

RESEARCH REPORT

Keeping Youth Out of the Deep End of the Juvenile Justice System

A Developmental Evaluation Overview of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Deep-End Reform

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The Urban Institute and Mathematica collaborated on the evaluation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s deep-end reform. Project staff from both organizations contributed to the research underlying this report.

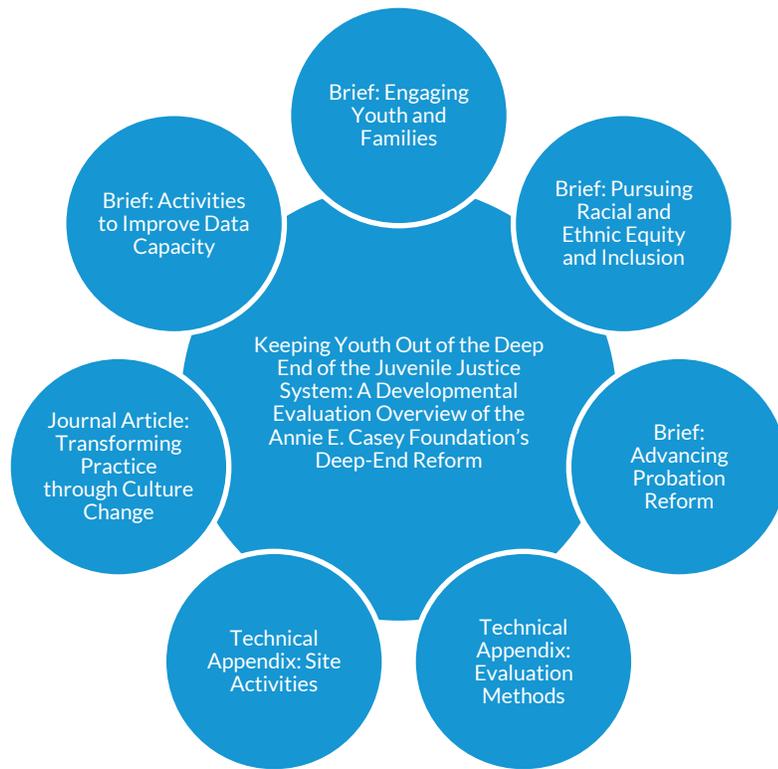
Executive Summary

Funded and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (the Foundation), several communities across the US have undertaken deep-end reform designed to safely and significantly reduce juvenile out-of-home placement, especially for youth of color. From 2013 through 2018, the Foundation funded a developmental evaluation of this reform to better understand what worked well, what could be improved, and lessons for the field. During the evaluation period, 12 local jurisdictions across the US pursued deep-end reform, receiving grants and tailored, technical assistance from the Foundation. They pursued a range of deep-end reform activities including improving probation practices, enhancing decisionmaking throughout the juvenile justice (JJ) system, expanding diversion and service options, and increasing youth and family engagement.

The Foundation funded a six-year evaluation to understand what worked well and what could be improved and to identify lessons for the field. Researchers from the Urban Institute and Mathematica collaborated on the evaluation and worked closely with Foundation staff to develop and answer questions about the reform using a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data collection approach. The Foundation began deep-end reform knowing the work would evolve, and it wanted the evaluation to inform and strengthen the reform, track the changes it effected, and document sites' successes and challenges.

The evaluation team documented its findings in this summary report, four briefs (one each on improving data capacity, advancing probation reform, engaging youth and families, and pursuing racial and ethnic equity and inclusion), a journal article (published in *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*) on transforming juvenile probation through culture change, and technical appendixes documenting sites' deep-end reform activities and describing the evaluation's methods (figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Documents with Findings from the Deep-End Evaluation



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The evaluation produced the following key findings:

- The communities that engaged in deep-end reform conducted multiple activities to reduce out-of-home placements and improve racial and ethnic equity and inclusion in their juvenile justice practices.
 - » Diversion (both before and after adjudication) was an important component of the work that sites pursued.
 - » Probation-specific activities addressed three core areas: (1) improving or expanding case planning (such as through teaming or case reviews); (2) expanding services (for example, diversion activities or wraparound services); and (3) establishing standard processes (as with probation agreements or early termination).
 - » In addition to activities addressing youth's specific needs, many sites pursued broad activities to improve the capacity of the JJ system (such as developing resource directories or training probation staff) or engage youth and families (such as providing information or developing family councils).

- Most probation staff report always or very often focusing on youth's strengths and assets to motivate change. This focus includes working closely with their parents and caregivers to achieve desired outcomes, individualizing service plans based on their unique needs, and talking directly to youth about their probation terms and conditions. From 2016 and 2018, probation staff in sites implementing deep-end reforms reported more frequent use of practices and principles addressing community engagement and racial and ethnic equity and inclusion.
- Although sites shared no single characteristic that appeared linked to the success of deep-end activities, five particular characteristics were common and were therefore considered assets to implementing reform: (1) deep-end reform leaders with positional power, (2) deep-end reform leaders committed to reform, (3) strong community partnerships, (4) stakeholder and site staff buy-in, and (5) substantial data capacity.
- The evaluation yielded two lessons about engaging youth and families. First, involving youth and families at the individual level (for example, including them in case planning) might be less difficult than engaging them at the system level (such as on a family council to advise JJ leaders). Second, external resources (such as technical assistance and collaborations with community organizations) can facilitate activities related to youth and family engagement.
- Racial and ethnic equity and inclusion does not have a one-size-fits-all approach; stakeholders must consider their unique challenges and opportunities and apply strategies that fit their needs. Collaborating with youth, families, community members, and organizations outside the JJ system is essential for advancing equity and inclusion goals.
- Sustaining changes to deep-end policy and practice related to probation required buy-in from frontline probation staff and a shared understanding of the purposes of probation. Almost every site engaged in discussions to understand deep-end staff and stakeholders' views about the purposes of probation through technical assistance that the Foundation sponsored.
- Certain key factors can help a jurisdiction use data to inform its reforms and decisions. These factors include staff buy-in, expertise in analytical methods and the JJ system, staff capacity to gather data, data collection system capacity, and cross-system coordination and information sharing.
- When asked about the benefits of participating in deep-end work, stakeholders identified overarching examples across five categories: (1) focusing more strongly on JJ practices, especially on understanding and addressing racial and ethnic disparities and on engaging youth,

families, and communities; (2) using data more to drive reductions in placements and racial disparities; (3) leveraging additional resources, such as finding additional funding to sustain reform efforts; (4) reducing out-of-home placements and safely meeting the needs of youth and families in the community; and (5) benefiting from training and technical assistance and learning about elements of the deep-end vision and key activities.

- As with many complex initiatives, deep-end reform involves challenges. Culture change, particularly toward addressing racial disparities and increasing inclusion, can be difficult to achieve at all levels of the JJ system. Partnerships, particularly with community organizations and youth and families, can require significant time, energy, and dollars to be successful. Multiple sites struggled with collecting and analyzing the data needed for reforms. Though stakeholders often overcame these challenges, doing so was not easy, even with a committed team and Foundation assistance.

Errata

This report was updated on September 21, 2020. “St. Louis County, Missouri” was corrected to “St. Louis City, Missouri” in figure 5 on page 9.

Keeping Youth Out of the Deep End of the Justice System

Funded and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (the Foundation), several communities across the US have undertaken deep-end reform designed to safely and significantly reduce juvenile out-of-home placement, especially for youth of color. This reform complements and extends the Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative® (JDAI®). Because youth of color are disproportionately involved in the juvenile justice (JJ) system, the Foundation also aims to advance racial and ethnic equity and inclusion in all aspects of JJ decisionmaking and outcomes. To achieve these goals, deep-end reform activities include improved probation practices, better decisionmaking throughout the JJ system, expanded diversion and service options, and increased youth and family engagement. The communities that pursued deep-end reform, which we refer to in this report as "sites," received grants and tailored, site-specific technical assistance from the Foundation. Some sites began the reform in 2013, and an evaluation began the following year.

This report is intended to inform JJ leadership and stakeholders about what they might expect should they choose to pursue similar objectives and activities for deep-end reform. Funders, state and local policymakers, and advocates might also benefit from learning about the Foundation's reform development and sites' experiences implementing it. Finally, researchers might be interested in the approach we used to evaluate the deep-end reform and in the associated findings.

Why and How Was the Deep-End Reform Evaluated?

