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# A Gap Analysis of the Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act Portfolio

In 2000, the California State Legislature passed the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act (California Assembly Bill 1913, 2000), which authorized funding for county juvenile justice programs and designated the Board of Corrections (BOC) (now the California Board of State and Community Corrections [BSCC]) as the administrator of funding. A 2001 California Senate bill renamed this funding source as the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), which aims to provide a stable funding source for juvenile programs that have proven effectiveness in curbing crime among at-risk

## KEY FINDINGS

- According to literature, best practices in juvenile justice programming are (1) providing a continuum of services for different risk and need levels, (2) using a positive youth development approach, (3) ensuring that programming is family-focused and community-led, (4) providing trauma-informed care, (5) applying a racial equity framework, (6) providing culturally appropriate and responsive programming, (7) using evidence-based practices and programs, and (8) attending to implementation and fidelity.
- Stakeholders from the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) and the Los Angeles County Probation Department endorsed the importance of the best practices that are identified here. The stakeholders emphasized the importance of ensuring that programs are consistent with a youth development approach, and that they are culturally responsive and trauma-informed.
- Several key barriers to ensuring that the best practices are reflected in the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) portfolio. These barriers include a lack of clear definitions or metrics associated with each best practice, the need for better data regarding program effectiveness, and a lack of information to determine whether programs applying for funding are consistent with the best practices.
- There are several opportunities to improve the alignment between the JJCPA portfolio and best practices, such as ensuring that guiding documents, funding applications, and scoring rubrics are revised to reflect the best practices.

(or at-promise) youth<sup>1</sup> and young offenders (Fain, Turner, and Shahidinia, 2018). To receive funding, the legislature requires Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils (JJCCs) in each county to submit plans to the state for funding to identify programs that filled gaps in local services (BSCC, 2021). The legislature required that providers base the programs on empirical findings of effective program elements (California Government Code § 30061). It required each plan to include:

- an assessment of existing services targeting at-promise juveniles and their families
- identification and prioritization of neighborhoods, schools, and other areas with high rates of juvenile crime
- a strategy to provide a continuum of graduated responses to juvenile crime (County of Los Angeles, 2020).

Each year, counties submit their annual plans to BSCC; however, it is up to each county to select the programs that receive JJCPA funding.

<b>Abbreviations</b>	
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
BOC	Bureau of Corrections
BSCC	Board of State and Community Corrections
CAC	Community Advisory Committee
CMJJP	Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan
FY	fiscal year
JJCC	Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council
JJCPA	Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning+
RDA	Resource Development Associates

For many years, the programs funded by JJCPA in Los Angeles County were fairly constant. As detailed in Soung and Best, 2018, an initial plan was developed in 2001 that funded 14 to 16 prevention and intervention programs; in 2004, the plan was organized into three programmatic areas, with 12 funded programs across these areas. As noted in the report, “the spending plan . . . remained essentially unchanged” through 2016 (Soung and Best, 2018).

However, there were several concerns about the administration of the JJCPA funds and composition of the JJCC. Regarding the administration of JJCPA funds, there was a perception that the plan was not guided by best practices for juvenile justice; that there were limitations to the data available for evaluation purposes, which, in most cases, only allowed the evaluators to compare outcomes of youth from year to year;<sup>2</sup> and that there were large amounts of unspent funds (Soung and Best, 2018). In addition, members of the JJCC and Los Angeles County advocates noted that the composition of the JJCC did not match the requirements outlined in California Code, Welfare and Institutions Code §749.22, particularly in regard to the inclusion of community members and representatives from community-based organizations (Fremon, 2019; Soung and Best, 2018). With increased scrutiny from advocates, the California State Legislature, and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the composition of the JJCC and approach to funding programs began a period of transformation (Bocanegra, 2017; Fremon, 2019). First, in December 2017, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors highlighted the need to ensure that services provided under JJCPA “reflect best practices, incorporate evaluation findings, and be informed by the needs of youth” (Hahn and Ridley-Thomas, 2019). This plan was to be detailed in the required annual Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan (CMJJP).

In response to the board and advocates, the JJCC’s Community Advisory Committee (JJCC-CAC) was developed in March 2017 and the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee, which is responsible for developing the spending plan, was developed in March 2018 (Soung and Best, 2018). In addition, the JJCC added ten community representatives, with some named by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and some through an application process (Soung and Best, 2018).

## JJCPA Funding Decision Process

The CMJJP is designed to be “a theoretical and practical foundation on which programs and services are selected, implemented, and evaluated to maximize benefit to the youth population served” (County of Los Angeles, 2020). JJCPA funds both programs and projects. Programs are ongoing services, typically funded year after year, whereas projects are designed to be temporary, unique, or novel services (CMJJP Subcommittee, 2020). Each year, the JJCC undertakes a process of planning for and developing the CMJJP, then making JJCPA funding allocations. For this report, we organized this process into three overarching phases (information-gathering, planning and allocations, adoption) and outlined the tasks within each phase in Table 1.

In brief, the JJCC gathers findings from a community survey that is conducted by the JJCC-CAC,

feedback on existing programs and projects that is solicited by the JJCC-CAC for informational purposes, and feedback from the JJCPA evaluator on any available evaluation data (CMJJP Subcommittee, 2020). Using this information together with funding applications received by governmental agencies, the CMJJP Subcommittee prepares an update to the CMJJP and makes recommendations for the JJCPA funding allocations for the following fiscal year (FY). In the early winter, the CMJJP Subcommittee presents its recommendations to the JJCC for approval and the JJCC-CAC to allow for community feedback. The final allocation recommendations then are presented to the full JJCC for a vote. After approval by the county’s Board of Supervisors, the funding allocations are submitted to the state.

TABLE 1  
JJCPA Planning and Funding Allocation Process

Phase	Tasks	Approximate Timeline <sup>a</sup>
Information-gathering	JJCC-CAC conducts annual survey to identify needs and priorities from perspective of community members.	July to September
	JJCC-CAC requests community feedback on programs that strengthen youth resilience and reduce delinquency (for informational purposes).	July to September
	Request for applications is released to solicit programs for funding.	July to September
	Evaluation data from programs presented to JJCC.	August
Planning and allocations	CMJJP Subcommittee forms and revises CMJJP and funding allocation recommendations using information that was obtained during the information-gathering phase.	September to December
	CMJJP Subcommittee presents a draft CMJJP and funding allocation recommendations to JJCC-CAC, receives input, and makes revisions as needed.	September to December
	CMJJP sent to full JJCC approximately six weeks in advance of JJCC meeting.	Around Thanksgiving
Adoption	CMJJP Subcommittee presents to full JJCC, and then JJCC votes on funding allocation recommendations.	January
	The Probation Department submits request to apply for JJCPA funding to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for approval.	Date requested in February
	Board-approved JJCPA application (with attached CMJJP) submitted to BSCC.	May

SOURCE: Information adapted from FY 2021–2022 CMJJP and stakeholder interviews.

<sup>a</sup> Uses a timeline outlined in the FY 2021–2022 CMJJP.

## Previous Gap Analysis Efforts and the Present Study

In 2018, Resource Development Associates (RDA)—serving as the JJCPA evaluator—published a JJCPA gap analysis report. Its goal was “to examine gaps between best practices in delinquency prevention services and JJPA program and service delivery in LA County” (Rabinowitz et al., 2018), with the goal of providing recommendations to guide the JJCPA portfolio. To conduct this gap analysis, it drew on a literature review, prior JJCPA research conducted in Los Angeles County, a document review, qualitative data collection with JJCPA stakeholders, and quantitative program utilization and outcome data. The 2018 report yielded a series of recommendations related to three domains: service approach, service types, and system capacity and administration.

In late 2019, the RAND Corporation was selected as the new JJCPA evaluator for Los Angeles County. As part of this role, RAND was asked by the Probation Department to conduct a gap analysis. Because RDA delivered a comprehensive gap analysis in 2018, we approached this gap analysis as an update to and expansion on the prior report. Our gap analysis had two primary goals. First, we aimed to determine whether the best practices identified by RDA were still supported by the research evidence, and whether any new best practices had emerged in the past three years. Second, we aimed to more clearly understand the extent to which these best practices are reflected in the JJCPA portfolio of services.

## Methods and Data Sources

We used four data sources to complete this gap analysis. First, we conducted a literature review of existing best practices that built on the existing research done by RDA (Rabinowitz et al., 2018). We also performed a review of relevant JJCPA-related documents, fielded a survey of JJCC members, and conducted semistructured interviews with JJCC members and Probation staff. Each data source is described in more detail in the sections that follow.

## Literature Review

The purpose of our literature review was to identify best practices in the field of juvenile justice to provide recommendations for strengthening the alignment between best practices and JJCPA-funded programming. Our starting point for this effort was a review of the literature conducted by RDA in 2018 (Rabinowitz et al., 2018). Its review was not intended to be a systematic review but rather a targeted review for best practices and key components of high-quality and comprehensive juvenile justice systems that should guide the service delivery model and implementation of the JJCPA services and supervision.

We took a two-pronged strategy in our literature review. First, we reviewed the literature cited in RDA’s gap analysis (Rabinowitz et al., 2018) and included relevant literature in our summary. Next, we conducted a broader review of the literature from articles published between 1990 and mid-2021 to identify any missing and more-recent published work. We primarily used Google Scholar’s search engine and the following search terms: juvenile justice, best practices, youth development approach, family, trauma-informed, racial equity, evidence-based practices, and culturally responsive. We also scanned bibliographies of relevant articles to expand our search.

