



County Justice Peer Learning Network RFP

An estimated 2 million annual jail admissions involve a person with a serious mental illness and three-quarters of these individuals has a co-occurring substance use disorder.¹ Many counties struggle to provide appropriate treatment and services to some of their most vulnerable residents in the community, sometimes resulting in jails becoming their de facto mental health facilities. This crisis disproportionately affects people of color, who are more likely to be incarcerated² and less likely to be diagnosed for mental illness in the criminal justice system compared to their white peers. An analysis done by the Department of Justice showed that 22 percent of black individuals and 23 percent of Hispanic individuals in jail met the threshold for serious psychological distress compared to 31 percent of white individuals.³ Black and Hispanic individuals are also half as likely to receive mental health treatment referrals compared to white individuals during their stay in jail.⁴

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's [Safety and Justice Challenge](#) (SJC) focuses on the overuse of local jails and has begun to generate alternative strategies that have the potential to remedy the problem. Many counties across the country are addressing the needs of individuals with mental illness through innovative interventions as a part of the SJC. As a Strategic Ally in the SJC, the National Association of Counties (NACo) will support county leaders in a County Justice Peer Learning Network (PLN) focused on reducing the number of individuals with mental illness involved in the justice system with a lens toward also reducing racial and ethnic disparities in arrest and incarceration of these individuals. In line with the SJC's mission of reducing the overuse of jails, the PLN will provide counties expertise and technical assistance from sites, partners and strategic allies within the SJC network while also integrating resources from NACo's other justice initiatives such as [Stepping Up](#) and [Data-Driven Justice](#).

Opportunities and Objectives

This PLN will support up to 10 counties with an interest in addressing the needs of individuals with mental illness in their criminal justice systems with an approach and framework that aims to also reduce racial and ethnic disparities seen in this population. The PLN will provide opportunities to:

¹ Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails, www.StepUpTogether.org

² R. Subramanian, K. Riley & C. Mai. Divided Justice: Trends in Black and White Jail Incarceration, 1990-2013. Vera Institute of Justice, 2018. <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/Divided-Justice-full-report.pdf>

³ J. Bronson & M. Berzofsky. Indicators of Mental Health Problems Reported by Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011-12. U.S. Department of Justice, 2017. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprj1112.pdf>

⁴ F. Kaba et al. Disparities in Mental Health Referral and Diagnosis in the New York City Jail Mental Health Service. *American Journal of Public Health* 10.9 (2015): 1911-1916. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4539829/>

1. Learn from county peers, subject matter experts and jurisdictions from the Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) network about successful strategies to reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses in local justice systems.
2. Engage county leadership in justice, health and human services to find alternatives to jail use.
3. Identify and address racial and ethnic disparities for justice-involved individuals with mental illnesses in their communities with strategies to engage people in appropriate treatment and services rather than jail.

At the end of the PLN, participants will be able to identify gaps in their justice systems for diversion of individuals with mental illness, as well as implement solutions for providing these individuals with a continuum of care. Participants will leave the PLN with an action plan for implementing a policy or program that aims to reduce the number of individuals with mental illness in their jails while addressing racial and ethnic disparities within their criminal justice system.

Participant Benefits

Selected counties will engage in the following starting January 2020 through June 2021:

- **Technical Assistance:** Selected PLN sites will engage with SJC jurisdictions, as appropriate, for peer coaching and have access to resources from other NACo initiatives like Stepping Up and Data-Driven Justice, as well as technical assistance providers from the SJC Network. Sites will also participate in quarterly virtual network calls to discuss progress and seek assistance.
- **Two Peer Exchanges:** NACo will provide two opportunities, one in Spring 2020 and one in Spring 2021, for two members of each PLN site to visit SJC jurisdictions working on strategies to address the needs of justice-involved individuals with mental illness with a focus on reducing racial and ethnic disparities with this population. The peer exchanges will provide PLN sites the chance to network with and learn from county officials from SJC jurisdictions, peers and subject matter experts. NACo will cover travel expenses to both peer exchanges for two team members for each PLN site.
- **Features in Blogs/Case Studies:** PLN sites will be featured in blogs and case studies highlighting progress with their efforts over the 18-month period.

Focus of the Peer Learning Network

Each selected site will identify and work on implementing at least one program, policy or strategy at the county level that will focus on reducing the number of individuals with mental illness in their county jail. Examples include:

- Establishing a crisis stabilization or triage center for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis where they can be diverted to by law enforcement.
- Establishing a mental health court that connects justice-involved individuals to case management and treatment.

- Establishing a co-responder model for law enforcement that pairs officers with a mental health specialist to respond to and deescalate 911 calls involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Establishing mental health screenings at jail booking.
- Establishing a jail population review team to determine eligibility for release for individuals with mental illnesses into community-based treatment.
- Implementing a data integration and sharing process for justice, health and human services departments in order to better track and connect justice-involved individuals to treatment and resources.
- Establishing a peer-navigator program to assist individuals with seeking treatment and resources post-release.

Part of implementing these strategies will be the intentional review of data to help identify areas where racial and ethnic disparities exist in accessing treatment or in arrest or incarceration policies to help address and reduce this impact.

