



SUSAN TURNER, LAURA WHITAKER, HANSELL PEREZ, STEPHANIE BROOKS HOLLIDAY

Implementation Evaluation of Capacity-Building Programs Funded by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act in Los Angeles County

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR3217-2.

About RAND

RAND is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. To learn more about RAND, visit www.rand.org.

Research Integrity

Our mission to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis is enabled through our core values of quality and objectivity and our unwavering commitment to the highest level of integrity and ethical behavior. To help ensure our research and analysis are rigorous, objective, and nonpartisan, we subject our research publications to a robust and exacting quality-assurance process; avoid both the appearance and reality of financial and other conflicts of interest through staff training, project screening, and a policy of mandatory disclosure; and pursue transparency in our research engagements through our commitment to the open publication of our research findings and recommendations, disclosure of the source of funding of published research, and policies to ensure intellectual independence. For more information, visit www.rand.org/about/research-integrity.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© 2024 Los Angeles County Probation Department

RAND® is a registered trademark.

About This Report

The Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) provides funding to counties to support programs that have proven effectiveness in curbing crime among at-risk youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, the Probation Department oversees the implementation of JJCPA-funded programs, which are approved by the county through the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, which comprises stakeholders from county agencies, city agencies, and community-based organizations. In 2019, the Probation Department selected RAND to provide evaluation and technical assistance services, including an annual gap analysis, related to JJCPA-funded programs. The purpose of this report is to provide the Probation Department and policymakers with an overview of three JJCPA-funded efforts that provide capacity-building and leadership-training services. The report focuses on the capacity-building efforts only; we did not evaluate the separate effort in which the Probation Department provides funds to organizations through a grantmaking fiscal intermediary. Our evaluation covers the efforts' three-year funding period from 2020 through 2023.

Justice Policy Program

RAND Social and Economic Well-Being is a division of RAND that seeks to actively improve the health and social and economic well-being of populations and communities throughout the world. This research was conducted in the Justice Policy Program within RAND Social and Economic Well-Being. The program focuses on such topics as access to justice, policing, corrections, drug policy, and court system reform, as well as other policy concerns pertaining to public safety and criminal and civil justice. For more information, email justicepolicy@rand.org.

Acknowledgments

We thank the staff of the capacity-building programs, as well as staff at programs receiving capacity-building services, who participated in data collection for this evaluation. Thank you to the Los Angeles County Probation Department for its role in supporting the research. We would also like to thank our peer reviewers, Christy Giallella and Mallika Bhandarkar, for their thoughtful review of this report.

Summary

In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds a small number of capacity-building efforts—that is, efforts that support organizations that serve youth rather than serving youth directly. The Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) receives JJCPA funding, which it then allocates to support capacity-building efforts in the area. Two such efforts focus on building the capacity of youth-serving organizations through activities related to fundraising, marketing, strategic planning, and evaluation, and a third focuses on building Probation Officers’ skills related to serving justice-involved youth.

In 2019, L.A. County hired RAND to evaluate the implementation of these three efforts. In this report, we detail the evaluation’s context, methods, and findings.

Our evaluation primarily consisted of interviews with staff members from Probation, the three JJCPA-funded capacity-building efforts, and the community-based organizations (CBOs) that received the efforts’ services. Our approach focused on findings across the three efforts, and we sought to uncover any facilitators and barriers that would lead to—or hinder—the efforts’ successful implementation. After collecting information on each effort individually, we searched for common themes and shared facilitators or barriers among the three.

Interviewees described several barriers to implementing the capacity-building efforts, including

- the many disruptions the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic caused, such as the move to virtual programming
- obstacles the organizations participating in the capacity-building efforts faced, such as limited time or transitions in leadership
- a mismatch between programs and Probation in defining and measuring success.

Interviewees also noted primary facilitators to the implementation of the capacity-building efforts, including

- adequate staffing, (i.e., hiring staff with sufficient organizational experience and expertise)
- successful team collaboration, including within a community-based organization—especially when there are leadership transitions—and between all of the participating organizations
- taking an approach of meeting programs “where they are” when providing services; that is, not taking a top-down approach and imposing activities and deadlines but rather letting the CBO (or other organization receiving services, such as Probation) inform and co-design the process so it can build capacity in the areas that are needed most.