After reviewing the identified literature, we determined that there remained robust evidence for the seven original best practices identified by RDA (Rabinowitz et al., 2018). We also identified one other best practice that emerged from the literature. The eight best practices appear in Figure 1 and are described in more detail in Box 1. The full literature review is located in the Appendix.

## Document Analysis

The purpose of the document analysis was to review JJCC written priorities and processes to understand how best practices are reflected in the CMJJP and funding decisions. We thoroughly reviewed the most-recent CMJJPP (2021–2022) and the 2021 request for applications for JJCPA funding. We also reviewed elements of two prior versions of the CMJJP (2020–2021 and 2019–2020), the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment fielded in 2021, the CMJJP Subcommit-

FIGURE 1  
Best Practices in Juvenile Justice Systems



\* Additional best practice identified in the updated literature review.

tee report from November 2020, and JJCC meeting and subcommittee meeting agendas and handouts from 2019 to 2021. In the document analysis, we used some of the documents in a descriptive manner to better understand the priorities of the JJCC and processes by which funding allocations were made. We also conducted a more formal analysis of four specific documents (the FY 2021–2022 CMJJP, JJCPA funding requests, JJCC-CAC requests for community feedback, and the results of the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment) to determine whether the best practices identified through the literature review were reflected in the documents.

### JJCC Member Survey

We developed a survey to be fielded to all JJCC members. This anonymous survey was designed to (1) assess how much JJCC members weight each of the best practices when making funding decisions and (2) identify JJCC members’ perspectives on the strengths and limitations of the JJCPA portfolio of funded programs. The survey had questions related to the optimal distribution of funds across the continuum of services and the extent to which members consider several factors when making funding decisions, including the best practices and other priorities identified in the CMJJP and JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment (e.g., providing services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/

Questioning+ [LGBTQ+] youth, the per-youth cost of services). The anonymous survey was sent via email to all current JJCC members ( $n = 28$ ) and was completed by 16 individuals (for a breakdown, see Table 2). In an attempt to include all JJCC member views, we individually invited each JJCC member to participate in the survey, sent two additional follow-up emails, extended the deadline, and verbally reminded members in the August 2021 public JJCC meeting. On average, respondents had been members of the JJCC for three years. Analysis of the survey items was descriptive in nature.

### Qualitative Interviews

In addition to the survey, we developed a semistructured interview protocol to guide discussions with a subset of JJCC members and key Probation staff. The interviews were designed to be complementary to the survey. Whereas the survey assessed the extent to which best practices are considered when making funding decisions, the interviews were designed to provide additional context and information regarding the existing JJCPA portfolio, whether it reflects the best practices identified through the literature, and opportunities to increase the alignment between best practices and funded programs.

We selected JJCC interviewees in two phases. In the first phase, we grouped all JJCC members by affiliation or group (i.e., nonprofit, city agency,

## Box 1. Best Practices for Juvenile Justice Systems

### **(1) Provide a continuum of services for different needs and risk levels**

This involves providing a variety of options starting with prevention programs for at-risk youth and moving toward graduated sanctions and treatment programs for youth who have committed delinquent acts (Wilson and Howell, 1993). This approach uses the risk-need-responsivity model, which indicates that the intensity of services should be matched to a youth's risk level (the *risk principle*) and address an individual youth's dynamic risk factors (the *need principle*).

Evidence demonstrates that programming for youth at high risk of offending benefits more than just lower-risk youth, and that providing overly intensive interventions to low-risk youth can have iatrogenic effects (Dowden and Andrews, 1999). For this reason, this practice also includes making a continuum of services available, from prevention to intervention programs.

### **(2) Use a youth development approach**

A youth development approach emphasizes the need to curate responses to juvenile offenses to match the age and developmental stage of the offender. A positive youth development/positive youth justice approach stresses the importance of promoting legal socialization, prosocial identities, and facilitating compliance with the law (National Research Council, 2013). Positive youth development theorizes that when there is an alignment among their talents, interests, skills, and community resources (e.g., school, family), young people can achieve positive developmental outcomes, including academic achievement, extracurricular activities, physical and mental health, and prosocial behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004; Dotterer, McHale, and Crouter, 2007; Fredricks and Eccles, 2010; Irvin et al., 2010).

### **(3) Ensure that programming is family-focused and community-led**

Family and community are core social institutions that support young people as they develop into adults. Programming should promote family engagement (including biological, foster, or adoptive parents and extended family or family members identified by the youth involved) and, where possible, be grounded in the community (Luckenbill and Yeager, 2009; Osher et al., 2012; Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner, 2011;

Shanahan and diZerega, 2016). Family is critical to children's development and one of the primary sources of children's emotional and social development and, consequently, strong ties between children and their families can support the establishment of social bonds and support pro-social behaviors (Brook et al., 1998). Similarly, a sense of belonging and commitment to a community also can support pro-social behaviors (McMahon and Pederson, 2020).

### **(4) Provide trauma-informed care**

Upward of 90 percent of justice-involved youth are exposed to one type of trauma; most have experienced multiple types of trauma (Abram et al., 2004). The high rates of trauma in this population demand that interventions targeting justice-involved youth integrate trauma-informed care and programming (Skinner-Osei et al., 2019). This approach aims to create an environment of safety, trust, and respect, and—while not excusing unlawful behavior—recognizing and responding to the symptoms of trauma, including how it might relate to offending (Harris and Fallot, 2009; Bloom, 2013; Levenson and Willis, 2019).

### **(5) Apply a racial equity framework**

Young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)—especially Black youth—are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement despite similar rates of criminal behavior among their White peers (McGlynn-Wright et al., 2020). Once arrested, Black and Latino youth are more likely to continue to have contact with the juvenile justice system, and Black youth, in particular, are more likely to get rearrested after their first arrest despite similar levels of reoffending among their White peers (Mitchell, 2005; Onifade et al., 2019). Juvenile justice programs should aim to address these inequalities.

### **(6) Provide culturally appropriate and responsive programming**

Culturally responsive refers to program adaptations made to incorporate culture-specific elements (e.g., terminology, communication styles, authority figures) or to match providers and clients with respect to cultural background (Feldman et al., 2010). Such methods can partly address racial and ethnic disparities in the

## Box 1—Continued

juvenile justice system by making programming more effective for non-White youth (Cabaniss et al., 2007; Hoytt et al., 2001). Such approaches might include providing legal education for families or ensuring that family members are included in court hearings or providing legal information in different languages.

### 7) Use evidence-based practices and programs

Evidence-based programs are those demonstrate that positive change in intended outcomes is attributable to the intervention and that the intervention has no unexpected harmful effects (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). The evaluation of the intervention must be high quality, and multiple evaluations must produce consistent findings. The intervention also must clearly align with intended outcomes through the targeting of risk and/or protective factors. The program or intervention should have a clear write-up

so that the implementation of the program can follow the same model as the program that produced positive results.

### 8) Attend to program implementation and fidelity

Juvenile justice systems should ensure fidelity to the intended implementation of an evidence-based program. Studies demonstrate that high-quality implementation with youth populations involved in the justice system can improve outcomes (Lispey, 1995). Research finds that well-implemented interventions produce larger effect sizes than programs with implementation difficulties (James et al., 2013). Importantly, studies of programs with weak implementation sometimes produced evidence of negative or harmful impacts. This relationship between implementation strength and outcomes is similar to several studies in the field (Lispey, 1995).

TABLE 2  
Distribution of JJCC Interviewees

JJCC Groups	Total Members	Total Interviewed	Total Responding to Survey
Nonprofit	11	4	7
City agency	3	1	2
County agency	14	5	7
Total	28	10	16

county agency) and then randomly selected one-third of each group to be contacted for interviews. We targeted ten people out of 28 total members in the first round. We had a 60-percent response rate and completed six interviews in the first round (one member declined and three did not respond to our request).

In the second phase, we randomly selected additional JJCC members based on two criteria: (1) to balance representation of each group because response rates across groups in the first phase was not equal, and (2) to target members who had participated in the JJCC as *members* for at least two years to ensure that we could gather sufficient data on changes to the JJCPA funding allocation process over time. Lastly, we

purposefully invited one participant, identified from other interviews, to give additional context about the selection process. Throughout the second phase, we had an 80-percent response rate with four out of five invited members completing an interview (one invitee did not respond to our request). In total, we completed interviews with ten JJCC members (see Table 2).

For the Probation staff interviews, our technical points of contact for the JJCPA evaluation identified key Probation staff. We conducted outreach to and completed interviews with three individuals.

All ten of the JJCC interviews were recorded and transcribed. To analyze interviews, we identified key themes deductively and inductively. Deductive

themes were based on best practices and the stages of the JJCPA funding and allocation process that we described in the introduction. Inductive themes were identified by members of our team that conducted the interviews. One team member coded the interviews, and themes that emerged were regularly discussed during our research team meetings. Probation staff interviews were not recorded, although detailed notes were taken. These interviews largely were used to provide additional context and factual information about the JJCPA funding process.

## Findings

In this section, we report the findings of our document analysis, survey of JJCC members, and interviews with JJCC members and Probation staff. We analyzed these data using the lens of the best practices identified in the literature review, although we also identified some broader findings related to the process by which JJCPA funding allocations are made and adopted.

### Results of the Document Analysis

We reviewed four key documents to determine whether the best practices identified through the literature review were reflected. These included the CMJJP, request for applications for JJCPA programs and projects, and the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment and request for community input on programs and projects. Findings on best practices are summarized in Table 3 and detailed in the following sections.

