in popular culture, though African Americans are more likely to draw on personal experiences or those of their friends and families than whites.

### Perceptions of the Juvenile Justice System

Regardless of one's level of familiarity, there is little sense within the public that the juvenile justice system has improved over the last 10 years, with perception of system failure especially acute among African Americans.

There is an opportunity to strengthen support in the key audiences of the public — in fact, it doesn't take much convincing to make people understand the need for system reform. Our research identifies the strongest and weakest arguments to do so (see "Know your Message" section for arguments). Furthermore, by understanding the impact that race has on one's perceptions of the juvenile justice system, you can be more effective when speaking to audiences who are already invested in racial equity.



## Arguments to Use and Lose

Some of these recommendations may surprise JDAI practitioners, but they have proven effective in shaping public opinion.

### To appeal to audiences of mixed races, build an argument based on the concepts of rehabilitation and accountability

Research shows a universal belief that the main purpose of youth prisons should be to rehabilitate youth. The rate of recidivism is the **most compelling data point** for all audiences and should be used to build an argument that alternatives to detention and incarceration are more effective than confinement in protecting communities and changing the trajectories of kids' lives for the better.

At the same time, the public believes in accountability. There is a consistent expectation among the American public that kids need to be held accountable for bad behavior, lest they continue to repeat those actions.

We realize that many juvenile justice experts and experienced system-level professionals believe that the majority of youth who get into trouble would be better served with little to no system exposure or intervention. Nonetheless, we advise that when specifically trying to move public audiences, avoid statements that seem to undermine the basic concept of holding youth accountable.

### Messages for Arguments Based on Rehabilitation and Accountability

- Our juvenile justice system is not working and needs improvement.
- We can reinforce public safety by holding young people accountable and giving them the opportunity for rehabilitation.
- Today's juvenile justice system focuses too much on punishment instead of rehabilitation. We know that sending kids to youth prisons does not rehabilitate them when 70 to 80 percent of youth are rearrested within two or three years of being released. Kids in youth prisons are denied the guidance, education and support network they need to reenter the community and become successful adults.
- The truth is any young person can make bad decisions. Some kids are misguided or troubled and some just find it hard to resist peer pressure. Whatever the cause may be, we have a juvenile justice system that favors kids with more financial resources and disadvantages racial and ethnic minorities. All kids, regardless of their race or financial situation, should face a fair system that advocates for them, not against them.
- We need to stop sending kids to youth prisons and replace incarceration with a better model that strengthens kids and families. There are successful alternatives to youth prisons that hold kids accountable, but also provide them with resources necessary to support their rehabilitation and give them a second chance and new opportunity.



## Language to use and language to lose when talking about improving the juvenile justice system

### What **not** to say

### What **to** say

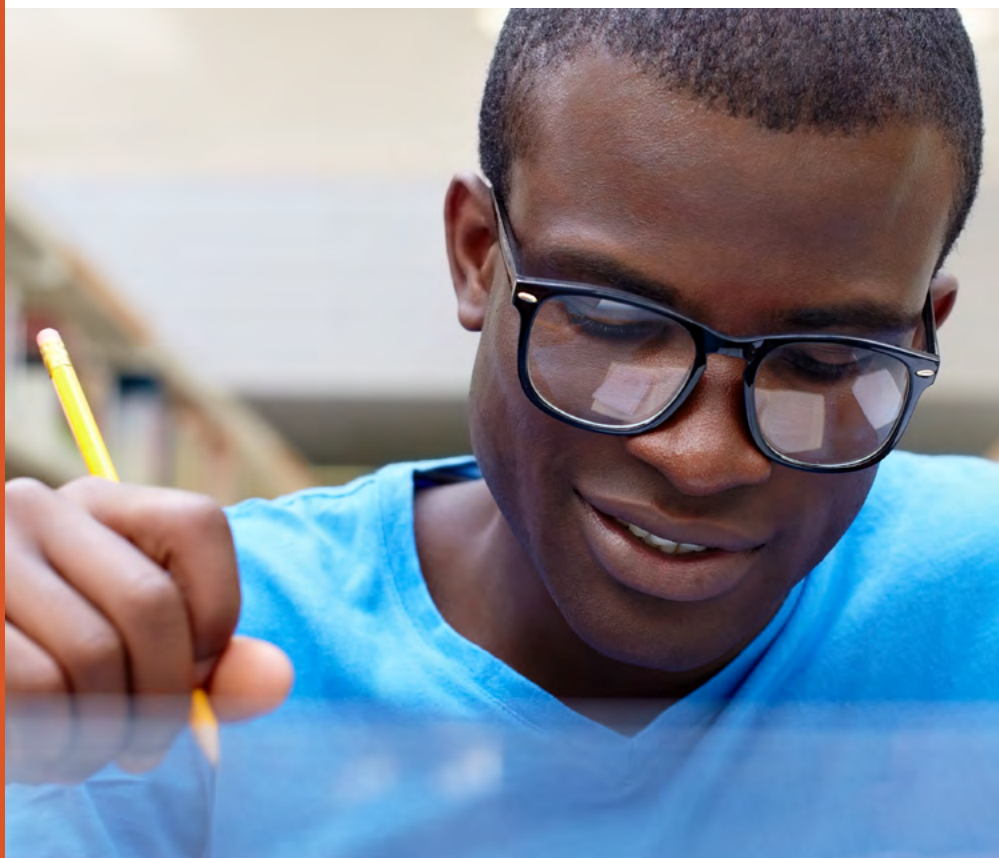
Young people <b>lack impulse control</b>	→	Young people <b>make bad decisions</b>
Young people <b>are defiant</b>	→	Young people <b>are bad at gauging risks and consequences</b>
Young people <b>expreience growing pains</b>	→	Young people <b>find it hard to resist peer pressure</b>
Teach kids a lesson	→	Give kids a second change Give kids a new opportunity
Reform kids	→	Rehabilitate kids
Resources	→	Guidance
Tough love	→	Education
Help	→	Support Network
Assistance	→	
Tools	→	
<b>Update</b> the juvenile justice system	→	<b>Improve</b> the juvenile justice system
<b>Transform</b> the juvenile justice system	→	<b>Reform</b> the juvenile justice system
<b>Fix</b> the juvenile justice system	→	
<b>Change</b> the juvenile justice system	→	
<b>Close</b> youth prisons	→	<b>Stop sending</b> kids to youth prisons