It is important to keep in mind that capacity-building efforts can take a long time to implement and yield results, and the outcomes we observed depend on the readiness of participating organizations and the presence of other organization-level barriers. With these findings, we believe Probation and other similar agencies can use funding to enable and support capacity-building

programs whose work will enhance youth-serving programs and, ultimately, improve the lives of justice-involved youth.

Contents

About This Report.....	iii
Summary	iv
Tables.....	vii
Implementation Evaluation of Capacity-Building Programs Funded by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention	
Act in Los Angeles County	1
Research on Capacity-Building.....	2
Present Study.....	3
Methods.....	4
Results.....	6
Concluding Thoughts.....	24
Abbreviations	27
References.....	28

Tables

Table 1. Interview Participants.....	4
Table 2. Key Effort Elements	6

Implementation Evaluation of Capacity-Building Programs Funded by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act in Los Angeles County

In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) supports programs that address the needs of youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system, as well as youth who are at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system (County of L.A., 2022). Most programs that JJCPA funds directly serve youth by providing a variety of prevention, early intervention, and intervention services. However, in recent years, including in 2023 and 2024 (which coincided with the writing of this report), 5 percent of JJCPA's annual funding has been allocated to support capacity-building efforts targeting community-based organizations (CBOs) (County of L.A., 2022; County of L.A., 2023). The purpose of these capacity-building efforts has been to “support community-based organizations with capacity-building, training and cross-training, evaluation, and to regularly track and monitor outcomes and use the results to drive County policy and practice change” (County of L.A., 2021, p. 23).

In recent years, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council identified two specific efforts as providing capacity-building services: (1) the Capacity Building for Violence Intervention Agencies program operated by the County of L.A. Department of Public Health's Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) and (2) Ready to Rise (R2R), which was established as a public-private partnership between the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation), the California Community Foundation (CCF), and the Liberty Hill Foundation (Liberty Hill).

In addition, California State University, L.A. (CSULA) was funded to provide Activating Intentional Youth Development Approach (AIYDA) and Activating Intentional Moments (AIMs) training, which teaches Probation staff members how to integrate principles of positive youth development into their work with youth. Although this effort is technically designated as a “primary prevention” based on the taxonomy used by the county's Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (i.e., the body tasked with making decisions about how L.A. County allocates JJCPA funds), it can also be conceptualized as a capacity-building effort because of its focus on equipping agency staff with skills rather than serving individual youth directly.

In this report, we refer to these three efforts as CSULA for the California State University program, OVP for the Department of Public Health, Office of Violence Prevention program, and R2R for the Ready to Rise initiative. Each effort received JJCPA funds for a period of three years beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2020. Our evaluation focuses on this period.

Research on Capacity-Building

Literature on capacity-building shows that it can be effective in strengthening organizations, although the literature base is not large and evaluations of capacity-building programs are often not rigorously designed. In this section, we review several evaluations that have relevance to the current project and are helpful for providing context for lessons and observations from the L.A. County efforts.

Patrizi, Gross, and Freedman (2006) reported on a juvenile justice project that the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation funded to build the organizational capacity of six programs. The project gave a great deal of flexibility to the programs; the activities were up to programs and there were few reporting requirements. The authors found that organizations that were stable and had strong leadership were able to take advantage of the flexible approach. Although the six programs in the project engaged in different activities, the programs were able to use the funds for traditional capacity-building in information technology, fundraising, communications, strategic planning, and board development. Or programs used funding in less traditional ways, such as building a national presence.

Crane et al. (2021) examined capacity-building activities for staff involved in the delivery of community-based transition services for youth leaving school and gaining employment as adults. As part of a statewide program in Maryland, staff were provided with professional development activities that included training and field-based coaching, service and outcome expectations for staff, and performance monitoring. Professional development activities were associated with more placements for youth in work-based learning experiences and paid employment (Crane et al., 2021).