#### CMJJP

As described previously, the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee is responsible for developing the draft CMJJP and the funding allocation recommendations. Each year, the JJCC presents a resolution, which defines the specific parameters of the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee's work. It also establishes a self-nomination and selection process by which JJCC members become members of the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee. For the development of the FY 2020–2021 plan, the Ad-Hoc Subcommittee consisted of

seven JJCC members from community-based organizations and six JJCC members from government agencies. The Ad-Hoc Subcommittee is co-chaired by the JJCC Chair (a Probation staff member) and a CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee member.

Each spring, the JJCC submits the Los Angeles County JJCPA application to the state BSCC. The application includes portions of the CMJJP, and the complete CMJJP is included as an attachment. The CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee primarily uses the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment and the findings from any available evaluations of JJCPA programs or projects to inform the plan's development. The Ad-Hoc Subcommittee also has the ability to incorporate additional priorities into the plan, which might reflect larger priorities within Los Angeles County. For example, in 2021, the group added a statement on racial equity to its mission statement that “brings forward the realities of and current confrontations with structural racism to inform the work plan” (CMJJP Subcommittee, 2020).

The CMJJP document includes several key sections:

- **JJCPA and CMJJP Background**, which provides some history on the JJCPA, including Los Angeles County's approach to JJCPA funding.
- **Organization and Implementation of the CMJJP**, which provides background on the CMJJP itself.
- **Mission and Guiding Principles**, which outlines the CMJJP mission statement along with guiding principles for the overall portfolio and specific principles related to the Growth Fund Guiding Principles, which are intended to guide all aspects of JJCPA implementation in the county, including funding allocations, priority populations, and evaluation efforts.
- **Framework**, which describes the use of a youth development approach and focuses on a continuum of services from prevention to intervention.
- **Service Strategy**, which begins by describing the target population for JJCPA-funded services in Los Angeles County (e.g., estimates of at-risk youth, number of youths on

TABLE 3

## Representation of Best Practices in Key JJCPA Documents

Best Practice	CMJJP	Funding Request	JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment and Community Feedback
Continuum of services	Detailed in CMJJP Guiding Principles and framework, mentioned in Growth Fund Guiding Principles	Requests information about continuum of services covered by proposed program or project	Survey item included about areas of most need
Youth development approach	Detailed in CMJJP framework	Not explicitly included	Not directly assessed
Family-focused and community-led services	Detailed in Growth Fund Guiding Principles and briefly mentioned in CMJJP framework, with broader references to family	Not explicitly included	Not directly assessed
Trauma-informed care	Not detailed	Not explicitly included	Not directly assessed
Racial equity framework	Reflected in Mission Statement and Guiding Principles	Not explicitly included	Survey item included about groups in most need
Culturally appropriate and responsive programming	Not detailed	Not explicitly included	Not directly assessed
Evidence-based practices and programs	Reflected in Guiding Principles	Requests information about evidence base of proposed program or project	Not directly assessed
Program implementation and fidelity	Not detailed	Not explicitly included	Not directly assessed

probation, geographic areas with the highest representation of youth under Probation supervision), then describes recommended service categories and approaches (e.g., physical health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment; school and educational support; employment, career, and life skills; socio-emotional support; housing; parent and caregiver support; and arts, recreation, and well-being), and highlights potential metrics for evaluating programs at the service provider level and youth or family level.

- **CMJJP Funding Allocations and JJCPA Funding**, which provides parameters for funding allocations, such as targeting services by needs and prioritizing funding for direct service provision.

We analyzed the most recent CMJJP (FY 2021–2022) to determine how the best practices identified from the literature review were reflected within the plan. Overall, we found some variability in the extent to which the principles were reflected in the CMJJP.

*Providing a continuum of services* was the most clearly defined best practice in the CMJJP, because it was reflected within the CMJJP Guiding Principles and strategic framework. The CMJJP also had clear definitions of at-promise youth, youth with initial and early contacts with law enforcement, and youths on probation, as well as descriptions of how these different categories of youth map onto the continuum of services from primary prevention to intervention. There are also estimates of the target population in each of those categories with the bulk in the at-promise category and the fewest in the category of youth on probation. The CMJJP provides the breakdown of youth in each category because it has the potential to inform the continuum of services. The CMJJP also specifies a funding strategy across the continuum, allocating 25 percent to primary prevention, 35 percent to focused prevention/early intervention, and 30 percent to intervention (with the remaining 10 percent to capacity-building, evaluation, and administrative costs). The funding strategy is intended as a guideline for the JJCC—although

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*Providing a continuum of services was the most-clearly defined best practice in the CMJJP, because it was reflected within the CMJJP Guiding Principles and strategic framework.*

it is not clear how the specific targets were derived. Although the CMJJP specifies this funding strategy, less explicit attention is paid to the risk level or specific needs of youth, which is another aspect of this best practice.

Both the (1) application of a racial equity framework and (2) use of evidence-based practices and programs were reflected in the CMJJP Guiding Principles, which include guidance to “Recognize and reduce the racial and ethnic and geographic disparities” (CMJJP Subcommittee, 2020, p. 19). Racial equity is also mentioned in a specific statement on racial equity, which broadly describes the historic inequities that lead to individuals identifying as BIPOC being disproportionately involved in the youth justice system, describes other county commitments to antiracism and equity, and states that “the CMJJP should embrace a call for anti-racism as it is guided by a commitment to and investment in BIPOC and their communities.” Although the statement on racial equity also includes a charge to “recognize and reduce the racial and ethnic . . . disparities related to access to services and juvenile justice processing,” there is no guidance as to what this might look like in a candidate program, or whether there is a measurable or actionable goal.

Similarly, the CMJJP includes several statements that reference a youth development approach, and the document uses language that has been updated to reflect a youth development approach—for example, the shift from at-risk to at-promise youth. This best practice is clearly described in the CMJJP framework, which includes a section on youth and empowerment that highlights the importance of an asset-based and holistic approach to services, and calls for a focus on developing “social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies.” This section also includes some basic examples of what this approach might look like in practice, although they are at a fairly high level (e.g., “Link youth to holistic support systems”) (CMJJP Subcommittee, 2020, p. 18).

The importance of the family-focused and community-led services best practice is most clearly reflected in the Growth Fund Guiding Principles, which explicitly prioritize funding for community-based service provision (versus government agencies being the focus of funding). The Growth Fund Guiding Principles highlight a commitment to funding community-based organizations with less access to funding, located in areas with high levels of arrest, and that serve youth with highest needs. However, there is little language reflecting the importance of funding community-based services across the JJCPA portfolio (not just among growth funded programs, nor is it clear whether there is any intention regarding sustainability of these one-time projects). Regarding the family-focused aspect of this best practice, there are references throughout the CMJJP to serving youth *and* families, and the CMJJP framework highlights that “youth and children are part of family units” and that a focus on “family empowerment opportunities” is key (p. 22). However, there is not much specificity about the vision for supporting families.

Finally, three best practices receive very little attention in the CMJJP: (1) providing trauma-informed care, (2) hosting culturally appropriate and responsive programs, and (3) attending to program implementation and fidelity. The section of the CMJJP that outlines recommended service categories and approaches has a very brief mention of each. For example, the socio-emotional support category has the recommendation to “Provide gender-specific, cul-

turally, and racially responsive services to at-promise youth” (p. 34). Similarly, the physical health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment category has the recommendation to “[F]und community-based, trauma-informed behavioral health interventions and more community-based substance abuse treatment in neighborhoods with a high density of youth on probation” (p. 33).

### JJCPA Funding Request

Appendix B of the adopted CMJJP includes the process for governmental partners to submit a request for potential funding for the following FY. The Recommended Format for Governmental Partner Funding Request consists of the following sections:

- **Executive Summary**
- **Statement of Need**, which includes the problem that the proposed program or project will address and population it will serve
- **Program/Project Description**, which includes the nature of the program or project, plans for implementation, expected outcomes, evidence base, number of youth expected to be served, where it falls on the continuum of services (i.e., primary prevention), and which Service Planning Areas<sup>3</sup> and Supervisorial Districts are served
- **Timelines and Milestones**
- **Budget by Service Strategy**, which includes a breakdown of funds for each proposed strategy, cost per youth, why funding is needed, and any other funds available to support the program
- **Evaluation**, which requests information on the measures that will be used to demonstrate program or project effectiveness.

In reviewing the Recommended Format for Governmental Partner Funding Request, we found that the best practices were referenced in the application only in a limited way. The application does not explicitly ask about the continuum of services and use of evidence-based practices. In addition, related to applying a racial equity framework, information about the Service Planning Areas and county supervisorial districts might provide some insight into the racial and ethnic groups most represented

in the youth population. However, these regions are large and, therefore, an imprecise proxy for racial and ethnic composition. Outside these specific best practices, it is possible that programs might include details regarding the other best practices in their descriptions of their programs; however, the Recommended Format for Governmental Partner Funding Request does not explicitly seek that submissions include detail on the other best practices.

### JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment

The JJCC-CAC is responsible for developing and implementing both a survey and feedback process to gather input from Los Angeles County communities. We reviewed the findings from the community survey presented in the annual CMJJP. In 2020, about 34 percent ( $n = 31$ ) of respondents were service providers working with youth, 24 percent ( $n = 22$ ) were county employees, 14 percent ( $n = 13$ ) were juvenile justice advocates, 12 percent were concerned community members ( $n = 11$ ), and the remainder ( $n = 14$ ) were in other categories (e.g., educator, youth ages 15 to 25 affected by the justice system, adult or family member affected by the justice system) (County of Los Angeles, 2020).

