



The Aspen Justice and Governance Partnership: Initial Lessons from the Field

Prepared for the Aspen Criminal Justice Reform Initiative | Fall 2023

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CHANGE



INTRODUCTION

Key Findings from the Justice and Governance Partnership (JGP):

1. A trusted and adaptive host organization is necessary to support the complexity of hyperlocal criminal justice reform initiatives.
2. Defining “community” in JGP was essential to build trust and an understanding of shared purpose; the power dynamic between institutions and community members is not binary or unidirectional, but multi-dimensional and multi-directional.
3. Establishing and maintaining a healthy balance between “top-down” and “community-up” design in JGP requires close attention to power dynamics and context, and continuous communication.
4. The work of developing a representative justice collaborative with a shared vision in JGP was dynamic, recursive, and time-intensive; it was a productive, forcing mechanism to promote common purpose and to uncover both challenges and opportunities.
5. To build momentum in hyperlocal criminal justice reform, deep, inclusive processes need to be balanced with early collective discoveries and shared awareness of early successes.

After 18 months in the planning stage in Grand Rapids, MI, the Aspen Institute Criminal Justice Reform Initiative’s [Justice and Governance Partnership \(JGP\)](#) is expanding to include Birmingham, AL, and three micropolitan/rural regions¹ comprising “the Corridor” in South Carolina. Equal Measure, an independent firm contracted to evaluate this effort, offers this memo to share emerging lessons from the initial phase of this work to call attention to the unique design of this community justice effort, and to catalyze conversations between those who seek to promote criminal justice transformation and the philanthropic partners who are critical to launching such efforts. The groundbreaking JGP initiative seeks to reimagine and transform a justice ecosystem within mid-size and micropolitan/rural regions where crime rates per capita are often higher than larger cities in the United States and receive much less public awareness and philanthropic support (see Appendix A for JGP’s initiative-level Theory of Change).

¹ A micropolitan city is defined as a city with 10,000 to 50,000 residents and its surrounding communities; see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro.html>



JGP Overview and National Partners

The Justice and Governance Partnership (JGP) is the signature program of the Aspen Institute's Criminal Justice Reform Initiative (CJRI). The program was conceived in 2019 by Dr. Douglas Wood, current director of CJRI and former director at the Ford Foundation, and Eric Cadora, Director of the Justice Mapping Center. As a centerpiece of JGP, an annual justice audit process both defines and illuminates neighborhood-level concentrations of injustice and a path toward reinvestment, drawing from existing institutional data and incorporating hyperlocal, neighborhood organizational data.

Rather than solely focusing on the criminal justice system or on legislative policy change, JGP activates and moves within a *broader, local ecosystem*, connecting justice and public safety with other local sectors such as healthcare, education, and housing, and grounding itself in those sectors' hyperlocal data. JGP promotes the ways in which a collaborative ecosystem can support local, *discretionary policies* that improve the experience of justice *at the neighborhood level*, such as reduced use of arrests through alternative responses like mental health crisis team responses. JGP provides an *alternative to 'crisis management governance'*—the reactive, emergency response approaches that over-criminalize individuals and communities and overlook the *root causes of crime and injustice*, which disproportionately impact lower income residents of color. A fuller history of JGP's development can be found in Appendix B.

The JGP initiative brings four national technical assistance (TA) partners to sites to support and build capacity with the Local Justice Collaborative (LJC) in each location. The TA partners include the **Justice Mapping Center**, led by Eric Cadora, which focuses on the **justice audit data development**; support for **local coalition governance**, led by Aspen Senior Fellow Ken Thompson of Ken Thompson Consulting, and the **Community Based Action Research (CBAR)** components, led by Aspen Senior Fellow Frederick J. Frelow of Frelow & Associates. The fourth partner is **Equal Measure**, the evaluation and learning partner, whose team supports the development of site- and initiative-level Theories of Change articulating indicators and outcomes for justice ecosystem transformation (see Appendix A for the JGP Theory of Change).²

Following are the primary questions addressed by the learning memo:

- What were the initial challenges and successes of designing and launching a community justice and safety initiative that seeks to foster transformative partnerships among institutions (institutional leaders) and community members (community leaders and residents)?
- What did we learn from the first year of work in Grand Rapids with this approach?
- What questions and opportunities does this approach raise for the criminal justice field and philanthropy?

² As of fall 2023, Aspen Fellow Amy Brown has also joined the TA team to support work on **braided funding** models.