In a separate, but related, area of public health and health promotion, DeCorby-Watson et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of capacity-building interventions, which included internet-based instruction, training and workshops, technical assistance, education using self-directed learning, communities of practice, and multi-strategy interventions. Although this meta-analysis suggested that capacity-building can “impact knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, changes in practice or policies, application, and perceptions of system-level capacity” (DeCorby-Watson et al., 2018, p. 12), findings were based on only 14 studies, and the authors noted that the quality of the studies was generally not strong and most measures were at the individual, rather than program or system, level.

Capacity-building for nonprofit community organizations as a means to rebuild social capital in communities was tested by faculty and students at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in the late 1990s (Reardon, 1998). Aimed at increasing the capacity of grassroots organizations, the university researchers engaged in activities with the community of East St. Louis, Missouri. Capacity-building was affected by several factors; however, several lessons are relevant to the JJCPA-funded efforts. Reardon (1998, p. 332) reported that these efforts, which take time and effort to build organizational capacity, should adopt “a long-term ‘systems’ approach to this work that focuses attention simultaneously on the individual, organizational, and environmental elements of the planning context.”

Sobeck and Agius (2007) examined a five-year initiative that both delivered and evaluated capacity-building activities for 23 organizations that provided programs (such as job skills, substance abuse prevention, and performing arts) for youth in Michigan. The initiative, named Strengthening Community Organizations to Promote Effectiveness (SCOPE), focused on leadership development,

organizational systems development, and strategy formulation and management. Capacity-building involved

- organizational assessments
- mentors
- development of a work plans
- peer leaders
- workshops
- technology services
- assistance from consultants on program development and evaluation services
- financial management training
- funds for direct services to youth.

Different SCOPE program directors reported getting different benefits from the capacity-building efforts; however, evaluation measures indicated increased management knowledge and an increase in the number of board members over the course of the initiative. Benefits at the organizational level included visibility of their organizations and networking with other agencies, among other benefits. Importantly, the evaluation showed that even after completing the capacity-building program, individual programs were at different stages of readiness for change—quite a few of the participating programs were not ready to fully integrate the capacity-building activities into changes in their organizations.

In summary, while capacity-building efforts have been shown to be effective, the literature base on this subject is somewhat limited, and specific capacity-building efforts have varied from program to program, making it difficult to identify what ingredients may be most effective. The meta-analysis by DeCorby-Watson et al. (2018) also noted the lack of strong research designs, the fact that evaluation activities lag behind the extensive use of capacity-building funds, organizations can be at different stages of readiness for implementing lessons and training from capacity-building efforts, and these efforts take time to achieve desired outcomes.

Present Study

The capacity-building efforts supported by JJCPA funds reflect the variation described in the literature mentioned above. Each effort has a somewhat different focus in terms of services provided, the target audience or organization, and the long-term outcomes the effort hopes to achieve. Moreover, each of these three efforts had already participated in evaluation efforts at the time we began our role as the evaluator of JJCPA-funded services. Therefore, rather than concentrate on program outcomes and duplicate the evaluation efforts, we set out to conduct a study that was focused more broadly on the ways in which JJCPA-funded capacity-building efforts were being implemented and the barriers, facilitators, and lessons the three efforts shared. More specifically, we set out to understand

- how each capacity-building effort served participating staff members and/or organizations
- program goals and specific services available

- barriers and challenges to implementing the capacity-building efforts
- facilitators to implementing the capacity-building efforts
- the programs' perspectives on partnership
- staff perceptions of program effectiveness and recommendations for improvement.

Methods

This report is based on 14 semistructured interviews conducted via the Microsoft Teams platform with individuals from each of the three capacity-building efforts and with Probation administrative staff. We conducted the interviews between May 2022 and May 2023. Probation provided contact information for key stakeholders in the three efforts. RAND staff contacted the agencies and requested information on individuals who would be able to talk about the programs and their implementation.