The JJCC-CAC survey addresses the continuum of services best practice by asking about the category of youth that the respondent feels are most in need of services—at-promise youth, youth with initial and early contacts with law enforcement, or youth on probation. It also addresses the best practice of racial and ethnic equity to some degree, by asking which racial and ethnic groups are most in need of services. The survey indirectly taps into the perceived importance of a youth development approach by asking about categories of services that are important to fund “based on the greatest unfulfilled need,” with categories that include employment and life skills, educational support, and socio-emotional support. Similarly, it indirectly taps into a family-focused approach by including parent/caregiver support as a category of needed services. Based on our brief review, it is not clear how all survey fields are assessed for inclusion in the CMJJP or integrated into the funding selection

Of note, the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment also assesses several relevant areas

beyond the best practices. For example, there are items asking where youth feel most safe and comfortable receiving services and what obstacles youth encounter in the county. It also asks about the level of need of several subpopulations of youth (including groups defined by sexual orientation and gender identity) and youth with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, or those involved in the foster care system or affected by the immigration system.

### Request for Community Input on Programs and Projects

The JJCC-CAC also solicits community input on programs and projects (County of Los Angeles, JCC CAC, 2021). As noted previously, this is not a formal application process but rather an opportunity for the JJCC to learn about relevant categories of programs and services in the community. In part, this request is designed to provide an opportunity for the JJCC to learn about new or novel programs that address the best practices. There are some ways in which the process may solicit relevant information. We reviewed this request to determine whether any information about the best practices is solicited. The request asks respondents to include detail about how “the program or project align[s] with the CMJJP Mission and Guiding Principles.” Two best practices (racial equity and continuum of services) are reflected in the Mission and Guiding Principles, so respondents might include information about these practices in their responses; however, there is no explicit request for this type of detail.

### Findings from the JJCC Survey

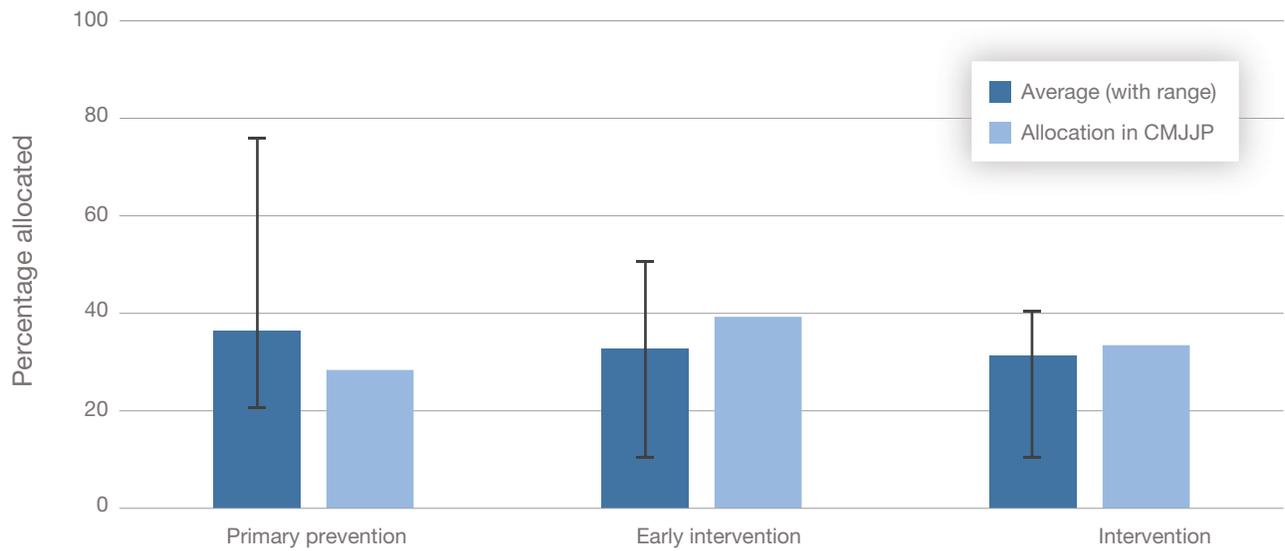
The purpose of the JJCC survey was to understand how individual JJCC members weigh the best practices and other relevant factors when making funding decisions. As described previously, the continuum of services from prevention to intervention is one of the best practices that is most well-defined in the CMJJP. However, we recognized that there might be variation in the value placed on each category of service by individual members of the JJCC. Therefore, we asked respondents to indicate their optimal distribution of funds across the continuum of services, with alloca-

tions summing to 100 percent. When looking at the average and median values for each category, the survey responses map fairly closely to the allocations reflected in the CMJJP (Figure 2). Survey respondents distributed the funds somewhat more evenly across the three categories than the CMJJP suggests, but, in general, there is no single category to which respondents allocated substantially more funds. However, the range of values for each category captured a fair amount of variability in survey responses. For example, allocations for primary prevention ranged from 20 percent to 75 percent, reflecting very different opinions on optimal allocation across respondents.

JJCC members were asked how often they consider each of several factors when making funding decisions. These factors included the best practices identified through the RDA gap analysis (Rabinowitz et al., 2018), but also a small number of other factors that had been identified as priorities through the CMJJP or were asked as part of the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment (i.e., whether the program serves LGBTQ+ youth, ages of youth served by the program, and per-youth cost of services). Figure 3 summarizes the proportion of respondents who indicated that they consider each factor “often” or “always.” Of note, 94 percent ( $n = 15$ ) of respondents indicated that they often or always consider whether a program serves the highest-need regions of the county, provides culturally appropriate or responsive services, and provides trauma-informed care. In addition, 87 percent ( $n = 14$ ) of respondents indicated that they often or always consider whether the services operate from a youth development framework. It is also noteworthy that at least three-quarters of respondents endorsed considering most of these factors often or always. Only three factors did not reach this threshold: whether the program is operated by a community-based organization (i.e., is community-led) (63 percent;  $n = 10$ ), per-youth cost of services (56 percent;  $n = 9$ ), and ages of youth served by the program or project (50 percent;  $n = 8$ ).

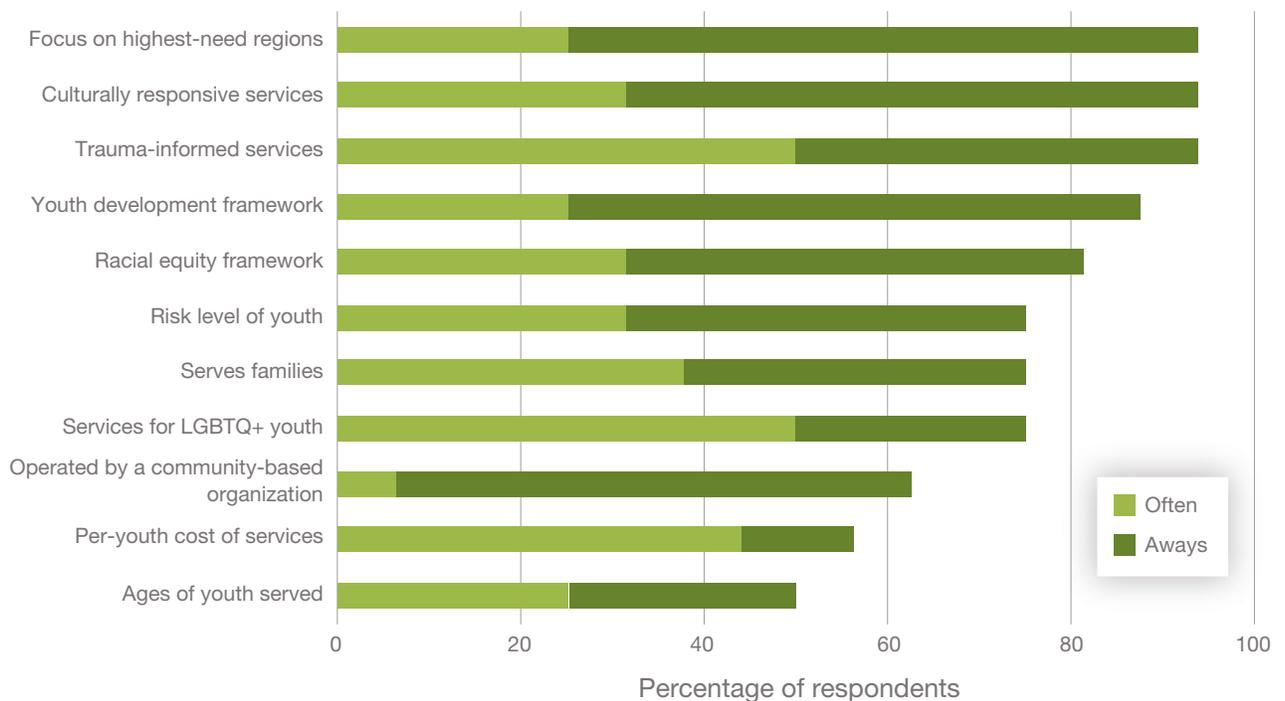
JJCC members were also asked to rank the top three most important factors when making funding decisions (Figure 4). Whether a program or project operates from a youth development framework was endorsed most often and also received the most “number one” ranks ( $n = 4$ ). The next most com-

FIGURE 2  
 JJCC Member-Reported Optimal Distribution of Funds Across Program Types



NOTE: CMJJP includes allocations for primary prevention, early intervention, and intervention programs and projects, plus a 5-percent allocation for capacity-building and 5-percent allocation for evaluation and infrastructure. We have focused on the 90-percent allocation for services when presenting these allocations. Therefore, numbers reflected in the “Allocation in CMJJP” category (light blue) reflect the allocation as a percentage of the total budget for services, excluding the funds allocated for capacity-building, evaluation, and infrastructure.