Selection Criteria

NACo will select up to 10 counties to participate in this 18-month project based on the following criteria on a points based scoring system:

1. Team makeup of relevant stakeholders, commitment and capacity to engage consistently in the technical assistance and peer learning activities over 18 months, to be expressed via a letter of commitment from county elected leadership. (10 points)
2. Clarity of interest, need and potential to benefit from the PLN. (10 points)
3. Clarity of goals and topics of interest the applicant plans to achieve through participation in the PLN. (10 points)
4. Demonstrated existing collaboration and efforts of county agencies and/or community partners for addressing justice-involved individuals with mental illness and racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system. (10 points)
5. NACo will give preference to counties that are NACo members. (5 points)
6. Replicability of the county's proposed goal to a broad array of other local governments. (5 points)

Commitment

As part of the application process, NACo is requesting that counties provide a letter of commitment from an elected county official (county commissioner, supervisor, executive, etc.) with an expression of intent to participate in technical assistance and peer exchanges for the 18-month period and a description of the jurisdiction's ability to benefit from technical assistance. NACo is specifically requesting that sites commit to the following:

- **Attendance and Participation:** Over the course of 18 months, PLN sites are also expected to attend and actively participate in every quarterly virtual network call starting in January 2020. The counties that are selected will meet twice in person at peer exchanges hosted by SJC sites,

one in Spring 2020 and one in Spring 2021. For both peer exchanges, two county representatives (one being an elected official) are expected to attend.

- **Working Plans and Goals:** NACo, along with partners from the SJC network, will support PLN sites to develop measurable goals for reducing the number of individuals with mental illness in jails, particularly people of color, and a work plan to make progress toward those goals during the 18-month period and beyond.

Applicant Team

Each team will be composed of two (2) representatives from the county government who will attend all peer exchanges and quarterly virtual network calls.

Required county team leads should be:

1. an elected official such as a commissioner or supervisor and
2. one senior representative from county law enforcement, corrections, public health, mental health or other relevant local agency like a criminal justice coordinating council.

Although PLN site representation at peer exchange will be limited to two county leaders, we highly encourage teams to engage additional stakeholders to assist with implementation in their jurisdiction. These supplementary team members should include those who can assist your jurisdiction with reducing individuals with mental illness in jails and reflect specifically what your team plans to work on. These can include but are not limited to representatives from other government agencies, social service organizations, community-based treatment providers, university partners, community members and those directly impacted by the justice system, etc.

To apply, counties should submit proposed team members, as outlined below, and answers to the application questions **via the Google form**.

Proposed PLN Team Leaders

County Name, State: _____

County Team Lead One: Elected County Official (commissioner, supervisor, executive, etc.)

Name: _____

Title: _____

Office/Agency: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, and Zip Code: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Email: _____

County Team Lead Two: Senior Law Enforcement, Corrections, Public Health, Mental Health, or Local Agency Representative, like a criminal justice coordinating council

Name: _____

Title: _____
Office/Agency: _____
Street Address: _____
City, State, and Zip Code: _____
Phone: (____) _____
Email: _____

Provide a list of any additional stakeholders who will participate in the implementation of reforms but will not attend peer exchanges.

Additional Stakeholders

Name: _____
Title: _____
Office/Agency: _____
Phone: (____) _____
Email: _____

Description of this organization's role as a complement to county efforts to combat number of individuals with mental illness in jail (*1 paragraph*):

Name: _____
Title: _____
Office/Agency: _____
Phone: (____) _____
Email: _____

Description of this organization's role as a complement to county efforts to combat number of individuals with mental illness in jail (*1 paragraph*):

Name: _____
Title: _____
Office/Agency: _____
Phone: (____) _____
Email: _____

Description of this organization's role as a complement to county efforts to combat number of individuals with mental illness in jail (*1 paragraph*):

Name: _____
Title: _____
Office/Agency: _____
Phone: (____) _____
Email: _____

Description of this organization's role as a complement to county efforts to combat number of individuals with mental illness in jail (*1 paragraph*):

Application Questions

Responses to the questions below will help the reviewers assess your county's capacity and commitment to reducing the number of individuals with mental illness in jails, particularly people of color. Please limit your response to each question to no more than 400 words.

Interest

- Why is your county interested in participating in the County Justice Peer Learning Network? Describe the issue(s) your jurisdiction currently faces with justice-involved individuals with mental illness.
- How would participation benefit your county?
- How do you anticipate participation in the PLN to impact racial and ethnic disparities in your jurisdiction's justice system?

Current Efforts

- How do you currently identify individuals with mental illness in your jail?
- Please provide data on your jail population:
 - Number and percentage of individuals with identified mental illness based on your average daily population and broken down by race/ethnicity at the following stages:
 - a) detained pretrial
 - b) held on violations of probation
 - c) sentenced in your jail
 - Average length of stay in jail for individuals who have a mental illness, broken down by race/ethnicity
 - Number and percentage of individuals with mental illness who are connected to community-based mental health services upon release, broken down by race/ethnicity. Please also share how you define "connected to services".
 - Number and percentage of individuals with mental illness who are rearrested after release from jail, broken down by race/ethnicity
- If you are not able to provide the previously mentioned data points, how could this program help you be able to collect this data?
- Describe, if any, current systems, processes and/or data collection used to track individuals with mental illness in jails in your jurisdiction.
- What does your jurisdiction do now to divert individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system?
- What does your jurisdiction do now to address racial and ethnic disparities in your jurisdiction's justice system?

Goals

- What change(s) to your justice system would your team like to achieve through this initiative? Please refer back to the examples listed on page two to choose your priorities.
- How would your jurisdiction measure and demonstrate progress for reducing individuals with mental illness interaction with jails after participating in this initiative?
- What commitment will your jurisdiction make to address racial and ethnic disparities through this initiative? How do you plan to integrate this commitment into your initiative strategy?

- One of the goals of the PLN is to support peer learning between the sites that are selected to participate. What would you like to gain from fellow participants? What could your team contribute to participants?