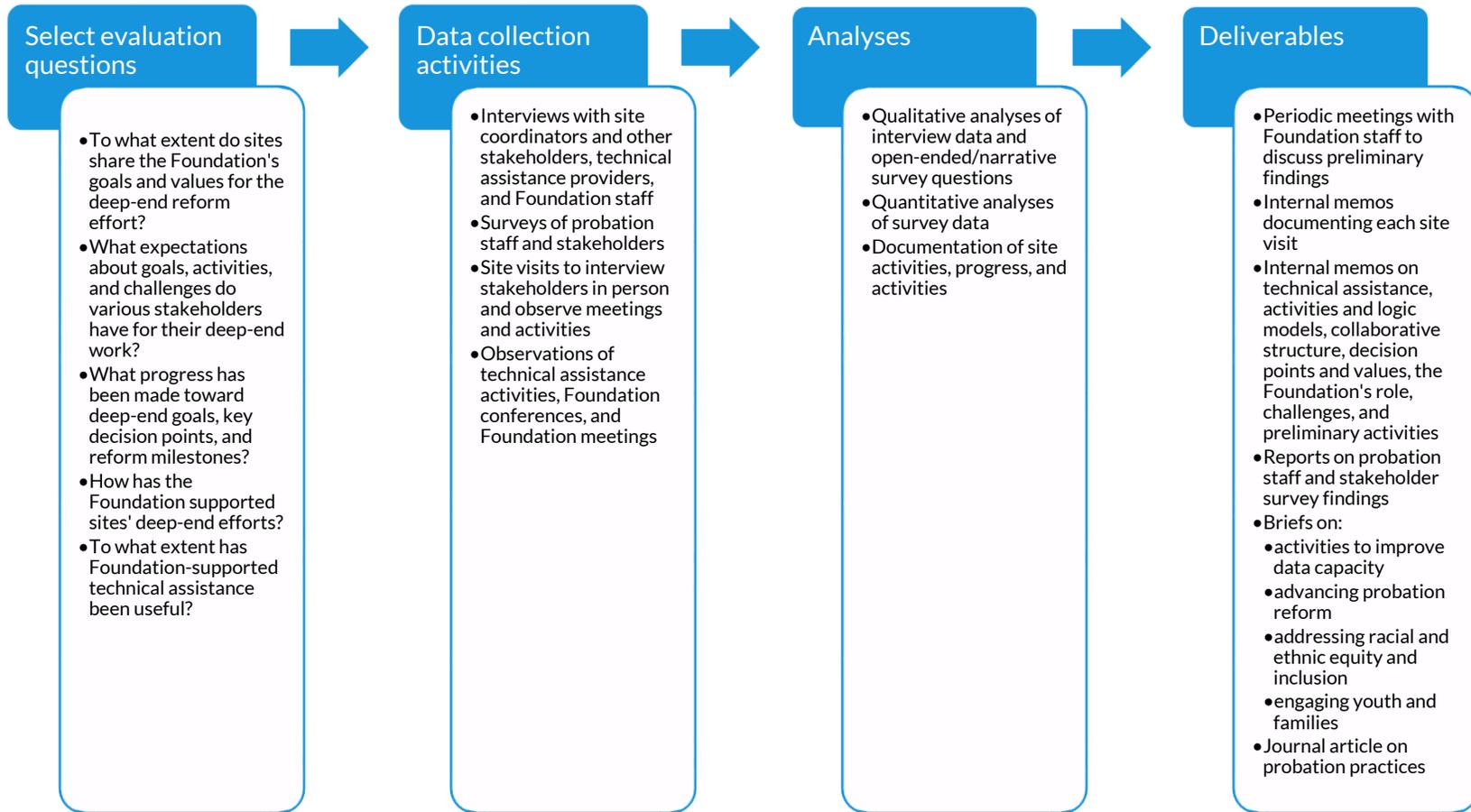
From 2013 through 2018, the Foundation funded a developmental evaluation of its deep-end reform to better understand what worked well, what could be improved, and lessons for the field. Researchers from the Urban Institute and Mathematica collaborated on the evaluation and worked closely with Foundation staff to develop and answer questions about the reform. The Foundation began deep-end reform knowing the work would evolve; it wanted information from the evaluation to strengthen the reform, track the changes it yielded, and document sites' successes and challenges. The Foundation asked the researchers to conduct a developmental evaluation, meaning it was not intended to assess youth outcomes or impacts resulting from sites' involvement. Rather, it focused on the strategies, processes, and progress associated with site implementation (and with the Foundation's involvement) as reported by Foundation staff and deep-end stakeholders (e.g., staff from probation, courts, and

partner organizations). This approach had the advantage of helping the Foundation understand and develop strategies for an iterative process. However, one of the evaluation's limitations is that it does not assess whether the strategies implemented by sites had impacts (that is, whether they caused changes in youth JJ involvement).

Figure 2 provides an overview of the evaluation's components, appendix A provides more details about the evaluation design and data collection activities, and appendix B lists the study's evaluation questions.

FIGURE 2

Overview of the Developmental Evaluation of the Foundation’s Deep-End Reform



What Is the Purpose of This Report and What Does It Include?

This report provides an overview of the Foundation’s deep-end reform and the findings from Urban’s and Mathematica’s evaluation. It offers a high-level view of the Foundation’s activities related to the reform, the activities sites developed and implemented, and the successes and challenges that the Foundation and sites encountered. First, we document the road map to deep-end reform that the Foundation uses as a framework to conceptualize decision points where the JJ system can prevent youth moving from delinquency to out-of-home placement. We then describe site activities related to work with preadjudication and postadjudication youth, along with systemwide supports that might be indirectly related to out-of-home placement. We conclude with sections on the conditions that might support and sustain reform, as well as stakeholders’ perspectives on how they benefited from deep-end reform and their advice for jurisdictions considering reform. Throughout this report, we include links to four companion briefs that describe in greater depth the pillars of deep-end reform: [activities to improve data capacity](#), [advancing probation reform](#), [pursuing racial and ethnic equity and inclusion](#), and [engaging youth and families](#). We also developed lists of site activities (available in [appendix C](#)); these lists represent activities implemented by sites and observed through evaluation data collection activities and are not exhaustive of all activities sites might have pursued.

The Foundation’s Approach to Pursuing Deep-End Reform

Understanding the broader context and the components of deep-end reform helps contextualize the work sites accomplished and other evaluation findings. In this section, we describe deep-end reform in the context of the Foundation’s approach to JJ systems reform and present three core aspects of the reform (equity and inclusion, using data to inform activities and progress, and youth and family engagement), along with the visual model the Foundation developed for it. Then, we describe the sites that pursued deep-end reform and the Foundation’s role in its work with them.

The Foundation's Deep-End Reform Extends Its Existing JJ Reform

The Foundation's deep-end reform extends its JDAI work, which it began in the 1990s and has implemented in more than 300 sites across the US (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2014). The Foundation's goal with JDAI is to reduce the number of youth detained and to avoid the long-term consequences of youth's further involvement in the JJ and adult criminal justice systems. In particular, JDAI seeks to affect equity and inclusion because youth of color are more likely to be placed in detention facilities than white youth. The Foundation assists jurisdictions by providing them access to technical assistance, training, conferences, practice guides, tools, and online groups. Its model emphasizes collaboration among key JJ stakeholders, along with the use of data to inform the development and oversight of policy, practice, and programs. Specific activities for JDAI include objective screening tools, alternatives to detention, and changes to case processing and court policies, as well as activities to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities and maintain safe and humane conditions of confinement in juvenile detention facilities. As of 2018, JDAI had achieved a 57 percent reduction in admissions to detention and a 50 percent reduction in the average daily population in detention facilities among participating sites (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2020).

Deep-end reform incorporates the same principles and practices that are part of JDAI and is intended to address the deep end of the JJ system.¹ In particular, deep-end reform focuses on activities that prevent youth, especially youth of color, from being placed outside the home, activities that often involve diversion or address youth who have been adjudicated. Initially, the Foundation proposed five goals for deep-end reform: (1) significant reduction of reliance on out-of-home placements, (2) safe and healthy adolescent development, (3) elimination of racial and ethnic disparities, (4) safe communities, and (5) sustained commitment to JDAI reforms.² Though it has not abandoned these goals, the Foundation has narrowed its focus to safely and significantly reduce confinement, especially for youth of color (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2020).

Similar to JDAI jurisdictions, the Foundation provided various supports to stakeholders in sites that pursued deep-end reform. These supports included the following:

- grants to offset conference travel, support data reporting requirements, and fund stakeholder meetings and activities to gather direct input from young people and families with system experience
- technical assistance from Foundation staff on partnerships, decisions, and implementation
- training on specific topics delivered by Foundation staff and other technical assistance providers

- cross-site collaboration activities through conferences, websites, and conference calls
- electronic resources on various topics to inform stakeholder decisions on deep-end reform activities

BOX 1

Additional Foundation Resources for JDAI and Deep-End Reform

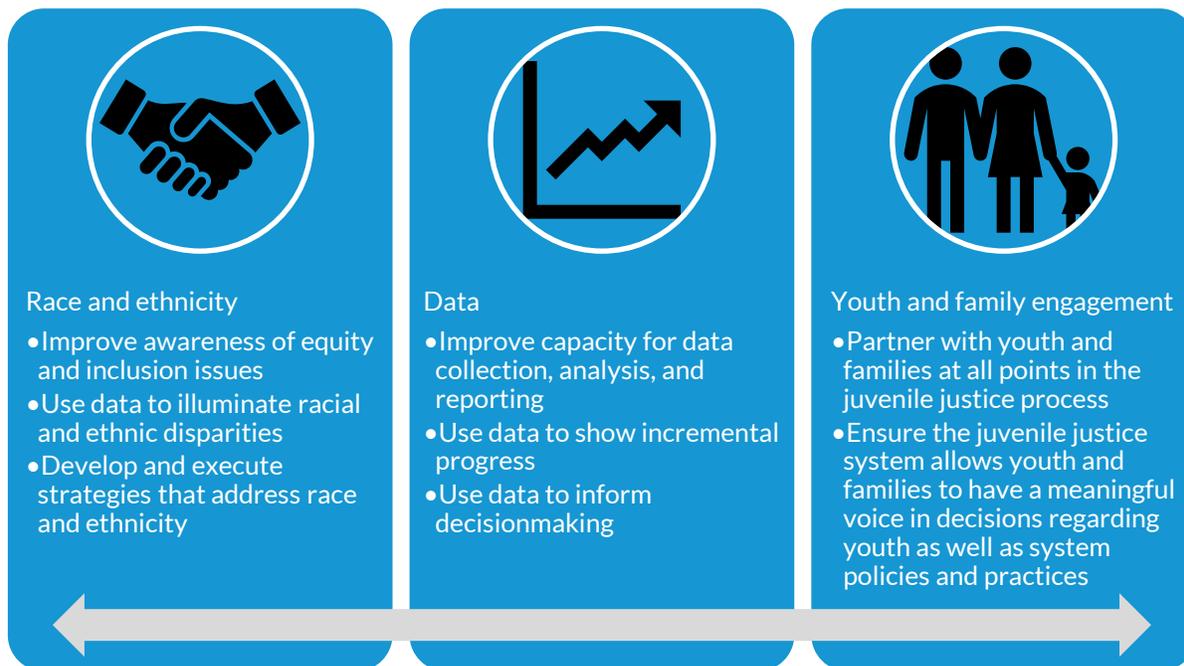
- This webpage provides documentation on JDAI: <https://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai/>.
- This report describes deep-end reform activities and sites: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/leading-with-race-to-reimagine-youth-justice/>
- A [deep-end toolkit](#) and a [resource guide](#) provide documents, tools, and references on topics such as data, collaboration, and probation practices.
- A virtual resource, JDAIconnect, can help reformers connect and access resources: <https://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai/jdaiconnect/>.
- [Resources on race and ethnic equity and inclusion, including a guide to action, webinars, tools, and best practices](#), can help jurisdictions improve in these areas.