FIGURE 3  
 Frequency with Which JJCC Members Consider Each Factor When Making Funding Decisions



monly endorsed factors were whether the program or project offers culturally appropriate or responsive services and whether it serves families, although whether the program serves families received more “top” votes. Interestingly, no respondents indicated that the ages of youth served or the per-youth cost of services were in the top three most important factors.

## Insights from the JJCC and Probation Interviews

Whereas the survey provided initial insight into the factors that are considered when JJCC members make funding allocation decisions, we were also interested in understanding stakeholder perspectives on how well these factors are reflected within the current JJCPA portfolio. Although interviewees did provide some insights specific to each best practice, we also gained insight into the processes by which funding decisions are made, the CMJJP is adopted, and contracting with funded agencies occurs. In this section, we review themes related to both best practices and the funding process. Findings were largely based on interviews with JJCC members, although information provided

by Probation Department stakeholders was incorporated to add context related to the policies and procedures governing the JJCPA funding allocation process.

## Representation of Best Practices in the JJCPA Portfolio

This section provides interviewee perspectives on each best practice. Illustrative quotes for each best practice are presented in Table 4. Where relevant, we also include responses provided in the open-ended portion of the survey where participants could elaborate on their survey responses.

### Best Practice 1: Provide a Continuum of Services for Different Needs and Risk Levels

Most JJCC respondents believed that a variety of different needs and risk levels should be considered when making program funding decisions. However, respondents were unsure whether this best practice is reflected in the JJCPA-funded slate of programs because of a lack of available data to make this determination. Respondents noted that programs theoretically address a variety of needs and risks, but the

FIGURE 4  
Ranking of Top Three Factors When Making Funding Decisions

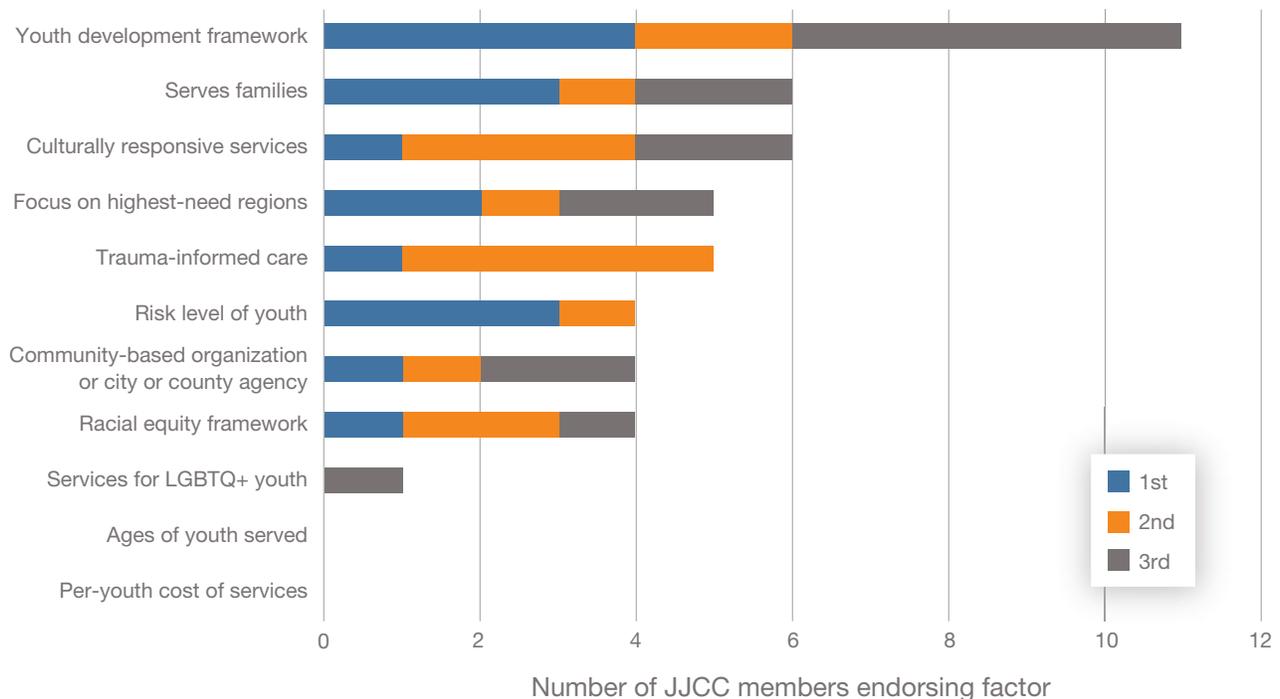


TABLE 4

## Illustrative Interviewee Quotes about How Best Practices are Reflected in the JJCPA Portfolio

Best Practice	Illustrative JJCC Member Quotes
Continuum of services	<p>“[It]’s hard to tell because in their proposals they’ll say they’re addressing everyone and everything but when you question and dissect it, really what special services or strategies or support or evidence-based practices are being used for particular youth [is unclear]. So, what we hear from the partners, it all sounds good but it’s really difficult to assess the services based on students’ needs.”</p> <p>“We don’t have that full picture, so that’s why it’s hard to say is our allocation correct of 30/30/30. We came to that because if we don’t have this complete understanding of how much intervention dollars in the facilities there are, so let’s start with even spread.”</p>
Youth development approach	<p>“I don’t even think we’ve had a conversation at that level on what we understand youth development to be. . . . We tend not to have those kinds of discussions at the JJCC level. It’s largely—there needs to be a vote on this thing, there needs to be a decision, we get together someone presents, we come back and make a decision on those things.”</p>
Family-focused and community-led services	<p>“[I]t’s difficult to get the families involved as part of the kind of services that are given. But there can always be a little bit more of an effort on behalf of JJCPA/JJCC to elevate that need a little bit more.”</p> <p>“The supports and services really need to be primarily located in and delivered by community. Which means a lot of different things but at least physically located in, the leadership is more from the community. I think that’s one of the biggest successes we’ve had is to shift toward that.”</p>
Trauma-informed care	<p>“[I]ndividual JJCC members might—because we’re given these score cards . . . an organization being trauma-informed might [affect] the score that member gives that proposal or program, but we don’t discuss these things as a committee.”</p>
Racial equity framework	<p>“I think it could be a more intentional part of the conversation. I think we probably could be more targeted in who our dollars are going to serve if we were approaching it with an equity lens. I think there’s attempts to do that, but we could definitely do more.”</p>
Culturally appropriate and responsive programming	<p>“Certain programs are tailored to the community not necessarily to the culture of the community. So, the focus has been how is this entity [affecting] the community they’re serving. The community may involve African American, Asian, [and] LGBTQ [populations], all in one. Others may be different. So, the focus has been on the community rather than on the culture. There is some overlap naturally but that has not necessarily been the focus.”</p>
Evidence-based practices and programs	<p>“One of my biggest frustrations is that we’re often times put in positions to make decisions about funding, without having, not even a full, but any sort of picture of the quality of the programs requesting these funds. That’s my biggest challenge and biggest frustration and has been over the past few years on the JJCC . . . [Q]uality data to help the JJCC make more sophisticated decisions is really lacking.”</p>
Program implementation and fidelity	<p>“We as JJCC don’t get an update from [the] Probation [Department] saying, ‘Hey, these are the performance markers that we established with these groups, and they’ve hit the mark, or they haven’t’—we just don’t . . . we don’t get that quarterly sheet saying this is what the numbers look like.”</p>

way in which those needs are addressed is less clear because of a lack of reliable and uniform data.

Regarding the continuum of services, some JJCC respondents suggested that a higher allocation of funding dollars should go to prevention services. However, CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents—who are closest to the funding process—suggested that the near-equitable split among funding prevention, early intervention, and intervention services was intentional. The CMJJP

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents stated that this even distribution reflected such factors as (1) the need to address all three areas, (2) the relatively new process of allocating funds to intentionally allocated buckets, and (3) the lack of data to support a shift in any one direction.

### **Best Practice 2: Use a Youth Development Approach**

All interviewed JJCC respondents spoke about the importance of ensuring that the programming incorporated tenets of a positive youth development approach. However, respondents expressed concern that funding might not reflect this best practice because there was no unified definition. One respondent even went so far as to say that the lack of definition completely undermined the ability of the body to align JJCPA funding with this best practice. Another respondent suggested that presentations from experts and discussions within the group could help to bring consistency and clarification to this term.

### **Best Practice 3: Ensure Programming Is Family-Focused and Community-Led**

All JJCC respondents affirmed that family-focused services are extremely important and should be considered in funding allocations. However, as with the first two best practices, interviewees reported that it was difficult to tell whether a program was family-focused because of a lack of data. CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents specifically indicated that more data are needed to understand whether programs are adequately serving families or the way in which they serve families (e.g., which frameworks or strategies are used). One respondent suggested that a landscape analysis of funding for family-focused services across the county might help understand the extent of services needed. Such an analysis would take stock of all the programs funded through a variety of funding mechanisms to understand where the JJCPA-funded programs can fill gaps instead of duplicating services. At the same time, some interviewees noted that existing programs that aim to support families might not be used sufficiently; for example, one JJCC respondent noted that it can be difficult to engage families even if programs are funded.