## Race-Specific Messages

African Americans or advocates who are invested in race equity issues are far more attuned to arguments based on the concepts of fairness and justice, which also specifically highlight the system's unequal treatment by race and economic status. When speaking to a public audience primarily made up of people of color and/or race equity advocates, tailor the broader message to also prioritize the concepts of fairness and justice.



## Most effective arguments for African American audiences and/or race equity advocates

### Unequal treatment — economic

The juvenile justice system continues to deny many low-income youth, nationwide, the legal representation to which they are entitled under the Constitution, while those with financial means have stronger legal representation and even avoid entering the system altogether. This only increases the likelihood that low-income youth will both enter the system and end up in youth prisons.

### Unequal treatment — race

At virtually every stage of the juvenile justice process, youth of color — particularly Latinos and African Americans — receive harsher treatment than their white counterparts, even when they enter the justice system with identical charges and histories. More specifically, African-American youth are nearly five times as likely to end up in youth prisons as their white peers, and Latino and American Indian youth are between two and three times as likely to end up there.

### Followed by:

### Success of alternatives

A number of alternatives to youth prisons have consistently improved the likelihood that youth involved in the justice system will go on to finish their education and lead productive lives with no decrease in public safety. These alternatives include helping young people with building family relationships, job training, mentoring programs, and community-based mental health, drug treatment and rehabilitation services. We can redirect young people who get into trouble with the law by providing them with a network of support that enables them to turn themselves around.



## Messaging tailored to emphasize “Fairness” and “Justice”

- Our juvenile justice system is not fair in its treatment of racial and ethnic minorities and needs improvement.
- Harsh punishment rather than rehabilitation works against public safety.
- Even young people in trouble with the law deserve to be treated fairly, and justice for them will ensure they get out of and stay out of trouble.
- Any young person can make bad decisions. Some kids are misguided or troubled and some just find it hard to resist peer pressure, but African Americans receive harsher treatment than their white counterparts. African-American youth are nearly five times as likely to end up in youth prisons as their white peers. All kids, regardless of their race, should face a fair system that advocates for them, not against them.
- Furthermore, our juvenile justice system focuses too much on punishment, instead of rehabilitation. We know that sending kids to youth prisons does not rehabilitate them when 70 to 80 percent of youth are rearrested within two or three years of being released. Kids in youth prisons are denied the guidance, education and support network they need to reenter the community and become successful adults.
- We need to stop sending kids to youth prisons and replace incarceration with a better model that strengthens kids and families. There are successful alternatives to youth prisons that hold kids accountable, but also provide them with resources necessary to support their rehabilitation and give them a second chance and new opportunity.





## Arguments that don't fare as well with the general public

### The Public's Appreciation of Brain Science Arguments

The scientific fields of psychology, neurology, child development and others have produced compelling evidence to help us better understand the young brain. Their findings have influenced field practice and policy. There is evidence that decision makers — judges and policy makers — are influenced and even moved by the body of research that has explained how youth are different. But there is a lag in this information influencing the public. This is well-documented and reinforced by multiple studies that show that the public remains largely unaware, unconvinced and at times even hostile toward arguments that use brain science as evidence. JDAI's peers in related fields — child welfare, foster care, family poverty — face the same challenge. Our research tested two brain development arguments, one focused on brain development and one on impulse control. While the percent of people who found the arguments convincing are not bad, they are far behind the strongest arguments of successful alternatives, unequal treatment and the need for rehabilitation.