For OVP and R2R, we requested contact information on youth programs that participated in the capacity-building efforts. Not all program contacts responded to requests for interviews. For OVP, we interviewed one OVP staff member and an individual involved in their evaluation of the OVP program. We also interviewed an individual from one of the programs that participated in capacity-building activities under OVP. For R2R, we interviewed individuals from CCF, Liberty Hill, Destiny Coaching and Consulting (Destiny), Special Service for Groups, Inc., and three programs that participated in the capacity-building efforts. We interviewed staff from Imoyase Community Support Services (Imoyase), the organization that evaluated R2R. For CSULA, we interviewed two staff members associated with the project.

We also conducted one interview with administrative staff from Probation (see Table 1 for a summary of interview participants).

Table 1. Interview Participants

Participant Group	Interview Participants	Number of Interviews
Capacity-building effort staff and evaluation partners	Staff involved with providing and/or evaluating capacity-building programming for CSULA, OVP, and R2R	9
Capacity-building participant organization staff	Staff of organizations participating in capacity-building programming	4
Probation administrative staff	Probation administrative staff	1

Interviews were conducted and recorded over Microsoft Teams using semistructured interview protocols. We tailored three protocols for this evaluation: one for the capacity-building efforts (CSULA, OVP, and R2R), another for programs that received capacity-building services; and a third for Probation administrative staff. Topics for the capacity-building effort interview protocol focused on (1) program descriptions, including goals and outcomes, clients and outreach, and case flow; (2) client experience and perceptions of program effectiveness; and (3) implementation barriers,

facilitators, and resources. For programs that received capacity-building services, the interview protocol included the topics mentioned above (though some items were reworded or shortened) and a set of questions about the relationship of the program vis-à-vis capacity-building. This set asked about participant organization staff's expectations regarding how they were to benefit from the capacity-building efforts, capacity-building activities, and the effect on their organization. For the Probation interview protocol, topics included

- how capacity-building efforts were chosen and their role in the larger portfolio of JJCPA-funded programs
- differences between the contracting process for capacity-building efforts and youth-serving programs
- how capacity-building efforts fill an identified need
- expectations regarding the number of programs that the capacity-building efforts serve
- the capacity-building efforts' effect on organizations
- expectations regarding evaluation data provided by capacity-building efforts
- preferences for measurable outcomes
- challenges in funding and oversight for capacity-building efforts
- suggested changes or additions to capacity-building efforts.

We recorded the interviews from Microsoft Teams and transcribed the recordings. We then coded the transcriptions into themes using Dedoose software. A priori categories for the coding reflected the topic areas in the interview protocols.

In addition to the interviews, we were provided with written evaluation reports for OVP and R2R; the reports were from evaluations conducted by their own external program evaluators. Imoyase conducted quite an extensive evaluation of R2R. Imoyase provided us with R2R's annual reports and a final summary report. No evaluation reports were available for the CSULA capacity-building effort as of this writing. Because of the wealth of information from reports and the large number of interviews conducted by Imoyase, we document the experiences of R2R in more detail than we do for the other two capacity-building efforts. However, this difference in available data also reflects the funding allocation for these programs. From FYs 2018–2023, R2R received \$11,325,259 to support its capacity-building services. OVP was funded in FY 2018–2019 and FY 2022–2023 and received \$1,929,750 total. From FYs 2019–2023, CSULA received \$400,858.

After completing our analysis, we provided copies of a draft version of the report to the capacity-building efforts and Probation to review for factual or interpretation errors. We received written comments from CSULA, OVP, and Probation, which we incorporated into the final version of this report.

Because our focus was on implementation and shared lessons across programs, we were not provided with data on individual youth outcomes for this study.

Results

Descriptions of Capacity-Building Efforts

In this section, we present descriptions for the three capacity-building efforts separately. We subsequently discuss implementation experiences for all three efforts together to highlight similar and different experiences. Table 2 below provides a summary of the three efforts' key elements.