Launch in Grand Rapids and Initiative-Level Theory of Change

Our new [Justice and Governance Partnerships](#) in select mid-size, micropolitan, and rural communities work to transform community safety and promote justice reforms at the local level by joining together data-driven and community-informed policies and practices. This new rigorous, collaborative approach uncovers punitive, crisis management-based approaches to governing and reveals options for new solutions that bring forth greater community safety and opportunity.
— CJRI program description

Grand Rapids, MI, was invited to explore participation in JGP in the summer of 2021, and was awarded a grant to launch planning stage activities in January 2021. Recognizing that mid-size and micropolitan cities often have the nation’s highest violent crime rates per capita, CJRI leaders initiated conversations with leaders from various regions around the country to assess interest in the JGP approach. Grand Rapids quickly rose to the top of the list based on promising conversations and strong interest from a small group of local leaders, specifically the Michigan State House Representative for Grand Rapids and a leader from the Michigan ACLU based in the city. These two individuals would eventually become the initial co-chairs for the Grand Rapids local justice collaborative³ and were instrumental in coordinating with the national TA partners to recruit a wide range of local leaders across multiple roles and sectors, and to apply for funding from the [Michigan Justice Fund](#) to launch a formal JGP planning stage.

As part of our developmental mixed-methods evaluation and learning approach, Equal Measure designed an initiative-level Theory of Change (see Appendix A). The Theory of Change (TOC) was developed through multiple design conversations with Dr. Wood and the national TA partners, and further refined through demographic intake surveys and rapid learning cycles conducted in Grand Rapids consisting of interviews, focus groups, and meeting observations over the course of the Grand Rapids planning stage. The TOC was used to both reflect and guide the national partners’ approach to technical assistance and to facilitate the creation of Grand Rapids’ local, site-specific logic model, which accounted for community contexts and incorporated preferred language and priorities.

The JGP’s Theory of Change outlines three major outcome categories that JGP has identified as essential to transform justice ecosystems:

1. NEW DISPOSITIONS

- Collaborative, community-driven approach
- Oriented toward racial equity
- Honoring pluralistic ways of knowing

2. NEW PRACTICES

- Engaging in public will-building and establishing shared norms
- Promoting data-sharing, and reinvestment opportunities in annual justice audits
- Building representative, decision-making governance
- Participating in national learning network

³ After launch of the planning stage, a well-respected county commissioner replaced the State House Representative as co-chair through the remainder of planning stage.



3. **NEW POLICIES**

- Improving discretionary and/or legislative policies
- Braiding resources and budgets

A forthcoming formative evaluation will explore proof points for how these outcomes can be identified and measured locally and nationally. The evaluation will be a period of documentation, learning, and reflection in partnership with each site's local justice collaboratives and national JGP leadership.



EMERGING LESSONS

A trusted and adaptive host organization is necessary to support the complexity of hyperlocal criminal justice reform initiatives.

Prior to the formal launch of the planning stage, Dr. Wood and Eric Cadora from the Justice Mapping Center coordinated primarily with two lead individuals in Grand Rapids who took on formal leadership roles as co-chairs. The co-chairs in turn began cultivating interest and early participation of a range of sector and community leaders to identify a trusted host organization and establish an initial planning group that would then evolve into a larger, broader local justice collaborative.

Together, Grand Rapids co-chairs, the nascent planning group, and national TA partners developed criteria to select Public Agency at the West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology (WMCAT) as the local host organization to coordinate the planning stage, including designated facilitators to serve in a project management, facilitation, and design function. The emphasis on local decision making played an important role in positioning the selected host organization as a neutral, credible hub for planning group activities. Public Agency, described on WMCAT's website as a "human-centered design consultancy with a mission to help organizations foster a culture of equity, action, and innovation," was described repeatedly by co-chairs, local justice collaborative members, and national TA partners as essential to the success of planning stage activities.

In partnership with the justice collaborative's co-chairs and national TA partners, the designated facilitators from WMCAT skillfully designed, coordinated, and facilitated the ongoing recruitment process, the recurring local justice collaborative meetings, and the many smaller workgroup meetings that were necessary to move the planning work forward. They also toggled between neutral facilitation and more active participation—an approach the co-chairs and initial local justice collaborative members responded to positively and appreciatively. While the style of the two co-leads varied—with one focusing on a skilled but neutral facilitation function, and the other often leaning into sharing her experiences and perspectives, particularly as a Black woman—they both quickly earned and sustained the trust of all involved, and contributed perspectives and insights that were incorporated into planning stage activities and deliverables. National TA providers frequently expressed appreciation and admiration for the local justice collaborative leadership's knowledge of the city and the diversity of their relationships.

