



**Juvenile Justice
Advisory Group**

**Strategic Action Plan
2024–2026**

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I. New York State Juvenile Justice Advisory Group

Federal law requires all states to establish an advisory group to oversee the strategic planning and federal grant funding allocation to organizations that address juvenile delinquency and prevention issues. Executive order No. 80 signed by Governor Mario M. Cuomo (and continued by all subsequent governors), named the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) the designated state agency and established the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group for overseeing the development and implementation of the state's juvenile justice plan, supervising the distribution of federal delinquency prevention funds and monitoring compliance with federal juvenile justice mandates. The membership of the JJAG must be comprised of not less than 15, and no more than 33 members, with requisite training, experience, or special knowledge in the areas of prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency or the administration of juvenile justice. In New York State, the juvenile justice system serves youth between the ages of 12 and 17. With administrative support from the Office of Youth Justice, located within DCJS, the JJAG finalizes New York's Three-Year Juvenile Justice Plan, which identifies funding priority areas. Federal juvenile justice funds are used as seed money to establish and support new and innovative projects that seek to measurably reduce juvenile crime, promote individual accountability, enhance public protection, and prevent delinquency through positive youth development.

MEMBER	TITLE
Edward Fergus	Chair, Juvenile Justice Advisory Group Professor, Rutgers University
Nina Aledort	Deputy Commissioner, state Office of Children and Family Services
Jenny Almanzar	Consultant of Specialized Services, Children's Home of Wyoming Conference; Trainer and Consultant, National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth
Brendan Cox	Director, Policing Strategies, LEAD National Support Bureau
Michelle Diaz	Youth Member; Executive Director, Canary Impact
Precious Ferrell	Youth Member
Brenda Freedman	Judge, Erie County Family Court
Niasha Hamilton	Youth Member
DaMia Harris-Madden	Commissioner, state Office of Children and Family Services
Heather A. La Forme-Maldonado	Director, Bureau of Native American Services, state Office of Children and Family Services
Precious Lugo	Youth Member
Diana Palmer	Councilwoman, City of Glens Falls
Meredith Ray-LaBatt	Deputy Director, Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families, state Office of Mental Health
Edwina G. Richardson	Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, state Unified Court System
Allen Riley	Commissioner, State Commission of Correction
Rossana Rosado	Commissioner, state Division of Criminal Justice Services
Euphemia Strauchn	Chief Executive Director, Families on the Move
Emily Tow	President, The Tow Foundation
Jason Williams	Youth Member

II. Executive Summary

New York State has made substantial progress over the past several years in reducing youth contact with the juvenile justice system and enhancing effective services to help ensure their success. Prior to the enactment of Raise the Age (RTA) legislation, effective October 1, 2018, for 16-year-olds and October 1, 2019, for 17-year-olds, significant juvenile justice reform efforts helped pave the way for the successful implementation of the law. Collaborative efforts among state agencies and with partners across New York State have resulted in the continuation of reduced reliance on the juvenile justice system despite the inclusion of these new age groups. At the same time, there is still much work to be done to ensure that youth and families are provided the resources and support they need to mitigate interaction with the juvenile justice system and ensure public safety. Additionally, the challenges over the past few years resulted in a need to re-evaluate the priorities outlined in the state's Strategic Action Plan to ensure continued progress over the next three years.

In an effort to implement strategies in a sustainable and cost-effective manner, the JJAG will utilize a three-category designation for funding investments: small, medium and large. This includes funding for:

- Creation of four Transformative Youth Justice Hubs designed to coordinate and sustain partnerships and cross-pollinate prevention efforts and best practices at the local level.
- Development and support of data infrastructure, in collaboration with communities, for the creation of standardized metrics of youth success and system equity.
- Investment in direct youth-service programming that builds on successful or promising existing initiatives.

This strategy will allow the JJAG to diversify funding efforts in a way that will reduce turnback and get the funding to the youth, families, and communities that need it the most, and will leverage previous investments toward impactful measures.