Table 2. Key Effort Elements

Effort	Target Group for Capacity-Building Efforts	Effort Goals
CSULA	Probation Officers	Train Probation Officers in techniques to engage youth in a positive manner and form more-effective relationships with them
OVP	Community-based organizations	Assess and assist organizations in the violence prevention arena with capacity-building needs, especially those related to challenges brought on by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic
R2R	Community-based organizations	Promote positive youth development through capacity-building efforts focused on organizations that serve high-needs youth in L.A. County

The three capacity-building efforts have two primary audiences. For OVP and R2R, the audiences, or “clients,” that received the capacity-building services were CBOs that provide direct services to youth. CSULA provided capacity-building training to *Probation Officers*. Thus, no direct-service youth organizations (other than Probation) were involved in the CSULA effort. This report focuses on the organizational level of the grantees that received capacity-building services. We will occasionally comment on the participant- and systems-level efforts to place capacity-building findings into context. We do not discuss the fiscal intermediary funding administered by CCF, which comprised the vast majority of JJCPA funding for capacity-building.

Probation administrative staff indicated that the concept of capacity-building support was that, in addition to organizations receiving funding to provide youth services, selected CBOs could receive support to ramp up, for example, such fiscal processes as budgeting, invoicing, or applying for grants. Capacity-building would enable staff at county agencies to then be able to apply for funding, obtain other grants, and achieve other related goals. Probation would then fund other cohorts of agencies to help reach additional CBOs in the county. Although Probation Officers recognized there would be variations in the capacity-building efforts, the staff conceptualized the efforts to target organizations' administrative support so the organizations' actual service programming would work more effectively. This capacity-building approach was a shift from the usual direct-service approach that Probation had historically provided.

Below, we describe the goals of the three capacity-building efforts.

California State University, Los Angeles's Activating Intentional Youth Development Approach Training for Los Angeles County Probation

Goals

The CSULA effort trained Probation Officers in AIYDA and AIMs. Both approaches are founded on positive youth development principles, and both introduce techniques for Probation Officers to engage with Probation-involved youth to intentionally foster key skills that underlie thriving youth development. AIYDA focuses on training providers to develop and deliver intentional skill-building activities to youth. AIMs focuses on training providers to plan and deliver intentional skill-building in brief interactions (e.g., passing by a youth in the facility).

The main goal was to build the officers' skills for interacting with Probation-involved youth using an intentional, skills-based learning approach. The curriculum was drawn from best practices in positive youth development, adolescent brain development, social and emotional learning, trauma-informed/healing-centered practice, and the science of learning and development. AIYDA and AIMs have been adopted as practice drivers by providers across L.A. County, including prevention and intervention contractors for the City of L.A. Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction Youth Development.

Target Population and Services

CSULA clients were Probation Officers. According to CSULA staff, they were not involved in the selection of the individual officers and did not know how the officers were selected for participation. Probation Officers participated in the effort in cohorts—some were line officers and a smaller number were supervisors—who were trained using a train-the-trainer model.

According to CSULA staff, the capacity-building effort engages Probation Officers in training activities for two hours a week for six weeks, followed by one-hour sessions per week for two weeks. The main components of the training involve intentional positive youth development activities (AIYDA) and using naturally occurring moments to build skills (AIMs). The program for Probation Officers begins with a discussion of the theory and science behind the AIYDA and AIMs approaches and adolescent brain development to provide baseline knowledge for the training activities. After this initial component, the effort covers the fundamentals of an asset-based model for teaching youth. Participants are introduced to concepts of social and emotional learning and six anchor skills: emotion management, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative, responsibility, and empathy. The Probation Officers, in turn, are trained to teach these same skills to the youth they interact with.

Probation Officers are trained in two different approaches through this effort: an activity-based approach (AIYDA) and a moments-based approach (AIMs). The former uses expressly planned activities, whereas the latter addresses situations in which a Probation Officer may only have a few minutes (a moment) to talk with a youth. A key component of the activity-based approach is to ask the Probation Officers to be very explicit in teaching youth the anchor skills. For example, one interviewee described the process as follows:

A lot of times we kind of, we do activities, and we say to ourselves, "Oh, they're learning teamwork because they're working together," but rather to intentionally and very explicitly tell the kids, "We're going [to] be working on teamwork today. And we're going to be working on . . ." Or, for instance, if we were working on something like emotion management, we would tell the kids, "OK, we are going to work on being

patient. We're going [to] be working on focusing. Those are lead-up skills for being able to manage our emotions and that's really important because . . ."

