



Where Evidence Meets Community Justice Data Analytics and Applied Research at the Center for Justice Innovation

Data drives change; now more than ever. But leveraging that power requires more than just numbers. It is the ability to *interpret* those numbers that propels meaningful change. Working with systems and communities, the Center for Justice Innovation harnesses the power of data analytics and applied research to address real-world justice challenges.

Since the Center's inception three decades ago, data analysis, rigorous research, and a determination to follow the evidence have been at the heart of our efforts to drive measurable reforms that build community justice. In New York City, we have designed [scores of programs](#) to improve outcomes for people inside of the criminal justice system or at risk of system-involvement. Innovations are then assessed in real time, allowing us to refine promising practices, take to scale what works, and draw lessons when efforts fall short. This work is carried out by our multidisciplinary team of data analysts, social scientists, and researchers with expertise in criminal justice, public

Our work is organized around six impact areas reflecting the Center's deepest areas of practice and expertise:

- Community Safety
- Front-End Systems Change
- People-Centered Courts
- Restorative Practices
- Intimate Partner Safety and Justice
- The Housing-Justice Nexus

policy, and program evaluation, and extensive experience working directly with practitioners and communities.

The Center brings this same approach to jurisdictions across the country. Through research, evaluation, and technical assistance, we help our partners to identify metrics, collect and interpret data, measure progress and course correct, and build long-term capacity for data-driven policy and practice.

Research for the Real World

The gap between research and practice is real; we bridge that divide under our own roof. Our researchers and practitioners are in constant dialogue: our approach to rigorous data collection and applied research informs our on-the-ground work, and the realities of practice shape our research agenda and data analysis. At the start of any project, Center practitioners and researchers work with communities and jurisdictions to identify the outcomes and metrics that matter most. Through these partnerships, the Center surfaces priorities for research and evaluation, identifying emerging practices, policies, and program models that warrant deeper study.

Center researchers and practitioners help local stakeholders make sense of findings—how research and a reliance on data-driven policy and practice can improve local systems. As sites move towards new policies and programs, or tweak existing ones, the Center tailors research and implementation support to local practices and culture. This ensures that evaluation findings translate into meaningful improvements in policy and practice.

Two of our recent research projects highlight precisely this relationship between data and on-the-ground change. Our [national research](#) on the practice of charging clients fees for the use of public defenders led to our working with public defense leadership in two states to conduct a deeper data-driven examination of existing policies. And our [impact evaluation](#) of our own program—the [Strong Starts Court Initiative](#), which supports infants, toddlers, and their families involved in court protection proceedings—found an increased rate of family preservation, enhanced family wellbeing, and a reduced likelihood of future abuse or neglect petitions. These documented outcomes contributed to the expansion of the program around New York State.

The Power of Partnership

Working closely with our Strong Starts program from its inception allowed our research team to:

- Identify the right metrics to reflect the program’s theory of change
- Develop a strong data infrastructure to ensure the program was efficiently collecting meaningful data
- Employ a rigorous methodology to answer key research questions developed collaboratively with program staff
- Present [findings](#) as part of the successful push to expand the Strong Starts program statewide.

Analytics: From Data to Actionable Insights

Data's power depends on its accuracy and comprehensiveness. The Center's data analytics capacity supports programs and partners from initial program design through ongoing implementation and evaluation. Data analysis informs strategic and operational decisions across initiatives, including resource allocation, program development, service delivery, and performance monitoring.

That kind of collaboration propelled the recent [opening of our community resource hub](#) in East New York—an historically under-resourced Brooklyn neighborhood. We operate an alternative to bail, [Supervised Release](#), across Brooklyn and our research team identified a concentration of missed court-mandated check-ins among residents of East New York, where a high proportion of program participants reside.

When Data Drives Brick-and-Mortar Change

Why this concentration of missed check-ins with our case managers? We hypothesized it was because of the neighborhood's distance from our downtown Brooklyn site. With results from a participant survey in hand, we saw that nearly half of respondents said that transportation assistance or referrals to services in their neighborhood would be helpful.

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We also documented urgent community needs for employment and mental health services. These data insights led directly to the location of [our new resource hub](#) in East New York. Supervised release clients can now more easily complete their check-ins and everyone in the community has access to the kinds of services we know they need.

Systems development

Our research team designs comprehensive data tracking systems and data collection processes for both operating programs across the Center and jurisdictions receiving expert assistance. These facilitate case management, monitoring and evaluation, and efficient reporting.

Establishing metrics and data tracking

At the outset of a new initiative—whether nationally or inside the Center—close collaboration with project directors, program staff, stakeholders, and funders is of utmost importance to clearly define core goals and measurable indicators of success. A recent example of this is our [national toolkit](#) to offer restorative justice court diversion programs a data-driven framework to measure and demonstrate their impact.

As programs evolve, data protocols and procedures are adjusted to align with current policy and practice. Data tracking processes are operationalized through assessing need, creating logic models and theories of change, auditing data, and developing and refining systems and tools.

Continuous feedback

Ongoing reporting and analysis help programs and partners monitor progress and make timely adjustments. Providing data trainings and user-friendly reports and dashboards that distill complex data taken from diverse sources ensures programs and stakeholders have the information they need to succeed. Collecting and analyzing project feedback by developing and implementing participant and stakeholder surveys adds to the continuous feedback loop.

Artificial Intelligence, Data, and Decision-Making

The justice system is awash in purported artificial intelligence solutions—for everything from prisons to courtrooms. AI can improve both public safety and outcomes for the justice-involved, but only if two overarching imperatives are met: 1) access to accurate, comprehensive data, and 2) clear human decision-making as to the intent (and limitations) of any possible AI application.

The impact of AI will be considerable, but its exact ramifications inside of the justice system are still to be determined. The Center is preparing to be able to assist jurisdictions with assessing the readiness of their data for use with AI. Similarly, we will help policymakers and practitioners think through what they want to use AI for—and then plan the implementation of the technology accordingly. By combining technical expertise with an understanding of justice system operations, and of the impact on the justice-involved of previous waves of technological innovation, the

Center promotes responsible innovation that prioritizes transparency, fairness, and effective outcomes.

Translating Evidence into Policy and Practice

Data drives change, but only if its message is deciphered and heeded. Key to translating complex data and research findings is the ability to convey them clearly to diverse audiences. We communicate our findings in a variety of ways, maximizing the impact of new evidence and ensuring that new insights can inform policy decisions, program improvements, and broader reform efforts.

From Data-Capacity to Real-World Policy

In 2025, we worked with three rural counties in California to create data-collection roadmaps for their defense systems, and we subsequently published a [national guide](#) for rural jurisdictions. Many rural counties rely on fee-per-service private defense contracts. This creates a significant barrier to standardized data-collection. In one of the California counties we partnered with, our data-collection roadmap supported local policymakers in passing an ordinance that created a Public Defender's Office. The legislation gives the Chief Defender explicit responsibilities related to data-management.

Conclusion

Every jurisdiction is unique, but every jurisdiction is going to confront an increasing need for data capacity, evaluation, and integration in the days ahead. This means more than just numbers. Effective data-informed decision-making must be grounded in rigorous research and backed by *human* expertise and intention—and that expertise must itself be rooted in the history and possibilities of the criminal justice space and of the long fight for genuine community safety and justice. We have been immersed in these spaces for 30 years and stand ready to help jurisdictions turn data, research, and experience into lasting impact.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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