The Foundation's Vision of the Three Fundamental Aspects of Deep-End Reform

As described in the previous section, deep-end reform incorporates multiple elements and values. However, as the reform evolved, the Foundation identified three aspects as being more fundamental: an emphasis on race and ethnicity, the use of data to inform activities and progress, and engagement of youth and families (figure 3). This change reflected the Foundation's broader activities as well as what Foundation staff learned through their work with the sites. We feature each aspect later in this report and as separate briefs.

FIGURE 3

Fundamental Aspects of Deep-End Reform



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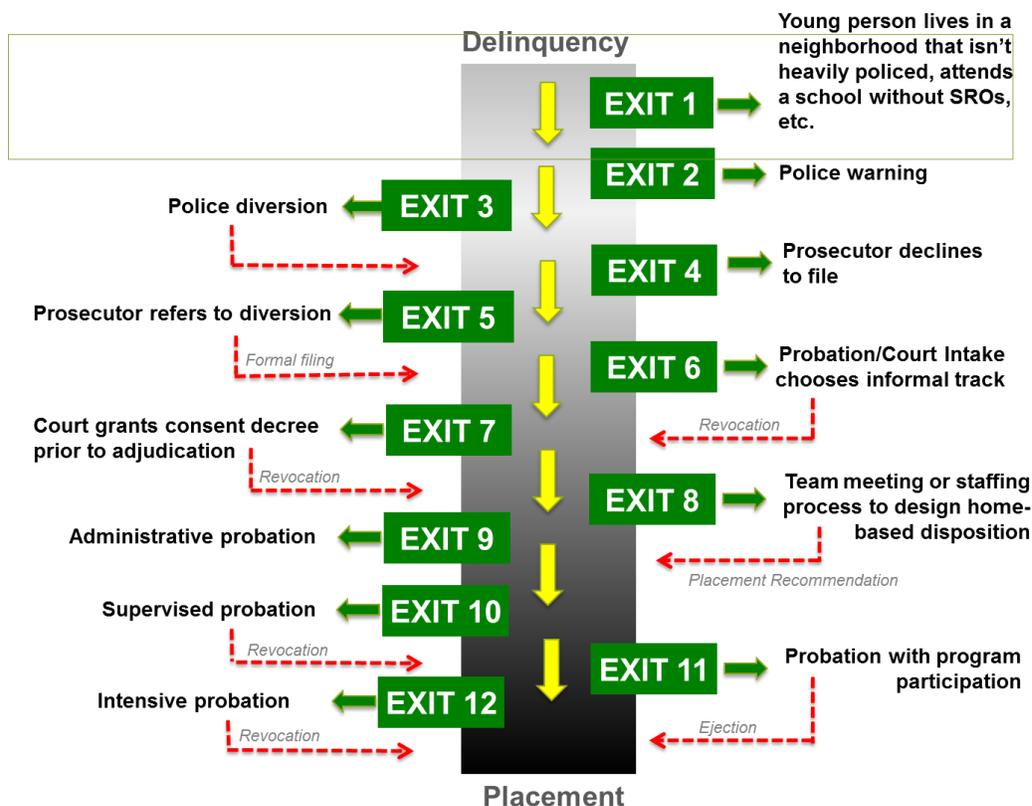
The Foundation Developed a Visual Aid to Conceptualize and Plan Deep-End Reform Activities

The Foundation developed a visual aid to conceptualize its deep-end reform. The deep-end highway, discussed in the Foundation’s report on the deep end (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2020) and presented in figure 4, identifies decision points as exit ramps where the JJ system can prevent youth from being moved to out-of-home placements, with 12 primary exit ramps representing opportunities for specific activities. As the highway’s shade deepens, racial and ethnic disparities grow as youth encounter decision points deeper in the JJ system. Sites were encouraged to tailor the highway model to local contexts for reform efforts.

We leveraged this highway model for the evaluation to categorize sites’ activities. We delineate the highway exits into two groups: preadjudication exits (exits 1 through 7) and postadjudication exits (exits 8 through 12). Not all site activities were associated with specific exits; some activities provided systemwide supports for youth and families or for the JJ system. We label these activities as streetlights along the deep-end highway.

FIGURE 4

The Foundation’s “Deep-End Highway” from Delinquency to Placement



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Source: *Leading with Race to Reimagine Youth Justice* (Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020)

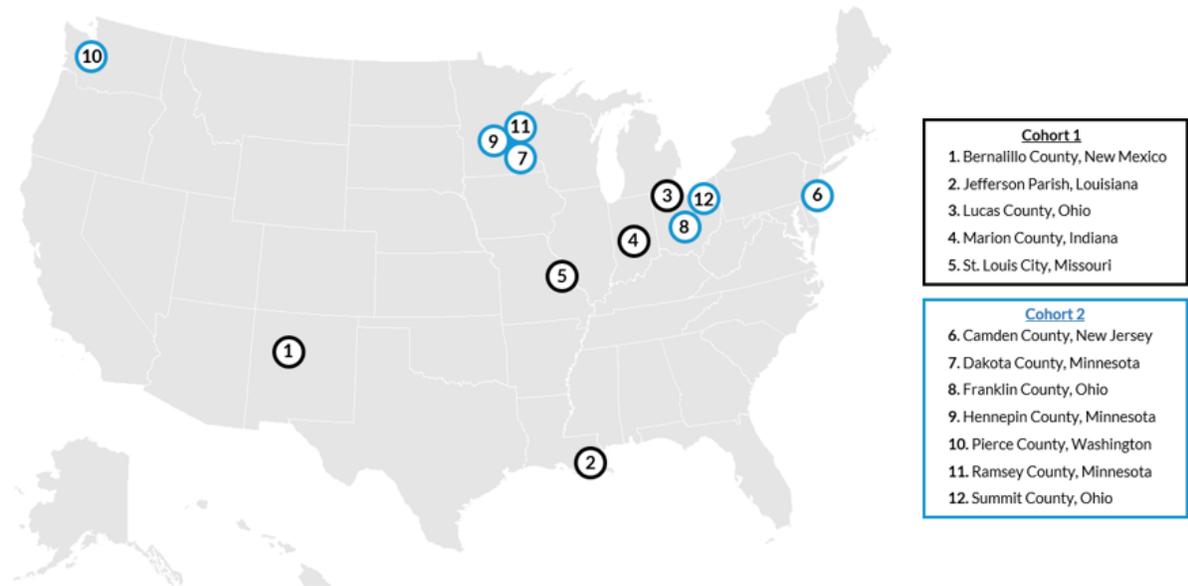
Note: SROs=School Resource Officers.

The Evaluation Tracked Twelve Sites That Engaged in Deep-End Reform

At the time of this writing, the Foundation had selected 14 sites with successful JDAI reforms to pilot deep-end reform and test the level and type of technical assistance needed. The evaluation included 12 of these sites in two cohorts (figure 5). Cohort one comprised 5 sites that began work in 2013, and cohort two comprised 7 sites that started in 2015. In 2017, 2 sites (Dakota County, Minnesota, and Franklin County, Ohio) became deep-end network sites, meaning they continued pursuing deep-end activities but did not receive funding or technical assistance from the Foundation. In 2018, one site (Jefferson Parish, Louisiana) discontinued its involvement in JDAI and the deep-end reforms. All 12 sites participated in the evaluation surveys of probation staff and broader site stakeholder groups, and 9 participated in the qualitative portions of the evaluation (including phone and in-person interviews) through the end of the evaluation data collection period (summer 2018). [Appendix A](#) provides details

about the sites that participated in each data collection activity. One deep-end site discontinued its participation in the work early in the evaluation process and so was not included in any of the evaluation’s data collection activities. Another site initiated its work with the Foundation in 2019 and did not participate in the evaluation because of this timing.