As the planning stage activities progressed, adaptation was needed to work toward adequate and balanced representation in the local justice collaborative. The co-chairs and co-leads initiated a strategic shift in their recruitment approach, focusing on recruiting individuals who were not yet involved, but whose representation would be essential to support the initiative in the long term. For example, in the early months of the coalition, local leaders and national TA partners noticed the smaller proportion of representatives from the local police and criminal justice institutions. Given the importance of these



individuals in advancing future criminal justice policies and practices, the co-chairs and co-leads began more targeted outreach and encouragement to bring them in as active, engaged coalition participants.

Shifting more ownership for leading the work from TA partners to the local justice collaborative leadership built momentum and cultivated more engagement among collaborative members for the work. Many local justice collaborative members acknowledged that sustainability of the JGP initiative in Grand Rapids would be more likely if local organizations, and eventually community members, felt ownership.

The co-chairs and co-leads were also instrumental in supporting the navigation through complex, unexpected developments in Grand Rapids. The nationally publicized killing of Patrick Lyoya, a young Black Grand Rapids resident, by a Grand Rapids police officer at a traffic stop, required strategic shifts in the early months of the planning stage. Sensitive interactions were required with local justice collaborators like the Grand Rapids police leadership and the county prosecutor, as well as members of the collaborative who knew Mr. Lyoya's family personally. The ability to interpret, respond, and adapt to local developments like this community flashpoint was critical and reflected a willingness and ability to adjust priorities and activities, even at the expense of initial plans. Adaptation and adjustment became a continuous practice throughout the planning phase.

“We recognize that there is systemic oppression in every system, and we see policy as being one of the greatest ways to change the oppressive system that we operate in. What are the unintended consequences of these policies?” — Planning Group Member

Defining “community” in JGP was essential to build trust and an understanding of shared purpose; the power dynamic between institutions and community members is not binary or unidirectional, but multi-dimensional and multi-directional.

At the launch of the planning stage activities in Grand Rapids, TA partners and local justice collaborative members used broad terms like “institutions” and “community members” to describe the scope and key participants in the initiative, but the generalized language tended to obscure—or maintain—power dynamics within and between groups.

Most of the early local justice collaborative conversations in Grand Rapids relied on terms like “community,” rather than specifically naming Black communities as the primary and necessary constituents of the effort—despite disparities by race evident in the hyperlocal data. As the planning stage progressed, more local justice collaborative members—including many of its Black leaders—expressed increased specificity of language was needed to mitigate against the cultural tendency described as “West Michigan nice”—the preference to be polite and not directly discuss and work to resolve issues. The indirectness and ambiguity skirted the explicit discussions about the efforts needed for true, long-term impact and systems transformation, and hampered initial trust between some members of the coalition.



“...the word ‘community’ is thrown around a lot. When you are talking about emergency systems like policing, that tends to be people who are lower income, Black and Brown communities...the idea of who is centered in this work is important...the people who are impacted the most need to be considered.” — Interview Participant

The meaning of terms like “institutions” and “communities” varied across the local justice collaborative members, which created more complexity. For example, some local justice collaborative members used the term “community” to mean individuals impacted by contact with the justice system: the formerly incarcerated and their families. Others used “community” to mean the neighborhood leaders and residents who face systems neglect, including those who live in poverty, in food deserts, or in formerly redlined neighborhoods. One police department representative defined “community” as anyone living in Grand Rapids. Some local leaders considered larger nonprofits to be “institutions” while smaller neighborhood community organizations were considered “community members.”

Which Grand Rapids institutions ought to be represented in the local justice collaborative or attend its various workgroups also varied. For example, in the early convenings of the local justice collaborative, the Grand Rapids police department, the university-based Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, and healthcare system provider Spectrum Health (recently rebranded as Corewell Health), were more involved than the housing and workforce development sectors. As the initiative continued, working group leaders began to recognize the complex power dynamics at play, made note of who was more present than others, and coordinated to expand up the participation of other key community institutions and representatives, like the county Sheriff’s Office and community neighborhood groups, like the Baxter Neighborhood Association.

Over the course of the planning stage, conversations with site leaders and local justice collaborative members evolved to focus on the symptoms of racial inequality—as an addition to the geographic focus on neighborhoods—to get more precise about Black residents as the intended beneficiaries of the Grand Rapids JGP. This represented a notable change in approach for a collaborative effort in Grand Rapids, as previous citywide initiatives often focused on discrete interventions rather than addressing the larger impacts of systemic racism in neighborhoods and on Black residents.