III. Purpose and Overview

A. Statement of Purpose and Timeline

As a condition for receiving formula grants from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), states must submit a plan for carrying out Formula Grants Program activities applicable to a three-year period. The JJAG has traditionally engaged in a strategic planning process to develop each three-year plan prior to its submission. The next three-year plan cycle will cover calendar years 2024–2026.

The JJAG meets quarterly to administer the formula grants funds, analyze the impact of the awards that have been made, and provide guidance and direction for the implementation of effective improvements to the juvenile justice system in New York State. This Strategic Action Plan (Plan) will be used to help guide deliberations of the JJAG and prioritize its actions.

The Plan includes three main priority areas that were derived from a process that began at its June 2023 quarterly meeting, with a visit from OJJDP Administrator Liz Ryan and a conversation

about the highlights of the 2021 – 2023 Strategic Action Plan. At the meeting, Administrator Ryan outlined the vision and action plan at the federal level and engaged in dialogue with JJAG members about what some of the most pressing issues were from her visits across the country.

After the June meeting, the New York State Youth Justice Institute (YJI) and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Office of Youth Justice (OYJ) developed and administered a questionnaire to JJAG members to identify priority areas for action. The information gathered from these initial steps helped to inform the agendas for two in-person strategic planning sessions in October and December.

The October session began with a national landscape presentation by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and was followed by detailed data presentations and discussions about the state of youth justice in New York. These presentations and conversations were followed by a summary of results from the questionnaire, feedback from interviews with members of the YJI’s Youth Justice Peer Advisory Council, and information gleaned from an interview with the executive director of the Coalition. Work group activities rounded out the session using a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework. In December, the RBA process and results were shared, and initial ideas for funding were discussed, all of which led to the details included in this Plan, which will guide the JJAG in its funding decisions through 2026.

B. Previous Three-Year Plans

Below is a brief summary of the main components of the previous three-year plans:

2021 - 2023	2018 – 2020	2015 – 2017	2012 – 2014
Support Efficient Coordination, Alignment, and Delivery of Services that Reflect the Priorities of State Agencies and the Partnership of Youth Justice throughout New York State	Seeking Statewide Alignment	Implement a Best Practices Institute	Promote Early Diversion of Appropriate Youth from Deep End System Involvement
Establish and Implement Youth Justice Policy Priorities	High-Priority Populations and Problems	Address the Intersection of Education & Juvenile Justice	Further Successful Juvenile Re-entry
Enhance Positive Youth, Family, and Community Impacts and Outcomes	Accountability: Process and Measurement	Narrow the Front Door at All System Points	Disseminate Best Practices in Juvenile Justice
	JJAG Optimal Functioning and Effectiveness	Include the Voices of Affected People	Support Data-Driven Policy Development and Program Analysis
		Incorporate DMC (now known as R.E.D.) into All Activities	Reduce DMC (now known as R.E.D.)

IV. Identification of Priority Areas

The main components of the 2024–2026 Strategic Action Plan were developed through the questionnaire sent to JJAG members, and the RBA framework used, during the strategic planning sessions. Several priority areas were developed in alignment with the provisions of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, and the questionnaire was used to narrow the focus that the JJAG would use to guide priorities for the next three years.

Questionnaire Results

Prior to the October strategic planning session, the YJI and OYJ developed and administered a questionnaire to all JJAG members to identify priority areas for action in the 2024–2026 Strategic Action Plan. In addition to identifying the priority areas, questionnaire respondents were asked to further refine each one by choosing focuses between prevention and intervention, as well as between geographic community and gender and developmental stage. The three main priority areas identified through this process are:

1. Increase meaningful youth, family, and community engagement – with an equal focus on prevention and intervention, and greater emphasis on geographic community and adolescence.
2. Increase access to trauma, healing, and behavioral health – focusing on intervention, geographic community, and adolescence.
3. Increase Prevention Efforts and Youth-Centered Service Delivery – focus on prevention, geographic community, and childhood.

