



**COMMUNITY JUSTICE
CENTER INITIATIVE
FINAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT
REPORT**

Criminal Justice Council

Dane County, WI

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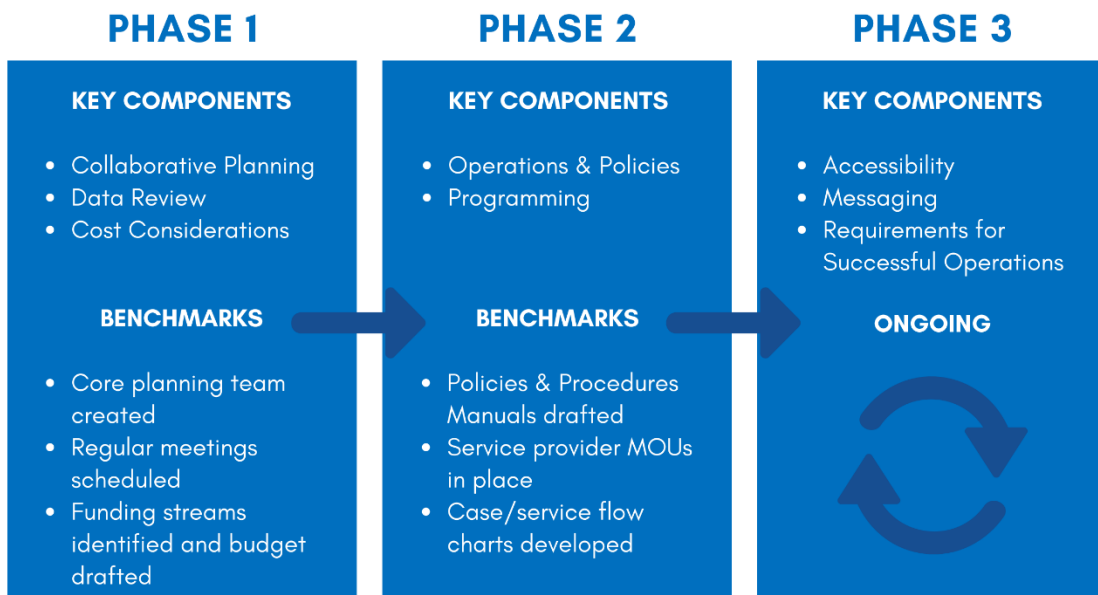
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Executive Summary

Dane County has engaged in several problem-solving initiatives to enhance alternative to incarceration opportunities including the creation of the Community Restorative Court, deferred prosecution, and crisis intervention programming. The County has continued its work towards criminal justice reform and addressing racial and ethnic disparities by investigating whether a community justice center model might help accomplish its goals. Through a series of stakeholder interviews and community engagement sessions, the Center has identified strengths and challenges, resource gaps, opportunities, and community priorities that will inform planning and set the foundation for the development of a future Community Justice Center.

Overall, stakeholders and community members are open to a community justice center initiative with a court component, if the planning and implementation is inclusive of those with lived experience and the focus is on assets, services, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities. From review of past reports and current engagements, it is clear that stakeholders and community members want to see tangible action steps following this needs assessment process in order to maintain continued buy-in for the planning and implementation process.

After conducting and assessing stakeholder interviews, pre-engagement reports, responses from community feedback events, available data, and prior reports and data findings, several key themes arose around the creation of a community justice center initiative. Priority action steps were then developed around each of those primary themes. The priority action steps the CJC and County Board should take in creation of a community justice center initiative are reflected below:



Collaborative Planning

Recommendation:

Convene a *core planning team* with representatives from all court agencies, service providers, community representatives and to lead action steps towards data review, operations, and programming. A separate *community advisory board* should be established for the core planning team to report out to and get feedback from during planning and implementation. Planning must finalize a venue for the community justice center initiative, several local agencies willing to host remote programming and rotating community justice center initiative events, or some combination of both.

Data Review

Recommendation:

To inform eligibility criteria for which cases the community justice center initiative may have jurisdiction over, the core planning team should review data from the *District Attorney's Office, Public Defender, and local law enforcement*.¹ To inform services and address racial and ethnic disparities in service connections, the core planning team must review data submitted by service provider agencies, create intake assessments that accurately track demographics, and set benchmarks for reducing racial and ethnic disparities through community justice center initiative programming. The data used as inputs to inform planning as well as the data that reflect outputs of justice center programming should be shared with the community in a transparent, regularly occurring manner.

Operations & Policies

Recommendation:

The *core planning team* will establish eligibility criteria, communication channels for referrals by law enforcement and service providers to the justice center, program completion criteria based on an individual's need and a legal response proportionate to the offense (if any), and funding streams and partner contributions to financially sustain the work of the justice center.

Programming

Recommendation:

The *core planning team* should work with *community-based organizations* and *county service agencies* like Joining Forces for Families to coordinate co-located programming that includes mental health, substance use treatment, employment readiness, civil legal aid including help navigating housing issues, help securing identification documentation, information on voting, recreational opportunities, peer-led groups, resources for the LGBTQ population, and resources for survivors. The work of the community justice center initiative will focus on coordinating

¹ Dane County CJC data owners have contributed data to the Criminal Justice Council Research and Innovation Team (CJCRI). This resource should be used to help inform the data review.

these services that already exist to avoid duplication of service and emphasizing that services should be delivered in a trauma-informed, nonjudgmental manner. The core planning team should incorporate voluntary referrals to services within the justice center, even for those without an active criminal case.

Accessibility

Recommendation:

In order to expand access to service, the community justice center initiative should identify *service providers* who offer programming in multiple languages led by culturally competent staff with an emphasis on peer/lived experience involvement, with flexible hours to account for work schedules and childcare, and at locations that are accessible to the population. Safety should be prioritized, requiring a conversation about whether law enforcement is present at the justice center and their role.

Messaging

Recommendation:

The *core planning team* should work with the *Community Advisory Board* to effectively communicate the function and goals of the community justice center initiative to law enforcement, the court, and community. This will require continued information sharing throughout planning and implementation through town halls, training, and presentations about the community justice center initiative's progress by the Community Advisory Board to the rest of Dane County.

Requirements for Successful Operations

Recommendation:

Once the community justice center initiative is operational, the *core planning team* must ensure the environment fosters person-centered and procedurally just practices, services must reach—and programming should be led by—communities of color, and feedback from participants, providers, court practitioners, and other stakeholders must be continuously collected and responded to through the use of surveys, community forums, etc.

Cost Considerations

Recommendation:

In order for the community justice center initiative to serve people across the county, the *County Board*, *the core planning team*, and *community-based organizations* should lead the conversations about blended funding opportunities to combine allocated funding from city, county, and individual community-based organizations so all stakeholders have buy-in and the center is sustainably funded. The core planning team should conduct a cost savings analysis to assess program efficacy and system cost reductions from decreased jail bookings/stays and decreased court time as a result of reduced recidivism.