



The following is an email that Nate Balis, director of the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group, sent to JDAI stakeholders on May 16, 2016.

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and its network of practitioners, researchers and advocates have been an engine of change in the field of juvenile justice. JDAI leaders in 39 states and nearly 300 local jurisdictions have helped make JDAI a national movement by introducing a range of policy, practice and programmatic reforms, substantially reducing reliance on secure detention and doing so without sacrificing public safety.

We know your efforts to safely reduce the use of secure detention are ongoing. System reform is a journey that rarely includes straight paths and often takes unexpected turns and detours. And as we look forward as an initiative, we also know, and have learned from you, that continuous system improvement will require at least three things: (1) doing better at implementing existing detention reforms, (2) going deeper by expanding the playbook and introducing new innovations and (3) focusing on sustainability to solidify gains and make them permanent, so that reform is not just a moment in time.

The future we envision for JDAI is one of a thriving network that embraces these three challenges. A network in which sites and states challenge one another to get better results, to continue to push the reform envelope, while building an infrastructure to sustain results. We intend for this email to clarify these three challenges.

1. **Doing Better.** We want to push and help sites to “**do better**” by more fully and faithfully implementing detention reform strategies. All JDAI core strategies can be viewed through this “do better” lens. In 2016, the bulk of how technical assistance has been and will continue to be directed is to support sites “doing better.” Sites may need to sharpen data collection and analysis, resume collaborative meetings (or establish a longer-term vision for their JDAI collaborative) or focus on expediting cases. We want JDAI sites to continuously improve: to end excessive overrides of detention screening instruments and to strengthen alternatives to detention program performance. “Doing better” should also be an inducement to sites to conduct system self-assessments so you can identify ongoing priorities. Toward this end, we are excited to roll-out a more site-friendly system assessment framework over the next few months. “Doing better” has been the bedrock of JDAI for two decades. It means continuing to work to get detention reform right.
2. **Going deeper.** One of JDAI’s strengths has been its array of innovations, such as evening reporting centers, differentiated warrants and case expeditors. We want sites to “**go deeper,**” to address aspects of detention reform that have been weaker across the initiative (e.g., ending racial disparities and reducing lengths of stay) and to develop and implement innovations that expand the overall detention reform toolbox (e.g., new program models and new policies that limit detention utilization). The “going deeper” challenge is an encouragement to sites, states and technical assistance providers to unleash their creativity.

What are examples of “going deeper”? Some sites might explore radically different solutions to persistent disparities in the treatment of youth of color, or experiment with new alternatives to a detention program

model or test a new risk-based assessment using predictive analytics. Other areas to explore might be new models of collaboration or oversight based on family and youth engagement and/or going further than graduated responses to more fundamentally change a compliance-based probation approach. We want to encourage you to think beyond our currently identified “best practices” to innovations that expand our repertoires.

3. **Implementing sustainability strategies.** We want sites to take more intentional steps to “**sustain**” individual reforms and also the collaborative, data-driven approach that has been at the heart of JDAI’s success. There are a number of actions that sites can take, such as including detention reform in an agency’s basic training curricula and in employee performance standards. Others sites may focus more on succession and fiscal planning, while all sites would be wise to build more robust partnerships with community organizations, parents and young people impacted by the system. Over the course of the year, JDAI technical assistance team leaders (TATLs) will raise the issue with sites to ensure that detention reform progress is not only preserved, but undergoes continuous improvement.

In sharing this vision with you, I also want to be transparent about how we and our JDAI partner organizations – the W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI), the Center on Children’s Law & Policy (CCLP) and the Pretrial Justice Institute (PJI) – are grappling with how to support your sites in taking on this agenda. In the simplest sense, we want to prioritize technical assistance resources for places that are poised to address at least one of the three strategic challenges described above. Our partners stand ready to assist you in your endeavors and we urge you to identify areas you want to get better at or to innovate in, and talk to your TATLs about opportunities in the months ahead.

In addition to technical assistance, we are also using 2016 to strengthen our infrastructure to greater support your work and the initiative. We are developing blended learning curricula for all four core JDAI courses (Fundamentals, Facility Standards, Risk Assessment, Racial and Ethnic Disparities) so that training content can be accessed online in small, digestible bites. With our partners from PJI, we have also begun planning for a new digital platform that will offer expanded opportunities for networking, learning and access to assistance.

The spirit behind this note is to stimulate efforts to keep JDAI agendas fresh and current in your sites and throughout the JDAI network. We hope you will take up this challenge and we are looking forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Thanks.

Nate

Nathaniel R. Balis | Director
Juvenile Justice Strategy Group
Center for Systems Innovation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

503 North Charles Street | Baltimore, MD 21202

Office: [410.547.3645](tel:410.547.3645) | Mobile: [202.550.4560](tel:202.550.4560) | www.aecf.org