FIGURE 5
The Evaluation Included 12 US Sites That Pursued Deep-End Reform



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The evaluation found that stakeholders who pursued deep-end reform cited the following three primary reasons for doing so:

- **Prior positive experience with JDAI.** Each site was interested in deep-end reform because it had benefited from JDAI and had progressed toward its detention reform goals.
- **A desire to work with the Foundation and receive technical assistance and resources to support reform efforts.** Stakeholders had high regard for the Foundation and were interested in learning about new perspectives and best practices they could apply to JJ work.
- **A mission to reduce out-of-home placements.** Stakeholders reported an interest in developing strategies to keep youth from being placed outside the home because of contact with the JJ system.

Every site developed partnerships of organizations and agencies in each of its localities to implement the deep-end reform activities (box 2). Each site had a local site coordinator for deep-end

reform, who typically also performed the JDAI coordinator role. Sites also received support from a JJ expert (the “deep-end team leader”) funded by the Foundation to provide technical assistance. The Foundation expected that stakeholders in sites undertaking deep-end reform would identify their specific goals related to the reform, develop work plans outlining activities to achieve those goals, implement those activities, and sustain the ones that the site found meaningful.

BOX 2

Developing Partnerships among Stakeholders within Sites

Deep-end reform requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Depending on state and local contexts, each site drew from the stakeholder types that follow to develop a partnership of JJ organizations and agencies to work on deep-end goals and activities:

- community-based organizations and people representing the communities most affected by the JJ system
- community-based service providers
- court
- detention facilities
- law enforcement
- placement facilities
- probation agencies
- prosecution
- public defense
- schools
- social services/child welfare

The involvement of multiple stakeholders, paired with complex goals involving system change, required **strong leadership** to guide reform activities, **dedicated staff** to coordinate deep-end work and manage interagency partnerships, **committees and workgroups** to tackle specific projects, and **regular meetings** to inform stakeholders about goals, activities, and progress and to make decisions and obtain consensus related to reform.

The Foundation Had Multiple Roles in Its Work with Sites

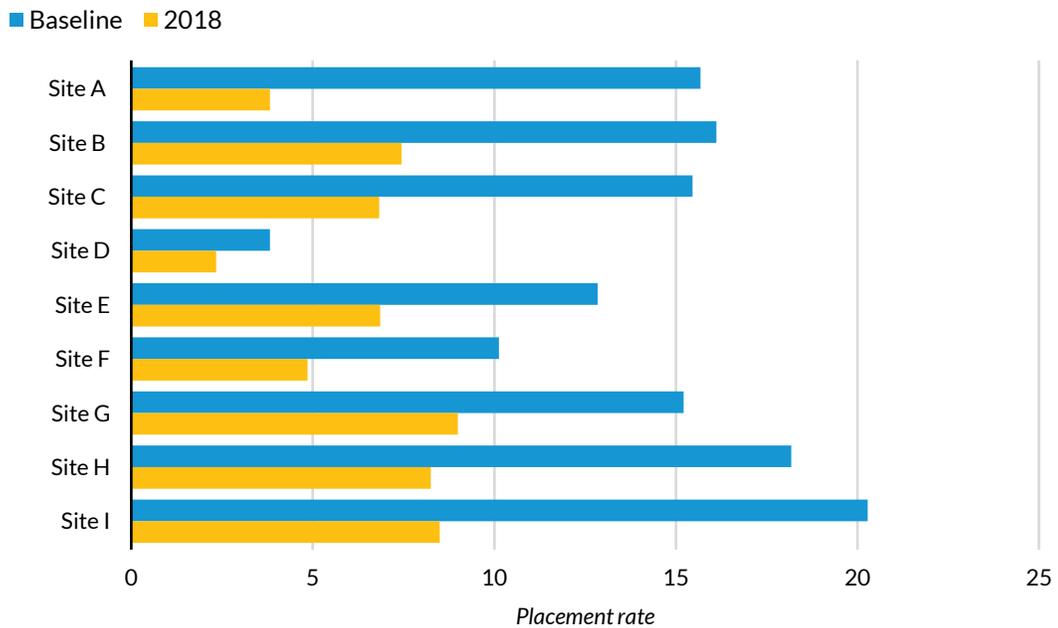
Throughout its work, the Foundation sought to define a clear yet flexible deep-end reform approach for sites, tailor that approach to each site, and build sustainable site capacity for reform. These goals required that Foundation staff conduct—directly or indirectly—numerous activities to promote the work in sites. Their main roles included the following:

- **Provide individualized guidance and technical assistance to sites.** Foundation staff and (as the reform progressed) the deep-end team leader assigned to each site worked to engage stakeholders who would decide on and lead complex activities. Each deep-end team leader (a consultant paid by the Foundation) served as a liaison between the Foundation and their site. This assistance expanded the capacities of stakeholders whose experience and knowledge of JJ reform varied. In addition, the Foundation contracted with external organizations with proficiency in specific areas to provide sites technical assistance on targeted activities. Examples of individualized technical assistance include improving community engagement, developing structured decision matrices, and training probation staff on case planning.
- **Promote communication and collaboration.** One deep-end team leader conducted monthly (and later, bimonthly) calls with all site coordinators to share information about specific topics and discuss sites' progress on their activities. The Foundation also held conferences that convened multiple stakeholders from each site. Site respondents reported appreciating these opportunities to galvanize energy and buy-in among staff from partner agencies regarding deep-end reform, and to learn about promising practices from other sites.
- **Develop tools and resources.** The Foundation developed tools, such as the [resource guide](#) and [toolkit](#) (see box 1); a system-assessment process undertaken at the beginning of each site's deep-end reform (this process involved conversations with multiple stakeholders—including youth and family—involved in the local JJ system and baseline data analyses examining rates of out-of-home placements by race and ethnicity); and an overview of activities to improve probation practices. These tools were based on emerging best practices and were designed to apply to multiple sites.
- **Collect and review data from the sites.** An important aspect of the Foundation's work with sites involved collecting and analyzing data to inform deep-end reform. This work included support to produce dispositional datasets and calculate quantitative statistics such as rates of diversion, probation violations, and out-of-home placements disaggregated by race, ethnicity,

and gender. The reform required performance metrics, with site staff tracking statistics and identifying progress and potential challenges.

- » To illustrate the Foundation’s data-related efforts, figures 6 and 7 show its analysis for one aspect of these metrics (out-of-home placement), which it presents in a [report](#) describing the deep-end reform (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2020). We anonymize the sites in these figures to avoid linking these metrics with specific deep-end-reform-related activities (as noted above, the reform evolved and the evaluation was not positioned to identify causal effects of the reform on youth outcomes). The Foundation collected information from sites on placements per 10,000 juveniles. From the earliest date of data collection (2012 or 2014) to 2018, the Foundation’s analyses found large decreases (ranging from 39 to 76 percent) in out-of-home placement rates for the nine sites that could provide reliable statistics. The ratio of rates for white youth and African American youth also showed reductions and in 2018 ranged from 2 to 27.
- » Details about evaluation findings related to deep-end data capacity activities can be found in “[Activities to Improve Data Capacity: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief](#)”.

FIGURE 6
Out-of-Home Placements per 10,000 Youth at Baseline versus 2018



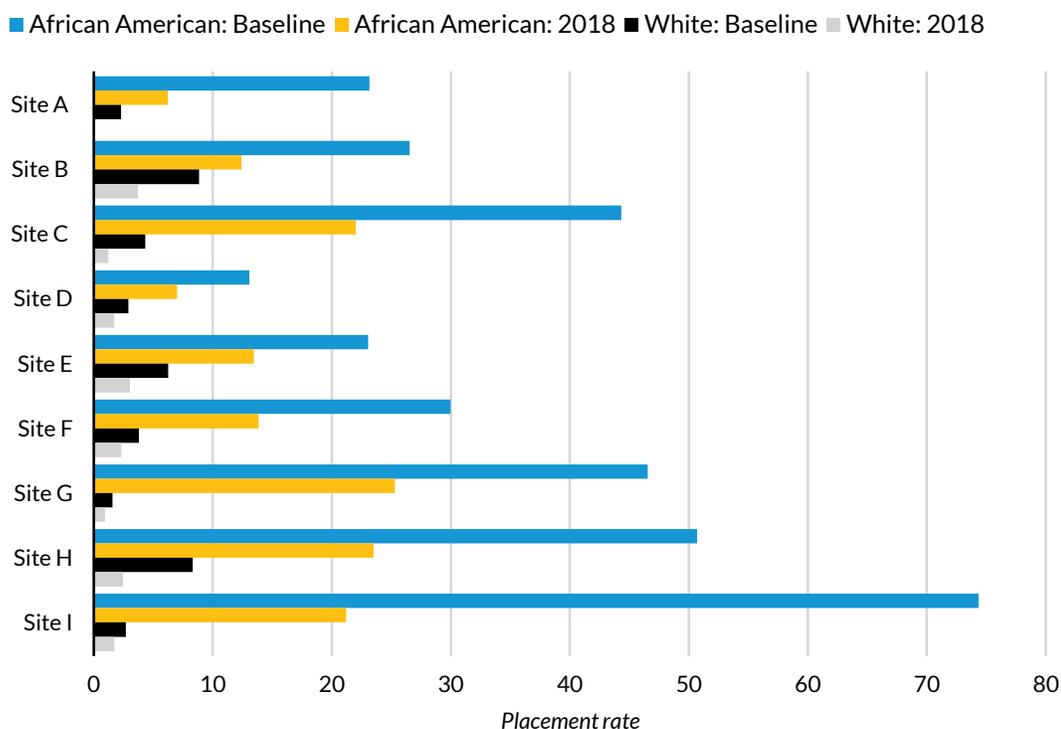
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Source: *Leading with Race to Reimagine Youth Justice: JDAI’s Deep-End Initiative* (Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020).