Results-Based Accountability Process

The RBA process was used to identify the root causes of the issues associated with the priority areas chosen and to identify specific initiatives that the JJAG could invest in. The process found that youth-serving systems struggle with involving families, youth, and the community in decision-making because the systems lack the knowledge and skills to effectively engage these groups. Youth-serving systems are also found to devalue certain families and may lack cultural competency, leading to a lack of respect for community engagement. JJAG members asserted that these concerns can be addressed by emphasizing the need for system stakeholders to approach their work in a collaborative manner and to implement engagement opportunities with the youth, families, and communities they serve.

The JJAG also found that access to trauma, healing, and behavioral health is currently inadequate because of structural barriers to obtaining and utilizing related services. Specifically, the lack of training in the use of family systems models, and the overall lack of providers willing or able to work with children are the main drivers of these barriers. Existing fiscal structures also tend to limit access in rural areas, where there are fewer resources. Expansion of local access to effective mental health and behavioral health supports is necessary to alleviate these challenges.

There are also barriers to the delivery of youth-centered services, which must be identified and addressed. Youth and families often lack equitable access to community-based opportunities. In addition, there is a scarceness of physical space for young people to gather, and school systems are reluctant to implement school-based programs or are unable to do so due to insufficient funding. Moving toward the community-schools model in more areas of New York State would help increase prevention efforts for this population.

V. Fiscal Strategy and Mechanism

To implement strategies in a sustainable and cost-effective manner, the JJAG will utilize a three-pronged approach to funding: small, medium, and large investments. This includes funding for:

- Creation of four Transformative Youth Justice Hubs designed to coordinate and sustain partnerships and cross-pollinate prevention efforts and best practices at the local level.
- Development and support of data infrastructure, in collaboration with communities, for the creation of standardized metrics of youth success and system equity.
- Investment in direct youth-service programming that builds on successful or promising existing initiatives.

This strategy will allow the JJAG to diversify funding efforts in a way that will minimize turnback and get the funding to the youth, families, and communities who need it the most, while leveraging previous investments toward impactful measures.

VI. Framework for Funding Investments

A. Transformative Youth Justice Hubs

Transformative Youth Justice Hubs will be developed to coordinate and sustain partnerships in key priority regions of New York State and will be used to cross-pollinate prevention efforts and best practices. The Hubs will exist in two rural and two urban communities and will operate as partnerships to coordinate and provide support at prevention and re-entry points for youth, families, and communities. Partnerships will be diverse and may include, for example, faith-based organizations, parent-focused/led organizations, youth service organizations (e.g., community-based organizations), schools, courts, law enforcement, mental health service organizations, and government entities. Each Hub will maintain a lead fiscal partner and a coordinating partner, as well as a board with co-chairs of different backgrounds. Partnerships will provide prevention support services that center on youth well-being domains (i.e., physical health, mental and behavioral health, family, community, economic stability, and education) with a specific priority on adolescent-aged youth.

B. Youth, Family, and Community Toward Success (YFACTS) Center

Nationally and in New York State, there are varying levels of access to both quantitative and qualitative data regarding youth serving agencies and at different points along the youth justice continuum. Comprehensive and organized data can be used to help identify the most effective locations for placing services, as well as how best to support youth, families, and communities. Available data shows that racial and ethnic disparities still occur in a widespread manner in New York State and across the country.

New York State has made great strides in its data collection capacity in recent years. However, the youth justice system consists of multiple agencies, which poses challenges to ensuring data quality, access, and actionable interpretation. That, in turn, can impact the ability to serve youth, communities, and families in an effective manner. The issue is further exacerbated by other existing limitations in the youth justice system's ability to collect important information, such as

sexual orientation and gender identity, and to collect race/ethnicity data reliably and consistently across youth-serving agencies.