Regarding community-focused services, many JJCC respondents expressed a desire to focus JJCPA resources on community-led interventions that are offered by community-based organizations rather than the same county and city agencies and programs that traditionally have received the bulk of the funds. Several JJCC respondents noted that having services delivered by community-based providers was the way

to ensure that programming is developed in partnership with communities. JJCC respondents reported that they were satisfied with the recent shift toward funding these organizations. However, some respondents also commented that this shift was the result of a multiyear effort, and there is room for progress.

### **Best Practice 4: Provide Trauma-Informed Care**

JJCC respondents affirmed the importance of ensuring that programs provide trauma-informed care when making funding-allocation decisions. However, interviewees revealed that trauma-informed practices rarely are discussed at JJCC meetings. Although individuals might consider the inclusion of trauma-informed practices when scoring programs, interviewees indicated that there is little discussion about the meaning, value, or inclusion of trauma-informed practices because it applies to JJCPA-funded programs. JJCC respondents suggested that greater efforts to define this best practice could strengthen their ability to align JJCC funding allocation with it.

### **Best Practice 5: Apply a Racial Equity Framework**

All interviewed JJCC members stated that consideration of racial and ethnic equity was important and something they considered in the funding-allocation process. However, as with the other best practices, JJCC respondents stressed that the definitions and metrics for racial equity should be improved, including acknowledgments of such constructs as historical trauma and community trauma. Along the same lines, another respondent suggested that the group create a scale on which to rate funding opportunities on dimensions of racial equity, which could help members align JJCC allocations with this best practice. In general, JJCC interviewees stressed that the group could do more to fully center racial and ethnic equity in funding conversations.

### **Best Practice 6: Provide Culturally Appropriate and Responsive Programming**

JJCC respondents reported that cultural appropriateness generally is not discussed or strongly considered in planning or funding allocation. Some interviewees related the concepts of culturally responsive programming to racial and ethnic equity or to

community-focused programming, but unique consideration had not been given to culturally responsive programming. Respondents suggested that greater care should be taken to address *culture*, which is a related but distinct concept from *racial and ethnic equity*, and that the committee should have open discussions about this difference.

#### **Best Practice 7: Use Evidence-Based Practices and Programs**

JJCC interviewees endorsed the importance of funding evidence-based practices and programs that are known to be effective for a given outcome or population, but noted that they do not always feel like they understand what these are. In addition, JJCC respondents stressed that they needed more data to determine whether programs had evidence of success, and discussed how difficult it can be to make funding decisions without data on the effectiveness of those programs. Alternatively, respondents expressed concern that some organizations would not be able to meet the demands of a rigorous evaluation to demonstrate impact, even if their program is making a difference.

#### **Best Practice 8: Attend to Program Implementation and Fidelity**

Although we did not ask JJCC interviewees specifically about the final best practice because the literature review was underway when interviews were being conducted, implementation fidelity and adherence came up regularly in interviews. In particular, JJCC respondents highlighted a lack of performance markers during the period of program funding as a barrier to understanding whether and how the program was working.

### **Perspectives on the Information-Gathering, Planning and Allocation, and Adoption Processes**

In addition to their perspectives on the best practices, interviewees often commented on the procedural aspects of determining the JJCPA portfolio. Key themes are summarized in Table 5 and described in more detail next.

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JJCC respondents highlighted a lack of performance markers during the period of program funding as a barrier to understanding whether and how the program was working.

#### **Information-Gathering**

A key theme raised by interviewees was the lack of evaluation data to guide their decisions. Many noted that they have had limited evaluation data available, which makes it difficult to know whether the programs being funded are achieving their expected outcomes or addressing the guiding principles. As a result, interviewees noted that it was challenging for them to know whether programs that have historically received funding should continue to receive funding without clarity on their effectiveness.

Another concern raised by respondents related to the information obtained through the funding request and request for community input on programs. As described in more detail in the following section, submissions are scored using a structured rubric. The rubric asks CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee members to rank each proposed program or project on several elements, including the extent to which the program or project is aligned with the four guiding principles outlined in the CMJJP: (1) program efficiency, (2) return on investment, (3) expected implementation (e.g., number of youth served, program costs, program capacity), and (4) expected outcomes (e.g., whether appropriate metrics of success have been identified). Although the rubric was intended to provide a structured method by which to rate proposals, interviewees indicated that the information solicited through the funding

TABLE 5  
Barriers to the JJCPA Funding Allocation Process

Phase	Barriers	Illustrative JJCC Member Quote
Information-gathering	Lack of evaluation data makes it difficult to know which programs are effective and might be worth continued funding.	“I just feel like we oftentimes make decisions with not enough information, or at least information that would make me feel comfortable in making these important decisions around funding.”
	Lack of alignment between funding request and request for community input, as well as the best practices or CMJJP scoring criteria.	“. . . The application process and what is suggested for folks to present in terms of funding does not include recommendations to address these areas directly.”
	There is limited dissemination of funding opportunity.	“We just evaluate the proposals that come before us. How do the funding announcements get distributed? Does the JJCC have any input in that?”
Planning and allocations	Limited time to revise the CMJJP and make funding recommendations, which is a time-consuming process.	“As I’m talking, the JJCC needs staff that can do that [proposal review] . . . that can be dedicated to reviewing proposals to digging in and sifting through information around all of these best practices and presenting that to the body in a way that’s digestible. I don’t know if that’s doable, otherwise.”
	Limited alignment between the scoring rubric and best practices; lack of clear definitions of scores to ensure inter-rater reliability.	“We’ve never had the opportunity as an example to discuss what a 5 would look like in each category. So, we’re not sharing . . . although we’re using the same principles but we’re not using the same understanding of these principles to evaluate these programs.”
	Lack of clarity about how much flexibility there is to change allocations for programs that traditionally receive funding annually.	“So my understanding is that there’s a significant number of governmental agencies that are part of the base funded programs and those are historically—I don’t know how those were initially selected but those have continued over the years to be continuously funded.”
Adoption	Limited information for JJCC members who are not on the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to review when voting whether to adopt the plan.	“I think this might be an area where maybe some of this conversation is happening in the subcommittee that does the recommendations but if that is the case that could be reported out. To start, it might be helpful to have that type of information shared out along with funding recommendations.”
	Complicated process for contracting with selected agencies; unanswered questions about the translation of the JJCC vision into program statements of work.	“. . . because we hand it off to [Probation and other] agencies to ultimately pick who they partner with, I can’t see, it’s almost like a black box to me at least. Whether there’s fidelity to that language in the selection of the service providers and ultimately the delivery of services is something we don’t have a lot of report back on.”

request, request for community input, and JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment do not clearly map onto the scoring rubric, so it is difficult for members to make ratings across each dimension. Finally, some interviewees highlighted the need to advertise the funding opportunity more widely in an effort to diversify the portfolio. Although we learned that the funding announcements are distributed to a distribution list of more than 700 people, interviewees noted

that there might be opportunities to reach a wider pool of agencies and organizations.

### Planning and Allocations

We learned in the interviews that funding allocation recommendations are made by the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee, which meets regularly throughout the fall to revise the CMJJP and review and rate proposals. One interviewee noted that the subcommittee had previously attempted to accomplish these goals in six

meetings. However, members found that six meetings were not enough and increased the schedule to ten. CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents indicated that the CMJJP is developed first during this period and then used to inform the funding-allocation process. One concern raised by interviewees is the time-consuming aspect of this process, especially given that participation on the JJCC is an extra responsibility for members, who have other jobs. For example, for FY 2020–2021, 29 agencies submitted funding requests for 63 programs or projects. Although the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee has tried to address this potential time-management issue by dividing the proposals and assigning a primary and secondary reviewer for each, some interviewees noted that not all CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee members completed their reviews on time.

As referenced earlier, the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee recently adopted a rubric to score applications. The rubric includes scores for each of the CMJJP Guiding Principles outlined earlier in this report. However, many CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents commented on the mismatch between the rubric and best practices beyond those principles that are reflected in the CMJJP Guiding Principles. In addition, some CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee respondents noted that scoring criteria were not defined, so even though a specific scoring range is noted, there is no instruction or consensus about what might define a high or low score.

Several interviewees also noted that the same programs seem to receive funding year after year, and they were uncertain as to whether they have the ability to make significant changes to those allocations. Related to this, respondents expressed concerns that most funds continue to go to county and city agencies, although these agencies often subcontract with community-based organizations to provide services. Some interviewees highlighted specific legal or contractual limitations that govern who is eligible to apply—for example, organizations must already be part of a master service agreement with the department, and government agencies are allowed to directly apply for JJCPA funds in a way that community-based organizations cannot. However, others stated that they just do not know how flexible they can be in their allocations—a concern they

hoped would be addressed by the new Governance Ad-Hoc Subcommittee that is being established.

### Adoption

Interviewees also shared details about the process of adopting the plan and program allocations. Specifically, the full JJCC weighs in only after all CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee recommendations are finalized. In the most recent funding cycle (2021–2022), the process of approving both the CMJJP and the recommended funding allocations took place over the course of two meetings, a change from one meeting in prior years. The CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee aims to share its recommendations with the full JJCC six weeks in advance of the funding-allocation meeting. Although this meeting has been extended beyond the allocated time to allow for JJCC member questions and public comments, JJCC respondents—particularly those who are not part of the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee—relate that not all funding allocations can be fully discussed in that period.