Note: Baseline data were either from 2012 (sites A through C) or 2014 (sites D through I), depending on when sites began their deep-end work.

FIGURE 7

Out-of-Home Placements per 10,000 Youth for African American and White Youth, Baseline versus 2018



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Source: *Leading with Race to Reimagine Youth Justice: JDAI's Deep-End Initiative* (Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020).

Note: Baseline data were either from 2012 (sites A through C) or 2014 (sites D through I), depending on when sites began their deep-end work.

Deep-End Reform Activities

Each site implemented a range of activities that reflected its deep-end reform goals. This section presents an overview of sites' activities through summer 2018 in three areas corresponding to the deep-end highway: preadjudication activities, postadjudication activities, and systemwide supports. We obtained information about activities through reviews of site documents (e.g., workplans and publications); telephone and in-person interviews with site coordinators and other stakeholders about their deep-end reforms; Foundation documents; and interviews with deep-end team leaders. Because these data only cover site activities reported through the data collection outlined above, our data collection efforts might not cover all site activities. Moreover, sites might have been in the planning stages for other activities not included here because we used implementation as a threshold for

inclusion, even if that implementation occurred at a pilot or small scale. Finally, this section's tables exclude activities related to data capacity or staff training. We provide more information about these activities in corresponding [appendix C](#) tables. Unlike the approach for figures 6 and 7, we identify the activities associated with specific sites, as the Foundation has publicized some of this information through blogs, reports, and conference presentations.

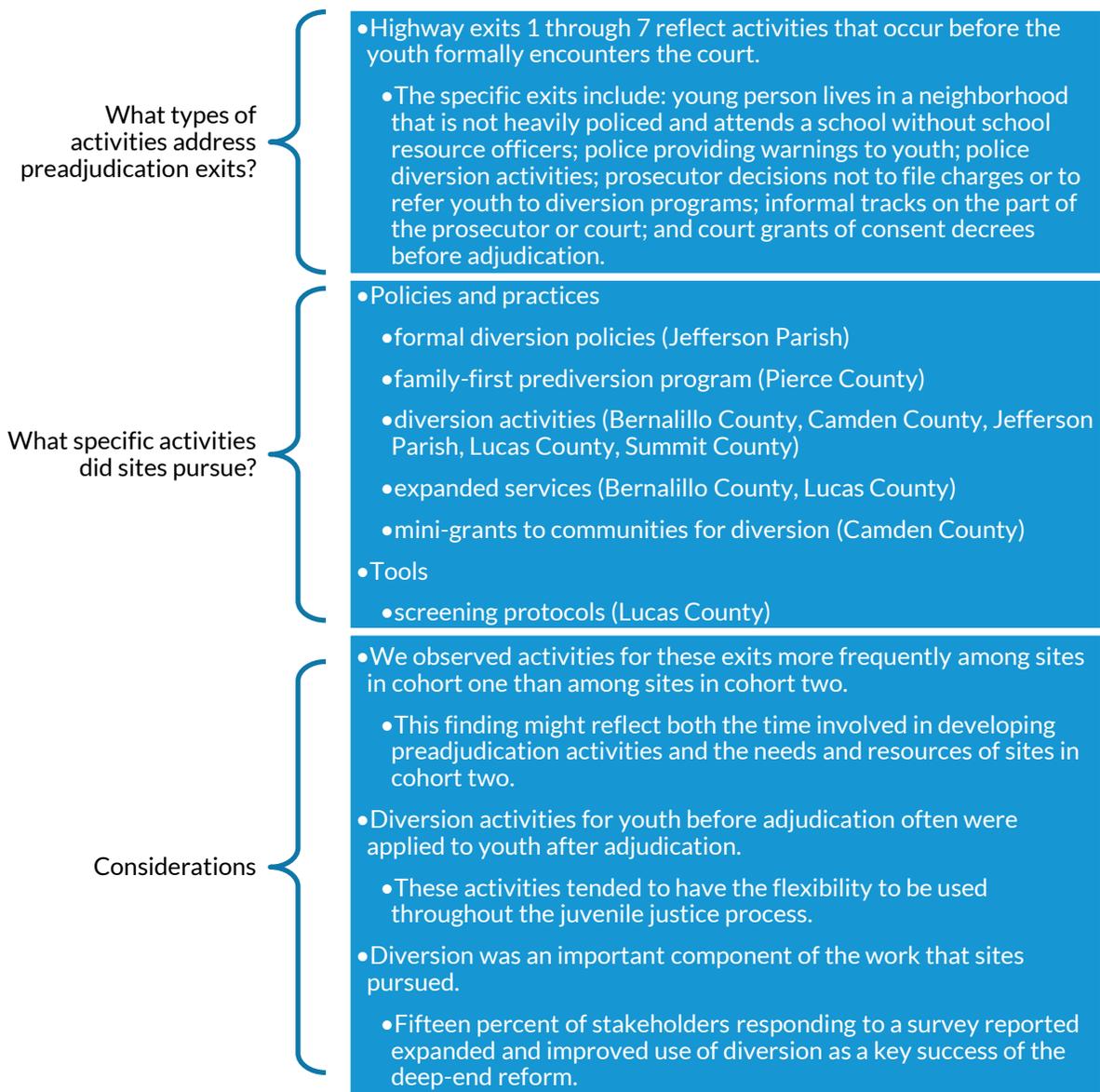
We categorize activities into three types. *Policies and practices* are activities involving a new or revised policy or practice, or an effort to improve probation or other practice more broadly. We identify *tools* as distinct instruments that could assist stakeholders in their policies or practices; these activities include designing a new tool or selecting and adopting an existing, standardized tool. Finally, *community-based alternatives to confinement programs* involve piloting, connecting to, or funding such programs.

Deep-End Reform Highway Exits on Preadjudication Activities

Six sites pursued reform activities related to preadjudication exits that overlapped with sites' existing JDAI activities. Details about site activities related to preadjudication exits can be found in [technical appendix C](#). In figure 8 below, we present some highlights of these activities.

FIGURE 8

Site Activities Related to Preadjudication Exits



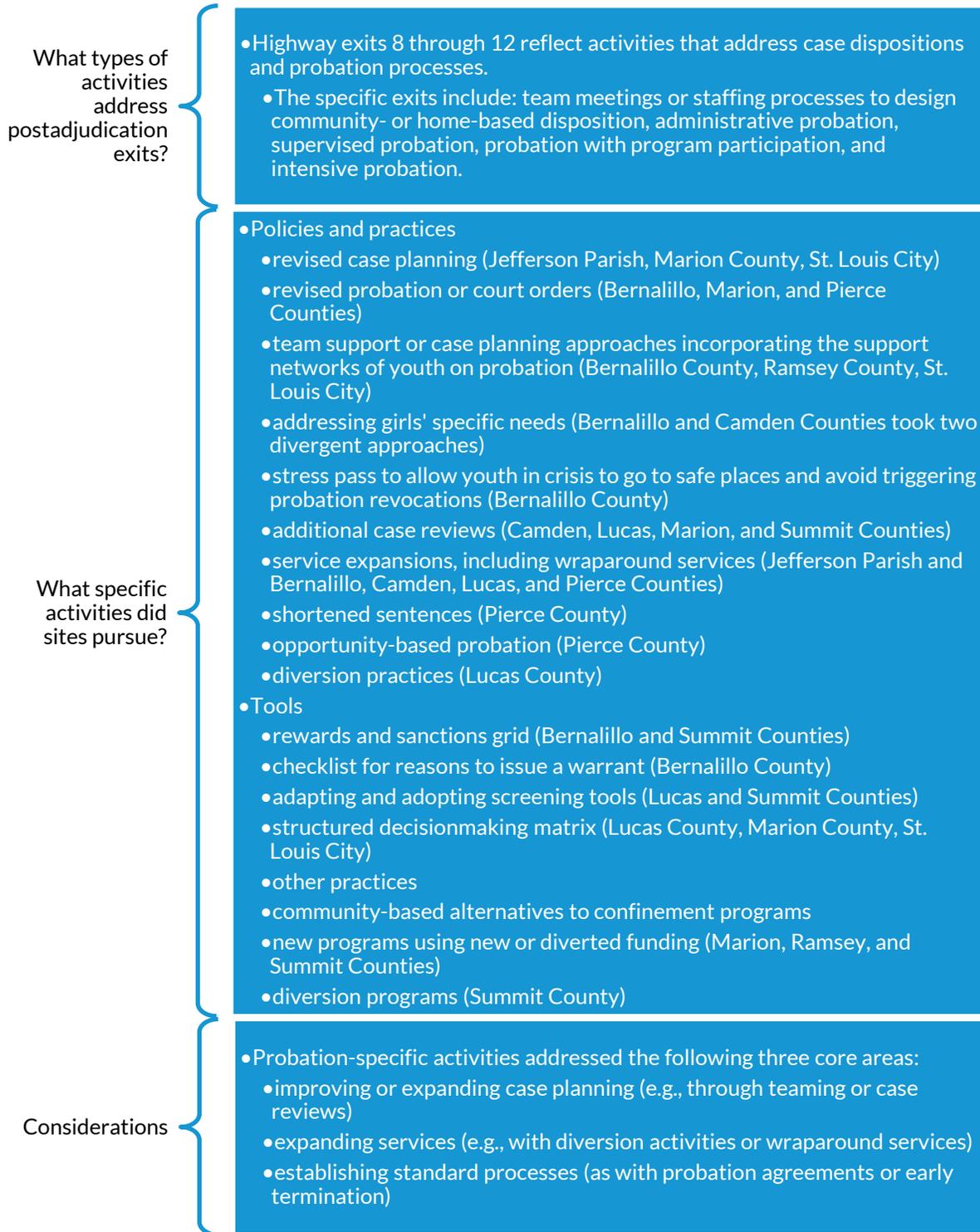
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Deep-End Reform Highway Exits on Postadjudication Activities

All sites pursued activities for exits related to postadjudication. Details about site activities related to postadjudication exits can also be found in [technical appendix C](#). In figure 9 below, we present some highlights of these activities. In addition, box 3 provides context related to establishing standard processes as part of probation practices.

