**FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS TO ASSESS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS**

Early in the work, the team developed a framework for the project that focuses on ten questions that juvenile justice systems should be able to answer.  The forthcoming measures are derived from these questions.

**1. How many youth are involved in various stages of the system?**   
One of the foundational measures of the juvenile justice system is the count of individuals at various decision points—from initial contact with police, through detention and referral to court, and counts of youth who are diverted, adjudicated, placed, and/or processed as adults.

**2. What are the key characteristics of the youth involved?**  
It is important to be able to describe the individuals who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Demographic information like date of birth, gender, and residence, and characteristics like risk level and protective factors can help to identify trends and learn about subpopulations. At a minimum, agencies with higher data capacities may also collect information on other characteristics, for example, education and employment status, substance use history, exposure to trauma, and involvement with other systems.

**3. How did the youth become system involved?**    
Information describing the situational characteristics of incident(s) can help explain the behavior that resulted in system involvement, such as an arrest or referral to juvenile court. This information might include the reason for referral, the type of behavior, or the victims impacted.

**4. How did the youth move through the system?**  
The ability to document the counts of individuals as they move from one decision point to the next helps to identify patterns of movement through the system. To do this, juvenile justice system professionals must carefully collect information on decisions made and their corresponding dates.

**5. Is the system fair?**  
Fairness refers to decisions that do not discriminate against youth from gender, racial, ethnic, or other subpopulations. These could be decisions on how to process a case (i.e., legal representation) or how to respond to a behavior (i.e., responses appropriate to risk and harm). Research indicates that when youth perceive themselves being treated fairly, they are more likely to internalize the lessons of accountability.

**6. How did the youth change while in the system?**  
The juvenile justice system aims to hold youth accountable and support them toward becoming productive citizens. To that end, it is important to assess how youth change, either positively or negatively, while involved with the system. That includes completion of services or supervision plans, progression in school, or learning new skills.

**7. Does the system meet the needs of youth and families?**  
To effectively meet the needs of youth and their families, services provided to youth should be matched to assessed needs and accessible. Juvenile justice systems, then, need to know certain information about the youth, including risk level and needs, and about available services, such as service types, location, capacity, and quality.

**8. What was the experience of youth in the system?**  
States are responsible for keeping system-involved youth safe and free from further psychological or physical harm. These experiences can be measured by collecting and analyzing data related to use of restraints, solitary confinement, and isolation, as well as positive experiences, like receiving incentives or bonding with a caring adult.

**9. How much does it cost?**  
States and jurisdictions should understand the financial costs associated with handling youth at multiple points of the system, and for related programs and services. Knowing how cost is spread between various system stakeholders, understanding the cost of one day of detention or placement, or identifying investments in research and planning efforts can help jurisdictions better understand how to implement changes and the fiscal impact of reforms.

**10. What are the long-term measures of success?**  
The justice system should not limit its measures to input or activity indicators and immediate system outputs, although those indicators are often more easily obtained. All agencies that are involved in juvenile justice should work together to assess if, when, and in what manner system-involved youth return to the justice system, and positive indicators, such as employment and graduation.