Establishing and maintaining a healthy balance between “top-down” and “community-up” design in JGP requires close attention to power dynamics and context, and continuous conversation.

While JGP is designed to promote a simultaneous “top-down” and “community-up” approach, the balance between both approaches shifted over time. Trust building between the Aspen national TA providers and local leaders in Grand Rapids was essential to promote the development of the emerging, local justice collaborative. Frequent and iterative conversations related to the initiative goals, vision, and tactics—in some cases led by national TA partners, and in others, between members of the local justice collaborative—were instrumental in furthering collective identity development within the emerging Grand Rapids local justice collaborative.

In the early months of the planning stage, the JGP approach leaned more top-down in its implementation. The initial engagement with the co-chairs about the opportunity to participate in JGP



was efficient but limited direct engagement with a larger set of Grand Rapids community leaders and community members. We also noted the frequent description by local leaders of the project as the *Aspen* initiative rather than a *Grand Rapids* initiative—especially early on—promoted a perception that JGP was an external program rather than an initiative that emphasized a community-driven approach.

In part, this top-down dynamic was also due to the extensive orientation that local leaders needed to understand the technical components of the JGP approach. The primary instruments of the initiative—the justice audit⁴ and the complex concept of a crisis management government index⁵—are conceived at a high level of complexity. The instruments required continuous explanation of their structure, purpose, and value, and required local justice collaboration members and co-chairs to expend time and effort to “try and understand” their expected roles and direction rather than focusing on leading. In the early months of the planning stage, one of the site leads often remarked they were “continuing to learn and get clearer in each ongoing conversation” about the JGP design.

Other structures supported the “bottom-up” dynamic of JGP design. The developmental and emergent ‘discovery’ of what JGP would become in the Grand Rapids context became increasingly grounded in the importance of community representation and voice. Toward the end of the planning stage, the topic of the local justice collaborative frequently shifted to the need to recruit more community leaders, particularly from neighborhoods within Grand Rapids’ Third Ward, which has the highest Black population in the city and the least investment.⁶ The site leads were vocal about the importance of inviting and centering community leaders, reflecting their own orientation to the emergent justice collaborative, as well as their commitment to the key structures of JGP that needed to be “based on data, informed by community experience, and backed by a broad coalition.”

“I don’t think that without real community backing that there will be any change...[T]he biggest driver for change is probably communities asking to be treated differently in some way by institutions.” — Interview Participant

“[T]he workgroup is establishing the foundation for a broader justice audit, so figuring out and thinking through who needs to be part of such work, what organizations need to contribute data, [and] how such data can be gathered ethically and equitably [is key].”
— Planning Group Member

The work of developing a representative justice collaborative with a shared vision in JGP was dynamic, recursive, and time-intensive; it was a productive, forcing mechanism to promote common purpose and to uncover both challenges and opportunities.

In Grand Rapids, the membership and representation of various sectors and perspectives in the local justice collaborative changed over the course of the planning period. At the start, most of the initial planning group members represented community-based organizations (CBOs) and public sectors (i.e.,

⁴ <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/the-justice-audit-explained/>

⁵ <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/criminal-justice-reform-initiative/crisis-management-governance/>

⁶ <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2019/10/grand-rapids-ward-with-highest-black-population-gets-least-investment-from-city.html>



healthcare, education) (Figure 1); the attendees came in response to the invitation to participate, and in many cases, through existing professional relationships with the co-chairs.

Figure 1: Percentages of Non-Philanthropic Representatives Increased in Short Time Period



As the planning stage progressed, there was a renewed emphasis on engaging additional public sector players as well as representatives from the criminal justice sector. The local justice collaborative realized that addressing crisis management practices more broadly would require participation by and the support of criminal justice system actors such as representatives from the Grand Rapids police department and the Kent County prosecutor’s office. The composition of the coalition shifted yet again when the co-chairs expanded from the initial constitution of a “planning group” to the larger local justice collaborative, and adding an explicit emphasis on recruiting members typically underrepresented in such coalition building work, such as representatives from neighborhood associations and members of color.