FIGURE 9

Site Activities Related to Postadjudication Exits



BOX 3

Findings from a Survey on Probation Policies and Practices

In 2018, the evaluation team disseminated the “Probation Policies and Practices” survey (N=332, 75 percent response rate) to probation staff in 12 sites. Findings reflected their focus on probation practices and activities:

- More than three out of four probation staff members reported very often or always engaging in probation practices consistent with the deep-end mission, such as working with youth to change behaviors through case planning, motivation, and positive youth development.
- Three-quarters or more of probation staff reported very often or always working with parents to help youth achieve their goals, which included building better relationships with their families.
- Few probation staff reported youth should be placed in out-of-home situations of any kind very often or that such placements were always appropriate. The exception was “when the youth has been shown to be a danger to others.”

The following evaluation resources contain information about deep-end probation reforms, including the Foundation’s probation transformation efforts:

- [“Advancing Probation Reform: A Deep-end Evaluation Feature Brief”](#)
- [Juvenile Probation Transformation: Applying the Approach in Lucas County, OH, and Pierce County, WA](#)
- [“Transforming Practice through Culture Change: Probation Staff Perspectives on Juvenile Justice Reform”](#)

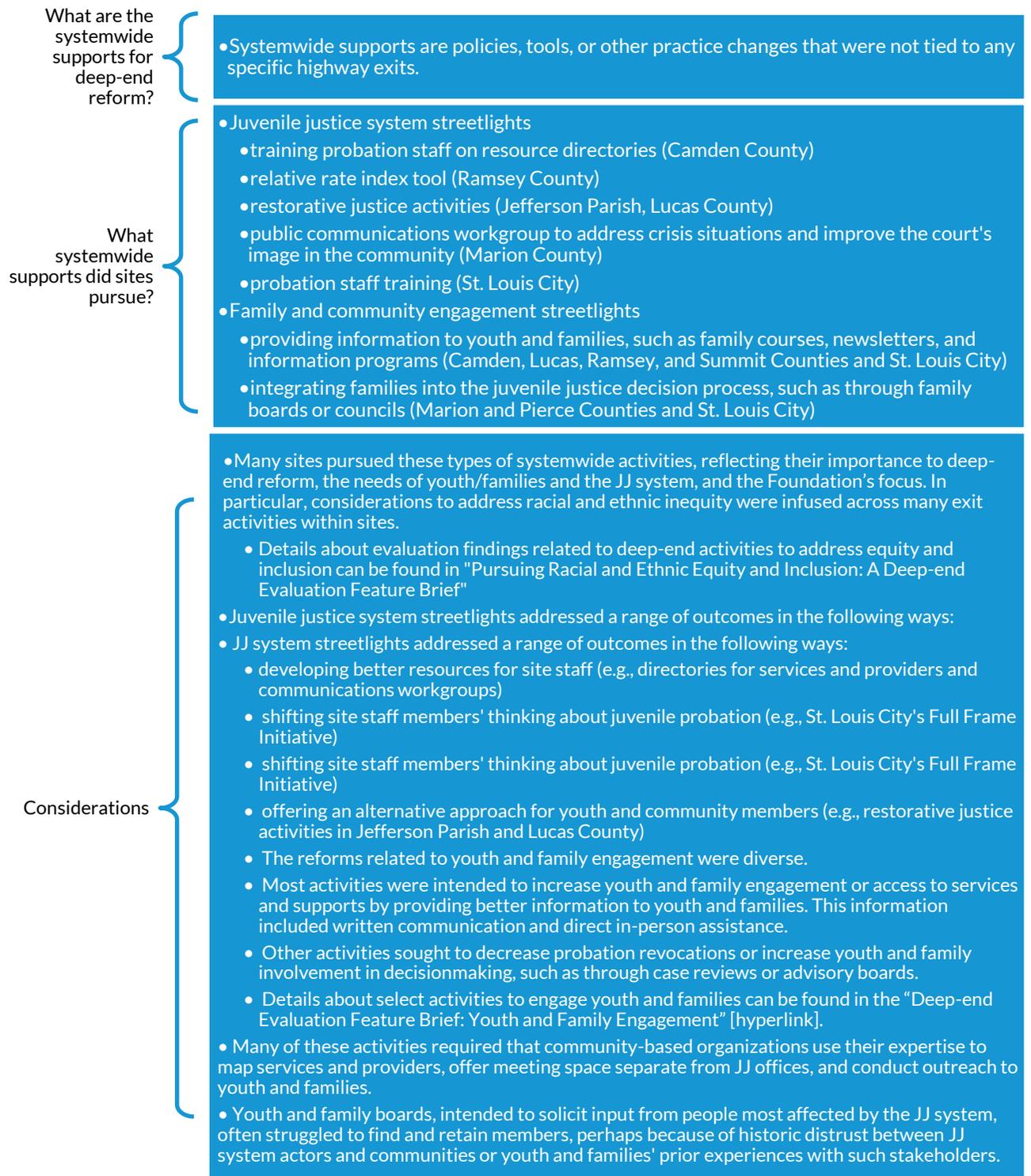
Source: “Probation Policies and Practices” survey, distributed by evaluation team to probation staff; not available online.

Systemwide Supports for Deep-End Reform

Systemwide supports (the highway model’s “streetlights”) are policies, tools, or other practice changes that were not tied to any specific highway exits but spanned several exits, either for the JJ system overall or for youth and family engagement. Six sites pursued activities related to JJ system streetlights, and eight pursued activities related to youth and family engagement streetlights. Details about site activities related to streetlights can be found in [technical appendix C](#). Figure 10 below provides some highlights of these systemwide supports.

FIGURE 10

Systemwide Supports for Deep-End Reform



Successfully Implementing and Sustaining Deep-End Reform

Deep-end reform required concerted efforts from stakeholders, whose sites embarked on journeys to reach unique goals. In this section, we document findings about assets and barriers to reform and how sites sustained their deep-end activities.

What Are the Conditions for Successful Pursuit of Deep-End Reform?

As we examined in depth the work on deep-end reform of the nine sites that participated in qualitative data collection, we identified several characteristics that were assets to that work (figure 11). Although no single factor appeared linked to implementation success across all sites, the following five characteristics were most common:

- Eight of nine sites had leaders with positional power to make decisions and follow through with them, such as deep-end coordinators with executive powers in their organizations or site champions.
- Six of nine sites had leaders who were committed to the principles of deep-end reform, such as those with a strong willingness to pursue reform.
- Six of nine sites had strong community partnerships involving, for example, community organizations that were part of deep-end leadership committees or involved in deep-end activities.
- Five of nine sites had attitudinal buy-in among stakeholder and site staff, such as an understanding and commitment to the principles and activities of deep-end reform.
- Five of nine states had substantial data capacity, such as the ability to collect needed data elements and provide reports on activities to leadership and frontline staff in a site.

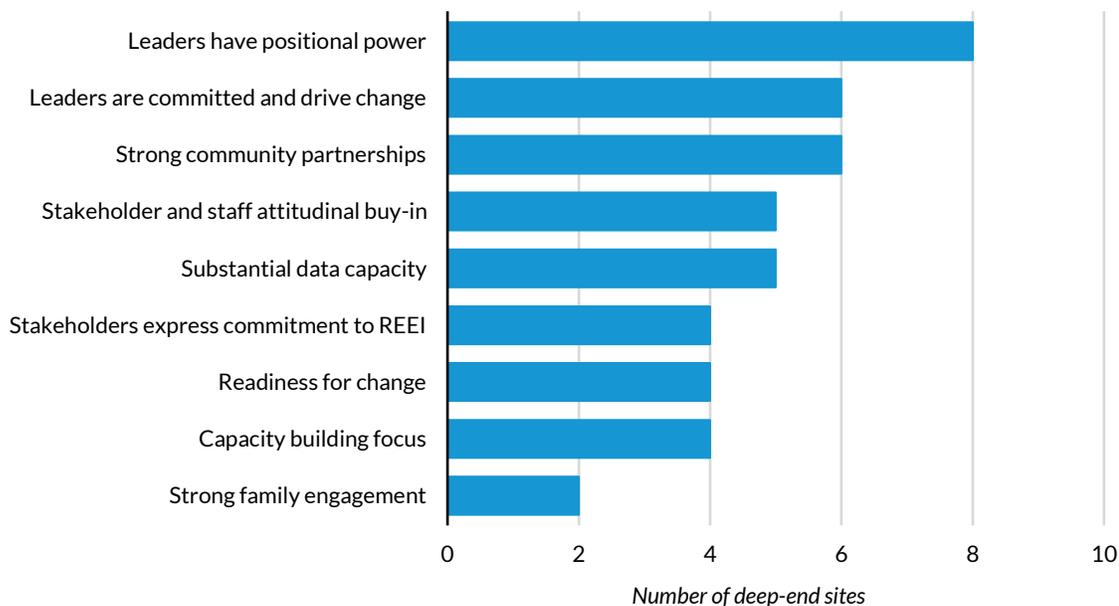
BOX 4

Stakeholder Comments about Their Sites' Assets

- “With regard to deep-end issues, rely on the data and rely on the information you’re getting. Don’t be fearful; when it is evidence-based, it likely will work, even if it doesn’t feel right.”
- “Deep-end participation signifies a huge commitment and they should not do it if they are not completely committed.”
- “By really involving themselves in the community, we were able to establish more avenues to get people to the table.”
- “You absolutely need positional power to move this work forward.”
- “What has been most valuable is seeing our work have an impact on our data and seeing that evidence in our numbers.”