We're trying to get them to explicitly teach these skills in a way that's attractive to their kids and [so the youth] stay committed to the feedback that aligns with the skill, and [then] check for understanding that aligns with the skill—and to positively reinforce all of the good things that the kids are doing.

The AIYDA training includes making sure Probation Officers communicate expectations regarding youth behavior (such as requiring youth to positively handle their feelings); providing feedback to the youth that is consistent with the social and emotional skills the officers learn in the course; and checking in with youth at the end of the activity to ask about the youth's emotions and how effective they felt the strategies offered by the Probation Officer were in achieving the skill. According to CSULA staff, they are trying to get Probation Officers to explicitly teach these skills in a way that is attractive to the youth under their supervision, stay committed to the feedback that aligns with the skill, check for understanding that aligns with the skill, and positively reinforce good behaviors that youth exhibit. AIYDA can fit any type of activity (e.g., sports, self-care, arts, music) so the training stresses that Probation Officers should expand activities in which they normally engage youth to include anchor skills.

With AIMs, Probation Officers practice responses to situations that might arise in the moment or in the context of other supervision activities. Doing so lets officers use such opportunities to practice the skills they learned in the course. Probation Officers may ask a youth to talk about or reflect on one of the six anchor skills when they have a moment with them. As one interviewee mentioned,

You have them [the youth] and you know you're going have them for that moment. What are some things that you can talk to them about? Or if you hear them say something, what are some responses that you might plan to give back regarding those particular six anchor [skills], regarding emotion management and empathy and teamwork and initiative and problem-solving? So that's the other approach.

Department of Public Health, Office of Violence Prevention's Capacity Building for Violence Intervention Agencies

Goals

In 2020, OVP planned a series of capacity-building workshops to enhance the operational capacity of CBOs that work in community violence prevention to build on the success of a previous program that delivered targeted services to 30 organizations in four South L.A. communities. The original design of the 2020 effort was to hold in-person workshops for the organizations. This structure changed when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift from in-person activities. OVP revised the effort to provide short-term assistance to organizations experiencing challenges caused by the pandemic. Consultant teams worked with nonprofit organizations individually (often over the

phone). Most often, the executive director was the individual in the agency with whom capacity-building discussions were held.¹

Target Population and Services

One hundred nonprofit organizations participated in the effort between April and December 2020. Programs were recruited primarily via a SurveyMonkey request that was sent to CBOs across the county, targeting organizations that worked with OVP in some capacity. Other recruitment efforts included posting on OVP partner organization websites and disseminating newsletters to spread information on the effort widely. The initial recruitment request was short, asking organizations to indicate their top three capacity-building needs, especially as related to challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to OVP staff, to be considered eligible, organizations had to engage in work that focused on violence intervention and prevention. In most cases, chosen organizations worked with OVP in some way. According to the Center for Nonprofit Management, which served as the evaluator of the effort, participating nonprofits represented all five L.A. County supervisorial districts, with most organizations operating in Districts 2 and 3. More than half of the agencies served fewer than 500 clients per year. The services that these CBOs provided most often were “youth tutoring/mentoring services, counseling, food assistance and arts programs” (Center for Nonprofit Management, undated, p. 7).

According to OVP staff, organizations were generally assigned to consultant teams based on the organization’s top need. Through iterations, the consultants and organizations arrived at a proposed scope—or action plan—for the assistance efforts. The technical assistance scopes of work covered four areas of organizational capacity-building; fund development and grant resources; organizational and operational development; marketing and communications; and data and evaluation. Technical assistance efforts were generally short term. The longest lasted approximately three months, with most lasting 30 to 60 days. Fund development and grant writing made up 41 percent of all technical assistance efforts; marketing and communications made up 22 percent; operations and organizational development made up 20 percent; and data and evaluation made up 17 percent (Center for Nonprofit Management, undated, p. 10).