“I think that there needs to be an opportunity to bring grassroots organizations in, because there are several in our community, and sometimes their voices aren’t as loud because maybe they don’t have that name recognition.” — Interview Participant

As the composition of the group evolved, the need emerged for clear governance structures and practices to clarify decision making and promote shared leadership for the local justice collaborative. In response to this need, the Equal Measure team developed a governance resource that summarized and identified effective practices adopted by comparable collective impact efforts, leading the host organization and co-chairs to draft and consolidate a concrete set of decision-making structures and practices, including the creation of a leadership council structure.

Shared intensive experiences also promoted ‘bonding and bridging’ experiences between local justice collaborative members. During the inaugural convening of the Aspen Justice Network⁷ in September 2022, a representative group from Grand Rapids engaged with national TA providers, participated in panel discussions, participated in intensive planning sessions, and interacted with other national leaders in criminal justice reform. Grand Rapids’ planning stage progress was also highlighted as an example for the other early stage JGP teams. The Grand Rapids group’s experience at the convening became a

⁷ The Aspen Justice Network convened for the first time in fall 2022, with representatives from Grand Rapids, MI, Birmingham, AL, and The Corridor, SC. Activities focused on shared professional learning, access to technical assistance, and individual team planning time.



recurring reference point for the co-chairs throughout the remainder of the planning stage. Notably, this was not solely based on the many positive bonding experiences that took place between the representatives from diverse sectors and organizations, but also because of the productive tensions that occurred, including the pivotal moment when several of the group’s Black leaders called for more explicit attention to race and racial equity as a focus of the local justice collaborative.

The evolving identity and collective purpose of the local justice collaborative was linked to the diversity of sector representation. While local justice collaborative members were working to identify data and governance priorities, there was a clear challenge to succinctly characterize the overall nature or emphasis of the JGP approach. For example, national TA partners differed in how they articulated the conceptual framing of the initiative, describing it variously as a justice reform, justice transformation, governance, or racial justice effort.



Figure 2: Grand Rapids Planning Group at AJN Convening

In retrospect, both national TA providers and local justice collaborative leaders noted that the planning stage of this initiative required much more time than expected—a dynamic that one TA partner described as a “chronic underestimation of time.” Developing intentional relationships, establishing ways of working, identifying priorities, and building trust across varying sectors was a time-intensive endeavor. In some cases, relationship building emerged from repairing mistrust between various sector representatives in the local justice collaborative. For example, one organization in the local justice collaborative was involved in an active lawsuit against another organization. Some mistrust related to the operation of not-so-hidden centers of power in the community, such as the outsized influence of wealthy philanthropists, which led to suspicions that the philanthropists would ‘call the shots’ regardless of the local justice collaborative’s vision or activities.

To build momentum, deep, inclusive processes in hyperlocal criminal justice reform need to be balanced with early collective discoveries and shared awareness of early successes.

National TA partners anticipated that the planning stage for a JGP would require eight to twelve months, considering this adequate time to build up initial local leadership for the work; to recruit representative sector and community leaders; and to build the relationships, a shared sense of purpose, and a shared agenda in preparation for the JGP implementation stage. In fact, Grand Rapids required sixteen months to complete its planning activities. While some of the timing issues involved factors external to the coalition building—for instance, the time required for Aspen to secure multiple national and local funding commitments—this expanded timeline also reflected lessons learned about the nature of inclusive, coalition-building processes.

Momentum ebbed and flowed over the arc of planning activities in Grand Rapids, especially as the planning activities stretched over multiple months and over numerous small and large group meetings. Local site leaders held a range of opinions about the value of inclusive processes. Early in the planning stage, one co-chair expressed consternation about an extended coalition-building process and suggested it was adequate for the co-chairs and the national TA partners alone to hold the expansive vision of the work. Many others in the local justice collaborative indicated otherwise and expressed the



importance of taking the necessary time to address deep-seated community issues and dynamics and not revert to behavior previously described as “West Michigan nice”—the preference to be polite and not directly discuss and work to resolve issues.

The planning stage in Grand Rapids reflected the nature of local justice collaborative and cross-sector relationship building—one that can be frustratingly resistant to measurement and short on visible early wins, as is frequently the case for collective impact efforts. And yet, there were many moments Grand Rapids local justice collaborative members experienced as both essential and transformational. The team experience during the first convening of the Aspen Justice Network, for instance, unlocked a more candid and unflinching examination of race, racial disparities, and unspoken power dynamics within the local justice collaborative, which have emerged as an important component of Grand Rapids JGP’s priorities and work.