Once the allocation decisions are finalized by the JJCC, the process of translating that allocation into program funding begins. We learned from interviewees that the plan is approved by the JJCC and Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, which provides approval for the Probation Department to apply for the funding. The Probation Department then submits the application, with the attached CMJJP to BSCC. At the same time, the department begins the time-consuming process of translating the JJCC allocation determinations into statements of work that meet the goals of what the JJCC approved and are consistent with the county’s contracting process. Although not formally part of the adoption process, some JJCC respondents specifically noted their lack of oversight or input into this contracting process (note that because of the contracting process, the statement of work cannot be made public until the contract is awarded to prevent information access to some over others). One interviewee acknowledged that this would be extremely burdensome, but there was some concern that respondents do not have insight into the extent to which statements of work reflect the key program elements that the JJCC thought was worth funding. JJCC respondents also noted that they cannot specify with which

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However, there are barriers to ensuring that the slate of JJCPA-funded programs support best practices.

community-based organizations the county and city agencies subcontract to provide services, even if they know of a promising program model. However, the Probation Department described working carefully with each agency to ensure that these statements of work adequately reflect core program elements while also communicating contracting requirements.

## Recommendations

Our gap analysis revealed that there is support for the funding of programs through the JJCPA that align with best practices. However, there are barriers to ensuring that the slate of JJCPA-funded programs support best practices. In an effort to help close this gap, we identified several areas where best practices could be incorporated into the process of making funding determinations. Our recommendations are organized according to the JJCC's annual process for developing and submitting funding allocations and the CMJJP. Of note, several of these recommendations are directly responsive to challenges named by interviewees or were suggested by interviewees, meaning that the environment might be conducive for updates to the process using these recommendations.

### Information-Gathering

- **Increase the alignment between the JJCPA funding request and the best practices.** For example, this could involve asking agencies to specifically outline the ways that their programs are consistent with each best practice—

or, at least, the three or four best practices identified as most important for guiding the JJCPA portfolio. This would ensure that all programs know to submit justification about the match between their services and the best practices, and this information is then available to the JJCC when making funding decisions.

- **Increase the alignment between the request for community input on programs and projects and the best practices.** Similar to the JJCPA funding request, the request for community input could be structured to specifically assess particular best practices. In turn, this would ensure that the JJCC receives information that would help assess the extent to which the best practices are present in the proposed programs or projects.
- **Revise the JJCC-CAC Youth Service Needs Assessment to better reflect best practices and expand the reach of this survey.** For example, this could include items asking community members to rank best practices according to importance, which would help gauge what community members value and ensure that those values are reflected in funded programs and projects. Furthermore, the largest group of respondents on the assessment is service providers. However, it would be valuable to find ways to increase input from families and youth to understand their priorities. This could be accomplished by more-directly disseminating the survey link to youth-serving organizations, posting it to websites beyond the Probation JJCPA site, or leveraging social media.
- **Ensure that the JJCC has access to evaluation data related to program implementation and outcomes.** It is clear that JJCC members are interested in understanding the effectiveness of funded programs. Over the years, there have been various evaluation efforts. For many years, evaluations focused on analyzing six justice system-related outcomes required by legislation and submitted to BSCC. However, there was little information about other relevant outcomes or program implementation. More-recent

evaluation efforts (led by RDA) broadened the focus of the evaluations by performing process and outcome evaluations on a subset of programs. However, several programs have not been the focus of in-depth evaluation in years, and there remain key limitations to existing evaluations—in particular, there has been little standardized data collection across programs for the past several years. The Probation Department is working to reestablish standards regarding data collection, and RAND is providing technical assistance to programs; however, it might take some time before high-quality evaluation data are available. In the meantime, RAND researchers are collecting qualitative data on a subset of programs each year, which would help provide details regarding implementation and perceptions of effectiveness.

- **Use JJCC meetings as a forum for expert presentations and information-sharing about evidence-based practices.** JJCC members noted that it can be challenging to keep up with the research literature. One option might be for the evaluation team to conduct evidence scans or literature searches on specific topics relevant to the JJCPA portfolio and then present these during JJCC meetings, or invite other local experts as guest speakers. There also could be presentations focused on ensuring that JJCC members have a shared understanding of best practices and how they can be operationalized (e.g., trauma-informed care). These efforts would increase JJCC members' ability to fully consider the evidence base of proposed programs and projects.

## Planning and Allocations

- **Consider ways to alleviate the pressure on JJCC members and Probation staff that results from the short timeline for CMJJP development and funding allocations.** The window for updating the CMJJP, reviewing applications, and making funding recommendations is brief. JJCC members self-nominate

to be members of the Ad-Hoc Subcommittee and place a great importance on their roles; however, JJCC members fulfill their roles in addition to their other employment. More dedicated staff to support these subcommittee efforts could be helpful. It might also be worth considering whether a consolidated review process would be more efficient than spreading it over several meetings (e.g., spending two full days reviewing applications rather than meeting several times over two months).

- **Provide clearer operational definitions of best practices in the CMJJP along with measurable targets.** Best practices receive varying levels of attention within the CMJJP. It would be more effective to provide specific or measurable recommendations for what those best practices would look like in reality. This might also include measurable goals or targets, or more-concrete examples of what the best practices might look like in a program context.
- **Ensure that the scoring rubric assesses each best practice and has clearer scoring guidance.** Some best practices are reflected

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Several programs have not been the focus of in-depth evaluation in years, and there remain key limitations to existing evaluations—in particular, there has been little standardized data collection across programs for the past several years.

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JJCC members expressed some uncertainty about how much input they have in certain aspects of funding decisions, and many called for clarification of their roles and scope.

because the rubric includes the CMJJP Guiding Principles, but others are not included in scoring. This would calibrate the scoring process by defining what the scoring ranges mean (e.g., if scoring a program on the principle of racial equity, what would a score of 1 look like? What would a score of 5 look like?), and create better consistency in scores across CMJJP committee members. It would also be a way to reinforce to applicants the importance of including information relevant to the best practices in their requests.

- **Provide clear guidance to JJCC members about the scope of their roles and the other factors that shape the funding-allocation process.** JJCC members expressed some uncertainty about how much input they have in certain aspects of the funding decisions, and many called for clarification of their roles and scope. There is a new Governance Ad-Hoc Subcommittee being convened within the JJCC, which might help address this issue. Clearer guidance for the JJCC about their roles and decisionmaking capabilities might help them identify additional ways to optimize the JJCC funding-allocation process.

## Adoption

- **Provide JJCC members who are not on the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee with more information to guide their voting.** JJCC members not on the CMJJP Ad-Hoc Subcommittee said that they feel that they have limited information about the selected programs (e.g., why they were chosen, why they were given certain allocations). More information about the decisionmaking process might increase their confidence in voting to confirm the plan.

In addition to supporting the implementation of these recommendations, we will conduct process and outcome evaluations of a subset of JJCPA-funded programs each year, selected in consultation with the Probation Department and the JJCC. We are also well-positioned to contribute to certain recommendations made by the JJCC, such as a landscape analysis of evidence-based programs to determine how well those are reflected in the JJCPA portfolio.

## APPENDIX

### Review of the Literature on Eight Best Practices

In this section, we detail the results of our literature review and the support for each of the best practices identified. As previously noted, our literature review process consisted of two strategies. First, we reviewed the literature cited in RDA's gap analysis (Rabinowitz et al., 2018) and included relevant literature in our summary. Second, we conducted a broader review of the literature from articles published between 1990 and 2021 to identify any missing and more recently published work. We primarily used Google Scholar's search engine and the following search terms: juvenile justice, best practices, youth development approach, family, trauma-informed, racial equity, evidence-based practices, and culturally responsive. We also scanned bibliographies of relevant articles to expand our search. Although not designed to be a systematic review, in total, we scanned the titles of approximately 450 articles and reviewed about 150 abstracts and full texts based on the relevance of the article or report to best practices in juvenile justice programming.

## Provide a Continuum of Services for Different Needs and Risk Levels

The first best practice for juvenile justice programming is to provide a variety of options starting with prevention programs for at-promise youth and moving toward graduated sanctions and treatment programs for youth who have committed delinquent acts (Wilson and Howell, 1993). This approach is based on the risk-need-responsivity model and has substantial backing in the literature (Bonta and Andrews, 2007; Gendreau, 1996). This model emphasizes that the largest effects are possible in the highest-risk individuals and, therefore, programmatic efforts and funding should target them (the *risk* principle). These efforts should also focus on affecting malleable risk factors that are correlated with criminal conduct including antisocial attitudes, educational deficits, and substance use (the *need* principle). Finally, treatment or intervention should follow a cognitive behavioral or social learning model, and should be delivered in a manner that meets an individual's characteristics when possible (the *responsivity* principle).

A substantial body of literature supports the value of the risk-need-responsivity model (Andrews, 1982; Andrews, 1989; Bonta and Andrews, 2007; Gendreau, Smith, and French, 2006; Smith, Gendreau, and Swartz, 2009). A meta-analysis of 229 studies found substantial support for the idea that targeting those at highest risk for offending or reoffending had the greatest impact (Dowden and Andrews, 1999). Recent work continues to find that programming for youth at high risk of offending benefit more than lower risk youth (James et al., 2013). In this vein, studies also find that too much attention on low-risk youth is, at best, less effective and, at worst, harmful (Wilson and Hoge, 2013). Diversion from the justice system continues to be the best option for low-risk youth because diversion is more effective in reducing reoffending than conventional judicial interventions.

## Use a Youth Development Approach

This best practice builds on the first by emphasizing the need to curate responses to juvenile offenses

to match the age and developmental stage of the offender. Adolescence is well known to be a period of development that involves exploration, experimentation, and engagement with risky behaviors (Waid and Urich, 2020). A positive youth development/positive youth justice approach stresses the importance of promoting legal socialization, prosocial identities, and facilitating compliance with the law (National Research Council, 2013). Positive youth development theorizes that when there is an alignment between youth talents, interests, skills, and community resources (e.g., school, family), young people can achieve positive developmental outcomes including academic achievement, extracurricular activities, physical and mental health, and prosocial behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004; Dotterer, McHale and Crouter, 2007; Fredricks and Eccles, 2010; Irvin et al., 2010).