Two staff members from OVP were involved in the effort; one was a co-lead of OVP’s Trauma Prevention Initiative and one was a program manager. Ten consultants were hired as independent contractors and provided the technical assistance, working in two- to three-member teams. OVP staff and consultants would meet weekly during which the consultants would report on the agency requests and the approaches they were taking. Consultants would provide the organizations with recommendations based on their prior experience and evidence-based research.

An interviewee from a youth-serving program receiving capacity-building services from OVP noted that they took advantage of the fundraising assistance, through which their organization received support in developing a boilerplate proposal. The CBO received a lot of feedback about the proposal and how to position itself to increase its funding. It also had one-on-one sessions on how to improve its proposal budgets and budget narratives. The interviewee did note that the assistance lasted for a very short period, probably 60 to 90 days.

¹ This program description draws from an evaluation report prepared by the Center for Nonprofit Management (undated).

Ready to Rise

Goals

R2R presented the most structurally complex capacity-building effort of the three efforts. The R2R effort began as a pilot public-private partnership among Probation, CCF, and Liberty Hill. CCF has a long history of providing grantmaking services to organizations and serving as a fiscal intermediary. Liberty Hill has had extensive experience with capacity-building efforts.

The goal of the collaboration was to promote positive youth development, particularly for vulnerable populations and those who have been historically disadvantaged. Like OVP's effort, the R2R capacity-building effort centered on organizations that serve high-need youth in L.A. County. R2R's effort focused on youth development and positive alternatives to punitive measures, and R2R staff noted in interviews that they felt that L.A. County had used such punitive measures to address delinquent youth behavior for a very long time. The R2R effort targeted change at three different levels. According to a CCF staff member whom we interviewed,

When we develop a program or initiative at CCF, we really think about it on three levels, which is the participants level, the organization level, and the systems level. The systems level would be, "What do we want to be able to leave behind for the community." [The organization] level is, of course, nonprofit. And then participants in this case would be the young people. The young people, that is the primary target of this. We want to make sure that they have lots of access to opportunities for wellness and academic and professional advancement. That they have less engagement with law enforcement and that they're actually on the trajectory to be fully formed citizens of L.A. County. From the organizational standpoint, we really want to resource them and build their sustainability and infrastructure and fidelity of their programs to be able to support the needs of these young people.

R2R's capacity-building effort was designed to increase organizational awareness and capacity to provide service interventions, increase the capacity for collaborations through peer-to-peer learning, and position organizations for future funding efforts they can apply for on their own (CCF and Liberty Hill, 2022, p. 56). An interviewee from one of the partner organizations that provided consultants for capacity-building indicated that R2R relies on community-informed practices, which involves working with individuals from the community who understand the young people's needs and addressing change using a multifaceted approach. The interviewee stated,

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. We have what I refer to as a constellation of organizations that make up Ready to Rise. They do everything from workforce development to arts, restorative justice, [and] leadership development mentorship. So, quite a wide spectrum of interventions.

Target Population and Services

Youth-serving agencies were the participants in the R2R capacity-building effort. Interested CBOs responded to a request for proposals to be selected to participate in the effort. R2R received and evaluated 171 completed proposals. Applications were reviewed and site visits were made to those CBOs recommended for funding. Of these, 20 organizations were initially selected for funding. Six months after the first round of funding, an additional 29 applicants were included in the R2R effort

for a total of 49 organizations. According to the final evaluation report, R2R prioritized programs that, at the time, did not have or lead grants from Probation. Selected organizations represented a variety of diversity in terms of L.A. County geography, the types of services they provided, organizational capacity (e.g., length of time providing services, budget), and characteristics of the youth population being served (e.g., the youths' race, ethnicity, and living situations) (CCF and Liberty Hill, 2022, p. 18). Sixty-nine percent of the participating CBOs were Black, Indigenous, People of Color–led. Most organizations provided violence-prevention services as opposed to violence-intervention programming. The full list of individual organizations participating in the R2R capacity-building effort can be found in both the CCF and Liberty Hill report and the Imoyase report.²