The balance required between momentum and inclusivity has also informed revisions to the planning stage TA that will be provided to the next set of JGP sites. As one key adjustment, the Justice Mapping Center will introduce a “leadership cadre” approach during the new JGP sites’ planning activities. The approach will focus less on bringing the complete set of sector and community actors together in each site, but instead identify a smaller group that can more nimbly focus on new partnerships and data sharing that relate to an overall vision of community safety and justice and to develop a prototype for future action. This new approach is intended to build momentum and serve as a precursor and proof of concept of what is possible and what will be explored with a larger set of actors.



QUESTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE FIELD

In 2023, the JGP model is poised to launch in four additional micropolitan, rural, and mid-size jurisdictions. Grand Rapids will be in the implementation stage, with local funding support from the Michigan Justice Funders, a statewide funders collaborative focused on “creating a thriving, enabling environment in Michigan necessary to advance justice reform initiatives.” Birmingham, AL, will be in the planning stage, with support from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from both the City of Birmingham and Jefferson County, within which Birmingham is situated. And three regions that make up “The Corridor” in South Carolina—a stretch of seventeen primarily rural counties in the state—will be completing their initial stakeholder engagement stage, with expected support from a coalition of philanthropic partners led by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina. Across the five JGP sites, this represents the opportunity to reimagine safety and justice for nearly a half-million individuals.⁸

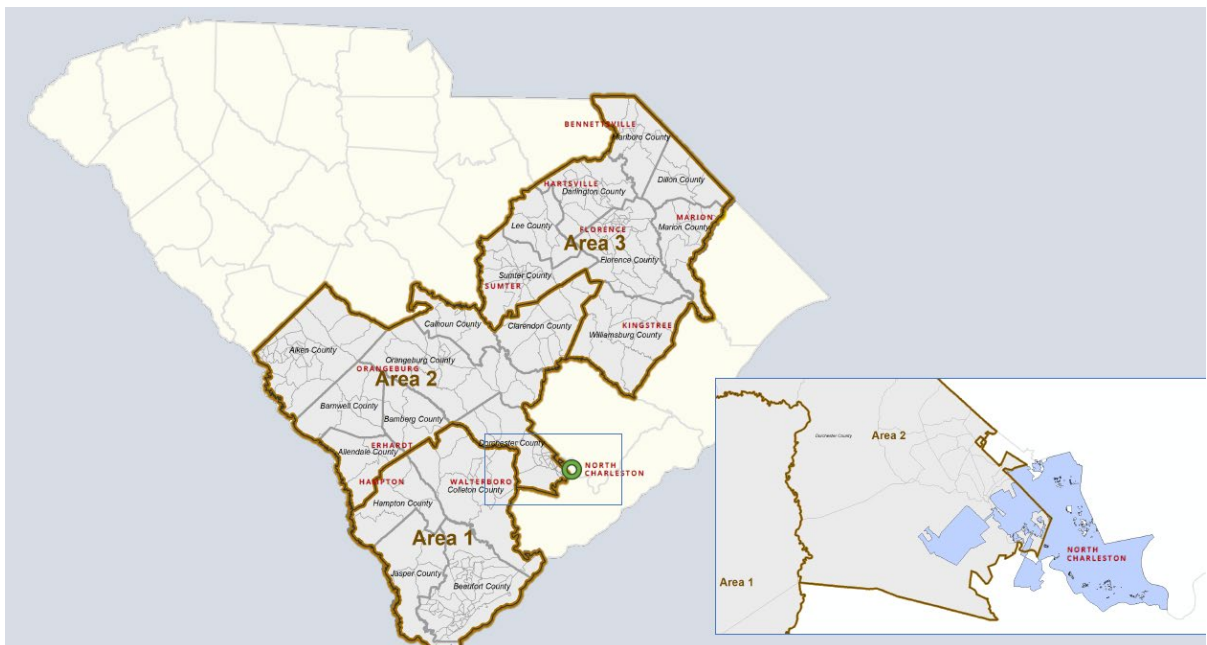


Figure 3. Map of South Carolina Areas of Focus, Courtesy of the Aspen Institute

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/birminghamcityalabama>; <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/grandrapidscitymichigan>; <https://palmettopromise.org/learning-is-a-joy-a-court-order-the-corridor-of-shame/>