### “Decisions” v. Other Influences

The public is quite far apart from field experts in their appreciation of what motivates youth to get in trouble and take risks. The public is convinced that youth make “bad decisions” and that's why they wind up in the system. Some in the field believe that youth don't “think” at all; rather, they act on impulse, respond to peer pressure and have trouble with self-regulation. The data show that people are mixed on this. They think and talk about things like “impulse control” differently than the field experts. The public is more likely to believe that “kids do stupid things” and lack a supportive network to prevent them from making bad choices. It is important, however, to appreciate the differences between whites and African Americans, the latter of whom are more cognizant of social and environmental factors when it comes to why youth get into trouble.



## JDAI Message Bank

The following set of messages will serve as a foundation for communicating about JDAI at large, including its core values, challenges and calls to action.

### Basic Facts/Stats on State of Juvenile Justice

- Many Americans are misinformed or unaware that crime committed by youth is down by half over the last two decades.
- We are making progress. Public safety has increased while detention and incarceration of youth has decreased.
- Even with progress, the system is still failing kids. On any given day, about 50,000 youth are in secure confinement, but 62 percent of them have not committed serious or violent crimes.<sup>1</sup>
- We know that sending kids to youth prisons does not rehabilitate them when 70 to 80 percent of youth are rearrested within two or three years of being released.
- Our system advantages white youth and is unfair to black and brown youth. African-American youth are nearly five times as likely to end up in youth correctional facilities as their white peers.

### Introducing JDAI

- The JDAI network is a powerful platform for juvenile justice reform. The work of JDAI is urgent because despite our progress, too many youths are harmed and treated unfairly.
- For 25 years the JDAI network has been growing to serve 10 million youth across 39 states and 250 counties, including Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup>

- Today's juvenile justice system focuses too much on punishment instead of rehabilitation. JDAI demonstrates that communities can both increase public safety and reduce the harmful practice of incarcerating young people.
- Achieving greater equity and outcomes for youth of color in the juvenile justice system is a priority of the JDAI network.

### Key Challenges

- When youth get into trouble with the law, they face a system that favors kids with more financial resources and disadvantages racial and ethnic minorities.
- In spite of progress, we still are confining too many kids in detention, youth prisons and out-of-home placements.
- Harsh punitive policies don't help youth change or make the public safer. If anything, youth placed in prison-like facilities are more likely to re-offend upon their release than their peers who avoided out-of-home placements.
- Isolating kids from their families and communities using confinement and probation has been proven not to work. We shouldn't separate kids from the support they need to get back on track.
- An estimated 200,000 youth are tried, sentenced or incarcerated as adults every year across the U.S.<sup>3</sup> According to decades of research, youth who are transferred from the juvenile court system to the adult criminal system are more likely to be re-arrested for a crime.
- The use of solitary confinement has long-lasting and devastating effects on youth, including trauma, psychosis, depression, anxiety and increased risk of suicide and self-harm.<sup>4</sup> Many youth in solitary do not receive appropriate education, mental health services or drug treatment.



## Progress

- Sites in the JDAI network have made a real difference in the lives of young people, their families and their communities by reducing detention by around 43 percent since their baseline year.
- JDAI has saved taxpayers by helping communities spend less to build and operate facilities that don't work and hurt kids.
- More than 50 JDAI sites have closed detention units or whole facilities as a result of reducing demand, saving roughly \$143.5 million per year.<sup>5</sup>
- The JDAI initiative is working with sites' local leadership to take on Disproportionate Minority Confinement (youth of color are detained at over three times the rate of white youth)

## Youth Prisons

Field leaders Patrick McCarthy, President and CEO of the Casey Foundation and Vinny Schiraldi, Senior Research Fellow directing the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard Kennedy School have stated<sup>6</sup>:

- Every youth prison in the country should be closed and replaced with a better model.
- Youth prisons don't work. They hurt kids, and there's a better way.
- Youth in trouble are best served at home with guidance and support. For the few young people who need to be removed from home, we should provide small, homelike facilities near their families.
- Putting youth in prison does not increase public safety and it doesn't help youth in trouble.
- Youth in trouble need education, guidance and a network of support in their community to get back on track.

## Calls to Action Messages

- **Youth prisons are no place for kids.** Locking up youth has high costs and negative outcomes.
- **We can do better.** Closing youth prisons will enable reinvestment in more effective community-based alternatives to incarceration, and small, homelike secure facilities.
- **Change is possible.** Change at scale in closing youth prisons is possible without compromising public safety — several states have done so or are on their way.
- **Most Americans are with us.** People strongly favor rehabilitation, community-based programs and family supports over incarceration and youth prisons.

- 1 McCarthy, P., Schiraldi, V. and Shark, M. (2016, October 21). The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model. Harvard Kennedy School and National Institute of Justice.
- 2 The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014, June 2). Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Progress Report 2014. Baltimore, MD: Author.
- 3 National Juvenile Justice Network. <http://www.njjn.org/about-us/keep-youth-out-of-adult-prisons>.
- 4 American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch. (2012). Growing Up Locked Down: Youth in Solitary Confinement in Jails and Prisons Across the Country.
- 5 The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014, June 2). Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Progress Report 2014. Baltimore, MD: Author.
- 6 McCarthy, P., Schiraldi, V. and Shark, M. (2016, October 21). The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model. Harvard Kennedy School and National Institute of Justice.





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