Source: Site stakeholders, interviews conducted by evaluation team, August 2014 to August 2018.

FIGURE 11
Site Assets



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Source: Urban/Mathematica qualitative analysis of stakeholder interviews.

We also observed barriers (many of which mirrored the assets) that could impede reform implementation if not addressed (figure 12). Barriers were observed less frequently in sites than assets.

The three barriers we observed most frequently were site staff turnover, lack of commitment among leadership, and lack of buy-in and collaboration among stakeholders and site staff. Two points about barriers in sites are worth noting here. First, sites were, in part, selected based on their past success with JDAI and their potential to carry out collaborative, transformational JJ system reforms. That experience with JDAI may have limited the barriers they encountered as part of their deep-end reform and may have been essential for their successes. Second, whereas a single asset alone might not be sufficient for successful reform, a single barrier could derail or postpone a site's reform efforts. For example, one site began the work without committed leadership to drive the reform activities. As such, progress toward embracing the vision of deep-end reform and accomplishing deep-end goals floundered until a leader leaned in to the process with intention, beginning the site's alignment with deep-end efforts.

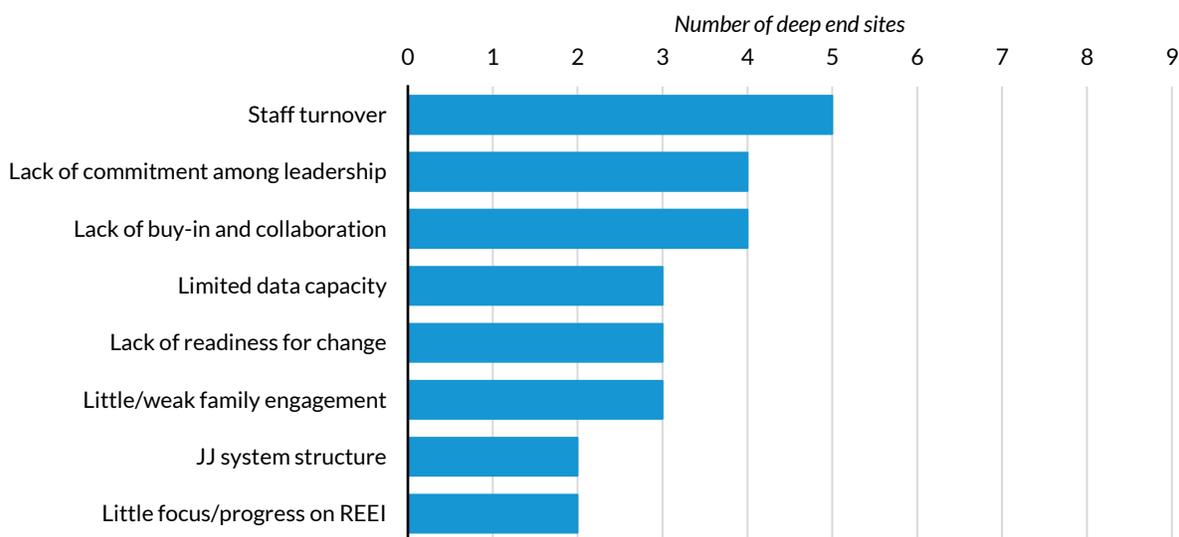
BOX 5

Stakeholder Comments about Their Sites' Barriers

- “Other players pushed to get the deep-end work here, but they transitioned out of [the site] before the work started. Their replacements haven't been champions, and it's been difficult to manage the staff transitions.”
- “Another challenge is related to turf and philosophy. When stakeholders say they don't have 'resources' and 'structure,' those are just a proxy for turf and differences in philosophy. As people, we use other ways to argue why we can or cannot do something. I can say 'resources weren't there,' but that is secondary. It all came down to we didn't actually agree what public safety means, and that didn't come to light until the purposes of placement conversation.”
- “Achieving staff buy-in was one of our biggest challenges. Staff were concerned about the community's reaction, specifically victims, to kids being returned to the community.”
- “It's been hard to build rapport and relationships because of the hierarchy and chain of command, and people are cautious about what they're allowed to say to whom.”

Source: Site stakeholders, interviews conducted by evaluation team, August 2014 to August 2018.

FIGURE 12
Site Barriers



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Source: Urban/Mathematica qualitative analysis of stakeholder interviews.

How Did Sites Sustain Their Reforms?

Staff identified elements they perceived as essential to sustaining their sites' deep-end reform efforts. These elements largely fell into three categories: culture changes, written policy changes, and funding strategies.

CULTURE CHANGE

Some sites focused on culture shifts **among their staff**. These shifts included understanding the necessity of frontline-staff buy-in. For example, one site involved probation and court staff in a training series on deep-end reforms to improve site-staff alignment with the deep-end vision. Other sites benefited from the strong leadership of people in power, which facilitated culture changes throughout the local systems. Other stakeholders, recognizing the importance of sustaining their activities on culture change, planned to fuel that change by intentionally hiring site staff supporting reforms when (1) site staff who did not support the reform left, or (2) key deep-end champions retired or rotated out of positions driving the reform.

Other sites pursued culture shifts by investing in **strengthening relationships** with families and community partners to create and sustain culture change **in their communities**. Activities in this area

included convening a consortium of community partners to develop a sustainability plan and fostering dialogue to develop mutual understanding about JJ policies and practices. (Details about activities to engage youth and family can be found in [“Engaging Youth and Families: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief”](#).)

WRITTEN POLICY CHANGES

An element that stakeholders said was central to sustaining deep-end reform was **codifying deep-end activities in written policy**. One stakeholder shared, “We need to write this all down ... If you don’t put it in writing, it can just be undone.”³ Examples of site progress on written policy changes include updating court orders to include early probation termination for youth with certain probation assignments; revising case planning policy to involve parents and youth and develop short-term, achievable goals for youth; and expecting standard probation agreements to be shorter with fewer conditions, thus aligning with deep-end goals.

FUNDING STRATEGIES

Some sites **secured institutional funding** to support their reform activities. One site, for example, secured funding through a line-item in the county budget to fund alternatives to confinement, while others participated in Pay for Success–type agreements or leveraged federal funding streams to support deep-end activities. Reform also brought opportunities to **divert funding streams** from other programmatic efforts, such as redirecting funds from one original purpose to other purposes (for example, from institutions to community-based programming). Furthermore, some sites reallocated funding indirectly by **changing staffing models**, such as by transferring probation or detention center staff to services units or programming.

What Challenges and Needs Did Sites Have Related to Sustainability Efforts?

Stakeholders identified several challenges around their sustainability efforts, as well as processes they deemed necessary to grow, continue, or sustain their work. Figure 13 provides common responses to questions about those challenges and processes.

FIGURE 13

Site Challenges and Needs Related to Sustainability

What types of challenges did sites face with sustainability?

- not preparing sustainability plans
- lacking an evaluation component to track goals and outcomes
- difficulty generating political support at the state level for reform
- working within restrictions on state funding
- not achieving full enrollment in or use of some programs and initiatives
- difficulty building and sustaining relationships with parents/families
- difficulty maintaining the stability and quality of relationships with community service providers
- difficulty maintaining the stability and quality of relationships with community service providers

What did sites need to sustain deep-end reforms?

- Culture change
 - holding themselves accountable to the deep-end work
 - increasing site staff buy-in
 - identifying reform champions
 - engaging youth and families
 - strengthening judicial support and leadership among key stakeholders because lack of support from certain stakeholders (e.g., court staff) could derail reform efforts
 - building support of external partners (e.g., schools and police)
 - articulating deep-end goals and priorities clearly
 - reflecting on and engaging in honest conversation about the effectiveness of reforms
 - diversion practices (Lucas County)
- Written policy
 - writing down policies
 - institutionalizing or codifying reform efforts
- Funding
 - obtaining or reallocating funding to support reform efforts
 - investing in data infrastructure
 - funding specific programs initiated as part of reform
 - supporting additional programming to further reform goals

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Benefits of Deep-End Reform and Looking to Its Future

By developing and implementing activities related to deep-end reform, stakeholders gained unique perspectives about the work and its implications. In this section, we document the benefits stakeholders perceived receiving from their work and their advice for jurisdictions pursuing similar reform.

What Were the Benefits of Participating in Deep-End Work from the Stakeholders' Perspectives?