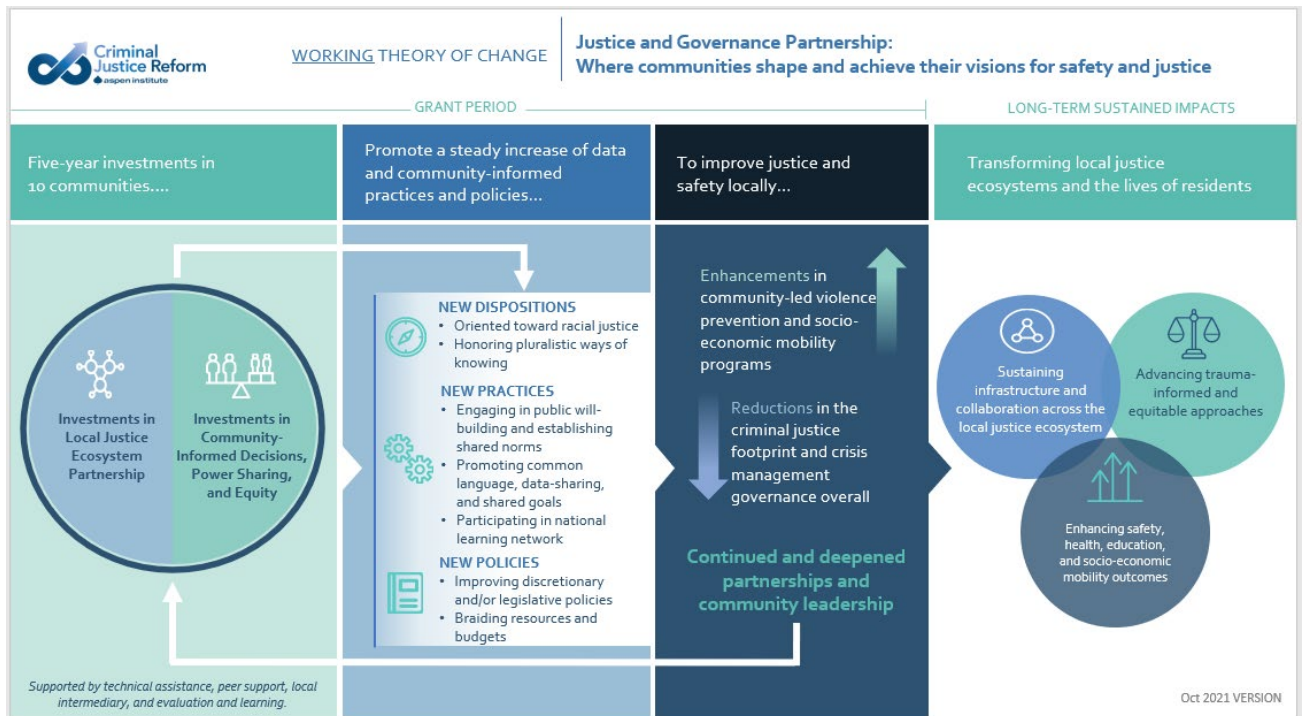
As progress and learning continue, we also offer the following questions and opportunities for the criminal justice field and for philanthropic actors who seek to support this work.

- What are the most effective ways of supporting local reimagination, ownership, and investment toward building wholly new ecosystems of justice?
- What evidence can effectively demonstrate that a focus on shared data, discretionary policy changes, and reinvestment of resources at the local level can transform both systems and lessen the burden of overlapping inequities (housing, education, health, criminal justice system involvement) on low-income residents of color?
- In what ways can this work identify, address, and redress the root causes of systemic racism and inequality that are embedded in our cities' histories, institutions, and current practices?

We look forward to being part of continued local and national conversations, exploring the answers to these questions, and continuing the necessary partnership to support the transformation of local justice ecosystems in our nation's most burdened, yet overlooked, cities and rural regions.



APPENDIX A: COVER PAGE OF INITIATIVE-LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE





APPENDIX B: LOCATING JGP IN THE BROADER FIELD OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

During JGP’s design stage, the national partners developed five processes to identify and refine its unique elements, and to calibrate its approach in response to the historical and contemporary context of criminal justice transformation in the United States. Each is described briefly below:

1. Influential Essay on the Criminal Justice Continuum

In 2019, Dr. Douglas Wood, then a Senior Fellow at the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (FCS), authored the paper “Ending this Place of Torment: A Framework for Transforming the Criminal Justice Continuum.” The vision and values of FCS, which are reflected in the paper’s content, focus on collaborative, community-based efforts, where “communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face.”

The paper established a necessary focus on a *broader justice continuum*, including prevention efforts to decrease justice involvement (“the front”), improvement of conditions and rehabilitation opportunities for those inside prisons and jails (“the middle”), and mechanisms to support successful reentry into communities (“the back”). The focus on all parts of the justice continuum—in partnership with community members, while acknowledging the historical and contemporary effects of structural racism—remain key priorities for JGP.

