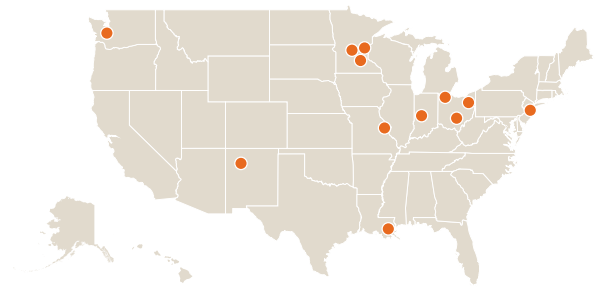# EVALUATING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE JUVENILE PLACEMENTS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation funded an evaluation of its juvenile justice deep-end reform to document what worked well, what could be improved and what others could learn from the effort. Deep end describes the range of residential institutions to which young people are sent as a consequence of delinquency, status offenses or technical violations of probation.

ABOUT THE STUDY

During the evaluation period, **12 communities across the United States pursued strategies to safely reduce incarceration and other out-of-home placements for young people, especially youth of color,** and move juvenile justice systems toward equity. These sites received grants and customized technical assistance from the Foundation to improve probation practices, enhance decision making, expand diversion and service options and increase youth and family engagement. Researchers from the Urban Institute and Mathematica collaborated on the evaluation, working closely with Foundation staff to develop and answer questions about the reform using interviews and surveys collected from sites.

STUDY SITES

KEY FINDINGS

Across the sites, four characteristics emerged as important to implementing reform:

- Leaders in a position of power who were committed to reform
- Strong community partnerships
- Buy-in from staff, partners and related organizations
- Substantial capacity to analyze and collect data

Challenges included:

- Changing system culture
- Forming new partnerships with community
- Collecting and analyzing data

Staff and partners identified five primary benefits to the work:

- Focusing more strongly on juvenile justice practices, especially on racial and ethnic equity and engaging youth, families and communities
- Greater use of data to drive reductions in placements and racial disparities
- Identifying resources, including local funding to sustain reform efforts
- Reducing placements and safely meeting the needs of youth and families in the community
- Receiving skills and tools

LESSONS

1 Complex system improvement requires many partners with a common purpose and defined activities.

2 Receiving external technical assistance — for example, seeking input from a community organization or obtaining a facilitator for convenings — can advance reforms.

3 Collaborating across sites, which provided opportunities for learning among peers, helped sites pursue and adapt their strategies.

To read evaluation reports about the juvenile justice deep-end effort, visit aecf.org