Applying this framework to juvenile justice interventions means focusing on programs that do not mimic adult criminal punishments but instead encourage positive growth in youth. Unduly harsh interventions and negative interaction between youth and the justice system can be counterproductive and undermine respect for the law and legal authority (National Research Council, 2013). However, programs that support the development of new skills;

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Diversion from the justice system continues to be the best option for low-risk youth because diversion is more effective in reducing reoffending than conventional judicial interventions.

encourage youth to take on new roles; and generally promote positive connections with prosocial adults, continuous learning, and tasks related to leadership and responsibility can improve youth outcomes (both criminal and generally) (Bazemore, Nissen, and Dooley, 2000; Bazemore and Stinchcomb, 2004; Butts, Mayer, and Ruth, 2005; Toch, 2000). Research found that a variety of program types successfully can integrate the tenets of positive youth development, including camp, outdoor programming, sports, art, music, mentoring, and school-based programs, and can be adapted to fit geographic and cultural contexts (Alemán et al., 2017; Bungay and Vella-Burrows, 2013; Harper, 2017; Hermens et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017; Thurber et al., 2007). Although the strength of the research on program formats varies, there is general support for the positive impact of such programs and the importance of limiting programs based on control or deterrence (Taylor et al., 2017).

## Ensure Programming Is Family-Focused and Community-Led

Promoting family engagement in the juvenile justice system is also considered a best practice among researchers and practitioners (Luckenbill and Yeager, 2009; Osher et al., 2012; Pennell, Shapiro and Spigner, 2011; Shanahan and diZerega, 2016). In this work, the term *families* typically refers to biological, foster, or adoptive parents but can also refer to extended family or family members identified by the youth involved. Family is critical to children's development and one of the primary sources of children's emotional and social development and, consequently, strong ties between children and their families can support the establishment of social bonds and support pro-social behaviors (Brook et al., 1998).

Researchers have studied the efficacy and impact of various programs that integrate families into the care and interventions for youth in the juvenile justice system. These programs support and emphasize the family's strengths to address the child's behaviors that led them to become involved in the justice system (Luckenbill and Yeager, 2009). For example, family therapy programs can address

specific issues, such as family dysfunction and child problem behavior, and have been proven to decrease delinquency and crime rates (Sexton and Alexander, 2000; Waldron and Turner, 2008). Another type of program is parent training. Research demonstrates that strengthening parenting practices can reduce problem behavior and time youths spend in residential facilities (Welsh and Farrington, 2006; Woolfenden, Williams, and Peat, 2002). Families also can participate in visitation with youth who are in residential facilities. Research suggests that visitation can improve children's emotional well-being and can ease the transition back to the community after release (Caldwell et al., 2004; Monahan, Goldweber, and Cauffman, 2011; Stice, Ragan, and Randall, 2004; Villalobos Agudelo, 2013).

Studies also find that it is important to emphasize, where possible, programs that are community-led for justice involved youth (Bilchik, 1998). Just as centering families strengthens support for the child, creating programming that is community-based can increase a child's sense of belonging and embeddedness in society. Indeed, research finds that the two concepts are related and that community-based programs that center families are more effective at creating positive outcomes than those that do not center family (Drake, Aos, and Miller, 2009). One of the most well-studied programs that integrates family and community is Multisystemic Therapy (Henggeler et al., 2009). *Multisystemic Therapy* is a community- and family-based treatment that focuses on youth with serious clinical problems and stresses the importance of engaging the interworking systems of family, peers, school, neighborhood, and community to fully support a young person and encourage positive behaviors and outcomes. This approach is one of the most extensively validated and supported psychosocial treatments for addressing criminal behavior in youth underlining the importance of a collaborative and community-integrated approach to intervention for youth (Henggeler, 2011).

## Provide Trauma-Informed Care

This best practice supported by the juvenile justice literature is to ensure that programming is trauma-informed. Traumatic events include physical or

sexual abuse, community violence, neglect, maltreatment, or witnessing violence (Adams, 2010). Many children who come into contact with the juvenile justice system have experienced trauma. Prevalence estimates suggest that upward of 90 percent of justice-involved youth are exposed to one type of trauma with most experiencing multiple types of trauma (Abram et al., 2004). The high rates of trauma in this population demand that interventions targeting justice-involved youth integrate trauma-informed care and programming. Trauma-informed care involves understanding, anticipating, and responding to peoples' needs and decreasing the chances that the process retraumatizes them as they heal (Skinner-Osei et al., 2019). This approach aims to create an environment of safety, trust, and respect, and—while not excusing unlawful behavior—recognizing and responding to the symptoms of trauma including how it may relate to offending (Bloom, 2013; Harris and Fallot, 2009; Levenson and Willis, 2019).

### Apply a Racial Equity Framework

Juvenile justice systems should include active efforts to combat racial injustice, including addressing racial disparities in justice involvement and program availability. Existing evidence demonstrates that young people of color—especially Black youth—are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement despite similar rates of criminal behavior among their White peers. A study that tracked Black and White students in Seattle, Washington, found that Black students who had an encounter with the police were 11 times more likely to be arrested than their White peers (McGlynn-Wright et al., 2020). Once arrested, Black and Latino youth are more likely to continue to have contact with the juvenile justice system, and Black youth, in particular, are more likely to get rearrested after a first arrest despite similar levels of reoffending among their White peers (Mitchell, 2005; Onifade et al., 2019). This inequity in treatment for youth of color is a concern that juvenile justice programs should aim to address.

### Provide Culturally Appropriate and Responsive Programming

Research finds that developing interventions that are mindful of cultural differences and necessary competencies can improve engagement and outcomes. *Culturally responsive* refers to program “adaptations, such as client-therapist matching or use of culturally relevant terminology, as well as more complex adaptations, such as the use of culturally based communication styles or treatment coordination with traditional healers” (Feldman et al., 2010). Such methods also can partly address racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system by making programming more effective for non-White youth (Cabaniss et al., 2007; Hoytt et al., 2002). Such approaches might include providing legal education for families or ensuring that family members are included in court hearings or providing legal information in different languages.

### Use Evidence-Based Practices and Programs

When possible, juvenile justice systems should use programs and policies supported by rigorous evidence. As highlighted in RDA's gap analysis, evidence-based programs are those that demonstrate that positive change in intended outcomes is attributable to the intervention and that the intervention has no unexpected harmful effects (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). The evaluation of the intervention must be high quality, and multiple evaluations must produce consistent findings. The intervention must also clearly align with intended outcomes through the targeting of risk and/or protective factors. The program or intervention should have a clear write-up so that the implementation of the program can follow the same model as the program that produced positive results.

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies are often considered to yield the highest-quality evidence, although there are other approaches, such as community-based participatory research, that highlight the value of firsthand accounts from participants and value based on the communities' definitions as opposed to outside determinations (Garcia

et al., 2014). Such methods are particularly important when considering evidence for programs that serve communities of color and underserved communities (Burhansstipano, Christopher, and Schumacher, 2005).

## Attend to Implementation and Program Fidelity

Building on the importance of using evidence-based programs, it is also critical that juvenile justice systems are able to ensure fidelity to the intended implementation of an evidence-based program. Studies demonstrate that high-quality implementation with youth populations involved in the justice system can improve outcomes (James et al., 2013). A recent meta-analytic review of aftercare programs for reducing recidivism among child offenders found that well-implemented aftercare interventions produced significantly larger effect sizes than programs with implementation difficulties (James et al., 2013). Importantly, studies of programs with weak implementation showed evidence sometimes produced negative or harmful impacts. This relationship between implementation strength and outcomes is similar to several studies in the field (Lipsey, 1995; Lipsey, 2009; Wilson and Hoge, 2013).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *At-risk youth* are those who have not entered the probation system but who live or attend school in areas of high crime or who have other factors that potentially predispose them to participating in criminal activities. The term *at-promise* is currently favored in Los Angeles County because it is consistent with a youth development approach.

<sup>2</sup> RAND was the evaluator for JJCPA programs from 2001 to 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Service Planning Areas* are the eight geographic regions of Los Angeles County, as designated by the Department of Public Health and used to identify and provide services relevant to each area (County of Los Angeles Public Health, undated).

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## About This Report

The Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), administered by the California Board of State and Community Corrections, provides funding to counties to support programs that have proven their effectiveness in curbing crime among at-risk youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. In the County of Los Angeles, the Probation Department oversees the implementation of JJCPA-funded programs, which are approved by the county through the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, which comprises stakeholders from county agencies, city agencies, and community-based organizations. In 2019, the Probation Department selected the RAND Corporation to provide evaluation and technical assistance services related to JJCPA-funded programs, including an annual gap analysis. This report presents findings from this gap analysis, which aimed to examine the extent to which the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council has access to and considers information regarding best practices for juvenile justice systems when making funding decisions for JJCPA programs and projects.

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## Justice Policy Program

RAND Social and Economic Well-Being is a division of the RAND Corporation that seeks to actively improve the health and social and economic well-being of populations and communities throughout the world. This research was conducted in the Justice Policy Program within RAND Social and Economic Well-Being. The program focuses on such topics as access to justice, policing, corrections, drug policy, and court system reform, as well as other policy concerns pertaining to public safety and criminal and civil justice. For more information, email [justicepolicy@rand.org](mailto:justicepolicy@rand.org).