Additionally, while large youth serving systems may have the ability and capacity to collect quantitative and qualitative data to drive effective change, many smaller community-based organizations often lack the data capacity, training, and support to do the same. As a result, these smaller organizations are often unable to demonstrate their impact, obtain funding, and improve their services and support delivery. To effectively serve New York's most vulnerable youth, it is important to have access to robust, reliable, and well-organized data across disciplines, and to create data literacy and infrastructure from the ground up.

As part of the Plan, the JJAG will support the development of a new Youth, Family, and Community Toward Success (YFACTS) Center to coordinate the measurement, gathering, and dissemination of youth justice data (qualitative and quantitative) on prevention services, efforts, and impact, especially in the communities served by the newly established Transformative Youth Justice Hubs. The new YFACTS Center will utilize existing, publicly available data and will develop capacity for new measures to be collected, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Synthesizing and organizing data will be done through the Center in a way that facilitates and prioritizes youth, family, and community outcomes, as well as impact at the ground level. The YFACTS Center will help translate data into results through data literacy and best practices on data governance, stewardship, quality, management, integration, and storytelling activities. Promising initiatives will be driven by a theory of change, accompanied by logic models, and rigorously evaluated to demonstrate their impact and potential viability elsewhere. The YFACTS Center will be created and overseen by the YJI and will coordinate the data infrastructure across the Transformative Youth Justice Hubs to support the development of the Hubs and provide information to state government agencies regarding impact of prevention efforts in New York State.

The YFACTS Center will provide two main functions to align with its purpose:

First, it will coordinate data measurement, gathering, and dissemination with, and for, the Hubs, which will involve participatory development of common measurements across the Hubs, including field testing, piloting, and implementation. The coordination will include training and technical assistance for the Hubs to organize data infrastructures for progress monitoring (e.g., inputs and outputs of programming, and impact or outcome examination). The coordination will also help support the establishment of partnerships between the Hubs and local researchers to encourage sustainability of data-informed initiatives.

Second, and in line with the JJAG's third priority area for action, as mentioned above, the YFACTS Center will gather and disseminate data on prevention and progress. Specifically, the types of prevention measures being coordinated across New York State will be shared to demonstrate the unifying knowledge and servicing approach being taken. Prevention measures and progress will be used to inform policy and practice development that addresses youth justice disparities and expands prevention efforts. The measures taken by this new YFACTS Center will: enhance the ability of New York State to better serve those who encounter the youth justice system; allow, through a participatory approach, youth and families to define 'success' and 'thriving' measures; and create an innovative learning community of best practices and resources that can serve as a model for other jurisdictions in New York.

C. Direct Services Programming

The JJAG will also invest in direct youth-serving programming that builds on successful or promising practices to address racial and ethnic disparities and prevention efforts for youth and young adults emphasizing adolescents. Utilizing the results from the root cause analyses that occurred through the RBA process, funding will be directed toward programming that increases meaningful youth, family, and community engagement, while increasing access to trauma, healing and behavioral supports.

VII. Implementation Steps

The JJAG's federal funding has accumulated significantly over the past several years, as distribution of the funding was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and federal policies. In an effort to implement strategies in a sustainable and cost-effective manner, the JJAG will utilize a three-pronged approach to funding which will include small, medium, and large investments. Initially, the JJAG will commit a large amount of funding to establish four new Transformative Youth Justice Hubs, a medium-sized investment to create a new YFACTS Center within the YJI, and smaller, innovative initiatives through the form of mini grants. With all three components of the Plan, the JJAG will focus on sustainability as the accumulated funding is spent and funding levels return to normal. Going forward, federal funding to the YJI will be project specific, since the Institute's success has resulted in a multi-year investment of state funding from DCJS, beginning in January 2024, to support the institute's operations.

As a result of the accumulated balance, the JJAG intends to commit a large amount of funding in the first year of the Plan to establish the new Transformative Youth Justice Hubs and YFACTS Center. As those initiatives develop and begin to roll out, the focus is expected to shift to direct services programming. With all three components of the Plan, the JJAG will focus intentionally on sustainability as the accumulated balance declines and federal funding availability returns to normal.