When asked about the benefits of participating in deep-end work, stakeholders identified overarching benefits across the following five categories:⁴

- The work made stakeholders more intentional about JJ practices, especially in relation to understanding and addressing disparities based on race and ethnicity and engaging youth, families, and communities.
 - » “The experience has foster[ed] conversations about racial equity ... the topic [is now] top of mind in people’s work. Stakeholders are examining this and are thinking about this work through a race equity lens and trying to be more concrete about the race equity pieces.”
- More data were being used to drive reductions in placements and racial disparities.
 - » “We have been working on casefile reviews of all kids who went to out-of-home placements in 2017, and from the information that was gathered and processed, that work will drive some policies and programs moving forward.”
- The work helped leverage additional resources, such as finding local funding to sustain reform efforts.
 - » “We have been pretty resourceful in seeking out funding to support initiatives that serve to benefit our families and our kids in the community without compromising safety and without using a lot of dollars, and using our funding wisely. I really attribute that to our relationship with the Foundation and others.”
- Stakeholders reported reducing out-of-home placements and safely meeting the needs of youth and families in the community.
 - » “We’ve focused on decreasing the length of probation—what the terms of probation really mean, versus what staff think it means. We’ve had a philosophical shift in this area, especially with the prosecutor. Kids with mental health needs, for example, shouldn’t be on probation just because they need services.”
- Stakeholders identified benefits from training, technical assistance, and education (from the Foundation and other sites) around elements of the deep-end vision and key activities.
 - » “The biggest things that we have done in terms of time and resources are intensive trainings. Through the trainings, we’re laying the foundation to make bigger changes.”

Stakeholders also reported many benefits of the Foundation’s involvement in deep-end implementation at the site level. Each site received tailored technical assistance, and stakeholders reported that they appreciated the assistance received directly from Foundation staff and deep-end team leaders. The Foundation also maintained a deep bench of technical assistance providers—which stakeholders also appreciated—to ensure they could simultaneously meet the variety of assistance needs identified in multiple sites. Findings from the evaluation’s stakeholder survey (including, for example, staff from probation agencies, community-based agencies, court administrators, judges, magistrates, prosecutorial staff, detention staff, and other deep-end stakeholders) indicate that sites found the Foundation’s technical assistance helpful in advancing their deep-end reform. More specifically, three-quarters or more of stakeholder survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Foundation’s technical assistance helped them better understand core deep-end principles, such as the following:

- the importance of including youth and family voices in overall JJ reform
- the importance of engaging family members as partners in individual cases
- the ways dispositional decisionmaking affects the likelihood of placement
- the ways probation practice affects the likelihood of placement
- the use of research to inform their work
- ways to counter racial and ethnic disparities in the JJ system

Finally, stakeholders appreciated the Foundation’s efforts in three specific areas of advancing deep-end reform: bringing new perspectives on deep-end issues, including the use of data (and expertise on data collection, measurement, and analysis); sharing best practices from the field; and navigating critical relationships (such as between probation and court staff). Of their experience receiving Foundation assistance, one stakeholder said the following:

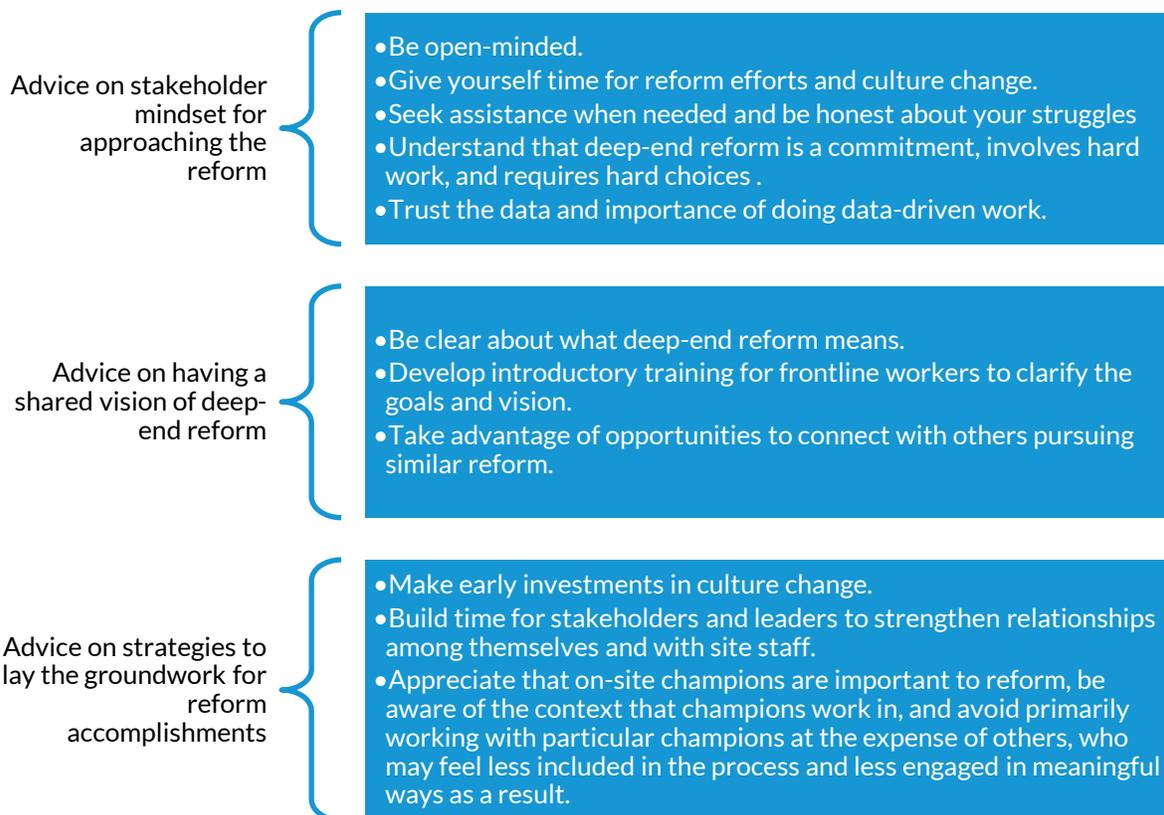
“We were having some differences of opinion earlier in the year regarding a program. We reached out to Foundation staff, who helped us process that and it was amazing how it all worked out. They helped us consider things that we didn’t think about, and they normalized it for us because we thought that it was unusual noncompliance and resistance, and they made us understand that it’s actually common. They suggested that we contact [a technical assistance provider] and bring him in, because he had a relationship with the organization and could do the majority of the mediating.”⁵

What Advice Did Sites Have for Stakeholders Considering Deep-End Reform and for Those Overseeing Similar Reform?

Stakeholders shared several recommendations for jurisdictions interested in taking on deep-end reforms or similar efforts in their communities. Those recommendations are outlined in figure 14 below.

FIGURE 14

Stakeholder Recommendations for Jurisdictions Pursuing Deep-End Reform



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Conclusion

This report presents observations from the developmental evaluation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s efforts around deep-end reform. By tracking the experiences of stakeholders in 12 sites, we have documented various reform activities, successes, and challenges. But overarching questions remain: Does deep-end reform reduce out-of-home placements? Should other jurisdictions pursue similar reforms?

Because the Foundation developed the reform during our evaluation, our work was not designed to answer those questions, and the Foundation has presented data collected from sites about their successes reducing placements, particularly for African American youth (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2020). However, we can make the following two broad observations based on the findings presented in this report:

- The communities that piloted deep-end reform engaged in multiple activities that, in theory, could reduce out-of-home placements and address issues related to equity and inclusion. These activities included implementing reforms addressing youth needs before and after adjudication, as well as systemwide initiatives that permeated the JJ system. It is likely that at least some of each site's activities would not have been developed if it had not participated in the Foundation's deep-end reform.
- As with many complex initiatives, deep-end reform comes with challenges. Culture change, particularly with addressing racial and ethnic disparities and increasing inclusion, can be difficult to obtain at all levels of the JJ system. Partnerships, notably with community organizations and with youth and families, require significant investments of time, energy, and dollars to be successful. Multiple sites struggled with collecting and analyzing the data needed for reforms. Though stakeholders can and did overcome these challenges, it was not easy, even with a committed team and Foundation assistance.

Regardless of the challenges, stakeholders in many communities want to avoid unnecessarily placing youth outside the home and to address racial and ethnic disparities. Stakeholders in communities considering deep-end reform should ultimately make decisions about pursuing reform with the input of multiple viewpoints, including youth, families, and other community stakeholders, and with consideration of all available information.

Additional information about the deep-end evaluation can be found in the following documents:

- [“Activities to Improve Data Capacity: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief”](#)
- [“Advancing Probation Reform: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief”](#)
- [“Engaging Youth and Families: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief”](#)
- [Juvenile Probation Transformation: Applying the Approach in Lucas County, OH, and Pierce County, WA](#)
- [“Pursuing Racial and Ethnic Equity and Inclusion: A Deep-End Evaluation Feature Brief”](#)
- [“Transforming Practice through Culture Change: Probation Staff Perspectives on Juvenile Justice Reform”](#)

Notes

- ¹ “Expanding JDAI to the Deep End: An Overview,” the Annie E. Casey Foundation, accessed May 14, 2020, <https://www.aecf.org/m/privy/Deep-End-Tool-Kit-1a-Reform-Overview.pdf>
- ² “Expanding JDAI to the Deep End: An Overview,” the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ³ Site stakeholder, interview conducted by evaluation team, August 2014 to August 2018.
- ⁴ Site stakeholders, interviews conducted by evaluation team, August 2014 to August 2018.
- ⁵ Site stakeholder, interview conducted by evaluation team, August 2014 to August 2018.

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Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2014. *Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative: Progress Report 2014*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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