To read the essay, visit <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/ending-this-place-of-torment-transforming-the-criminal-justice-continuum/>.

2. Justice and Governance Partnership Description

In 2021, the JGP was adopted with clear goals to improve the lives of residents and reduce the footprint of the justice system, and leave a durable, sustaining capacity in communities to continue this work. The document outlines how JGP will help local jurisdictions improve analytic capacity and organize policy improvements focused on ending overdependence on the criminal legal system as a response to structural discrimination and persistent poverty and will stimulate investment in the local institutions and networks most knowledgeable about neighborhood safety and justice. Four areas of impact are:

1. *Better Lives for Individuals Through a Reduction in Crisis Management Governance*
2. *A High Impact, Collaborative Local Justice Ecosystem*
3. *Justice Policy Self-Determination with Increased Community Involvement and Focus on Equity*
4. *Expanded Community-Led Violence Prevention and Socio-Economic Mobility*



3. Series of national interviews

JGP then engaged Vik Malhotra, former director of Civil and Human Rights at the Ford Foundation, to conduct a series of interviews with 19 national criminal justice reform leaders and stakeholders to capture insights and recommendations for the Aspen Institute's new Criminal Justice Reform Initiative (CJRI), which houses JGP. Authored in fall 2020, it considered the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as continued senseless and catalyzing murders of Black Americans at the hands of police, resulting in the largest demonstrations in American history.

The analysis elevated the importance of shifting public attention and interest away from reform and toward *reimagining criminal justice and community safety* in ways that require fundamental shifts away from policing and incarceration as the avenue for public safety, and toward new systemic changes at the community level to address underlying social, economic, educational, and health issues—all themselves undergirded by systems of structural racism.

Other key findings that informed the JGP approach included an emphasis on: Aspen's recommended role as an *amplifier and convener* (rather than the external leader) of local, place-based efforts to improve community justice and safety; the importance of *integrating other key sectors, such as housing, health, and education systems* as necessary components of achieving public safety and resilience; *avoiding oversimplification* of the criminal justice continuum at the expense of true transformation; and use of the justice audit as a mechanism to measure progress toward and to confront the *deep-seated and structural racial inequities* of the criminal justice system.

4. Internal Landscape Scan of National Criminal Justice Reform Initiatives

As a complement to the interviews with national leaders, in 2022, Equal Measure then completed an internal landscape analysis of 18 well-known criminal justice reform initiatives with the goals of identifying strengths and gaps in these efforts to inform JGP strategy and design; refining the unique value proposition and need for the JGP approach; and developing recommended talking points to cultivate interest in JGP from prospective micropolitan cities.

The analysis yielded a 2x2 matrix that located these initiatives, as well as the intended approach of JGP, along an **ecosystem domain** (each initiative's orientation relative to a 'holistic' approach or a 'focused' approach, as articulated in the criminal justice continuum), and an **orientation domain** (each initiative's orientation toward leadership and implementation approach, either 'centralized' in its implementation model, or 'community oriented' in a bottom-up design approach). Equal Measure then identified three of these initiatives for a more detailed comparative analysis to examine design, key activities, and desired outcomes. The initiatives Equal Measure examined were the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, and Transforming Safety Colorado.

The key findings aided in the clearer articulation of JGP's position in the criminal justice transformation landscape, including: the *prioritization of a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to criminal justice reform*; the *consideration of the entire justice continuum*; and its



*balance between a centrally defined strategy and approach **and** the prioritization of local community leadership, refinement of the approach, and ownership.*

5. Engagement of national advisory council

Lastly, JGP identified an influential group of national criminal justice experts to serve as an advisory council for CJRI and JGP's place-based efforts. The council includes leaders of other highly regarded criminal justice reform efforts, such as Lenore Anderson, co-founder and President of Alliance for Safety and Justice; higher education partners Karol Mason and Erica Bond, president and vice-president, respectively, at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice; philanthropic leaders like Jeremy Travis, executive vice president at Arnold Ventures; and other highly regarded nonprofit leaders, such as DeAnna Hoskins, president and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA, and Insha Rahman, Vice President of Advocacy and Partnerships from the Vera Institute of Justice.

These national experts were engaged multiple times during the design and early implementation of JGP, including at the inaugural Justice Network retreat held in September 2022.

To learn more about the national advisory council, visit

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/criminal-justice-reform-initiative/cjri-advisory-council/>.