As noted, R2R was an effort comprising many organizations and individuals. Apart from the CBOs, the primary organizations that were involved in R2R were CCF and Liberty Hill, which were the two lead organizations in the effort; Destiny, which was the lead capacity-building partner that provided coaches to assist and support the 49 participating organizations; and Imoyase, which served as the program evaluator. In addition, Liberty Hill managed capacity-building tracks for the second of two cohorts of participating organizations in core areas in which capacity-building support was focused: Special Service for Groups led the data and evaluation learning track, the Nonprofit Partnership led the strategic planning learning track, Revolve Impact led the communications learning track, and Impact Philanthropy and Swadhin Consulting led the fund development learning track. Forty-five individuals served as capacity-building coaches and consultants (CCF and Liberty Hill, 2022).

The capacity-building coaching efforts were led by 16 Destiny coaches. According to Destiny staff, each coach selected for the team had their own practice and business and came together as a team to work on the R2R effort. The coaches had decades of combined experience in their particular fields and were trainers, evaluators, and coaches and many had experience in board development. As one Destiny staff member noted,

[W]e're trainers, we're evaluators, we're coaches, we do board development. Not one person does all of that, but the whole team has that level of expertise—community organizers and diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners—so we know from our decades of experience what has worked. At the core, what we focused on is relationship-building, culturally responsive and respectful practices, and from there our expertise areas are implemented. . . . That's how we decided our approach and our framework.

Destiny's coaches were involved in the assessment and planning process with the participating grantee organizations, and they assisted with creating individualized plans for the year's activities, goals, and support required for identified services. Capacity-building efforts centered on 14 focus areas. According to Destiny staff, these focus areas were chosen based on what was being used in the field and on recommendations from the evidence base and were adapted to incorporate the topics deemed important by the participating organization's staff. The 14 areas were as follows:

² The organizations participating in the OVP effort are listed in Center for Nonprofit Management, undated. The CUSLA effort worked with Probation only.

- board of directors
- community engagement
- marketing and communications
- evaluation and data management and use
- fiscal management
- fundraising
- goal-setting
- human resources
- infrastructure
- organization structure and culture
- partnership development
- policy advocacy and community organizing
- program development
- senior leadership.

During the assessment and planning process, the CBOs were able to reflect on their practices within each of the above areas and then choose what they wanted to prioritize. Coaches met with program staff at least monthly.

In addition to the assessing, planning, and individual coaching that Destiny provided, participating organizations engaged in one of four learning tracks, each led by a different partner as described earlier.³ Each track involved either a series of sessions or a curriculum that used, depending on the track, individualized coaching, peer learning, workshops, or assignments to provide in-depth learning theory. Staff members from organizations participated in small cohorts of ten to 12 for a period of up to six months.

The track-based approach can be illustrated using the evaluation track. Examples of the approach taken for the evaluation track were described by one interviewee as follows:

They all start with—our services really focus on the coaching relationship. We provide coaching support to the organizations, which means that we come in and support them in clarifying what their needs are—prioritizing what their capacity-building needs are, what their organizational needs are, even what their individual needs are—because all of it has consequences for the organization. Then we are able to either identify resources for them to support them in meeting their goals, or we ourselves provide direct coaching [and] consulting support to them. So, at the core, though, is that coaching relationship where they can take a moment to reflect, to prioritize, to think through and to kind of problem-solve with us and plan the next steps forward.

R2R also hosted several activities in which it provided technical assistance for many organizations. Convenings helped organizations share experiences with each other and foster a sense of community, racial justice convenings addressed issues of racial equity, and coffee talks helped provide opportunities

³ Learning tracks started with the second cohort of participating organizations, but both cohorts were able to participate during the final year of R2R's capacity-building effort.

for skill-building, sharing, and getting support for new challenges that arose during the course of the initiative (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Black violence by police). The Black Affinity Group series (which began in the third year of the capacity-building efforts) consisted of six sessions designed to bring together Black-identifying individuals to build relationships and solve problems. An Executive Director Peer Support Space provided by the organizations let executive directors meet on two occasions for peer learning. Workshops covering specialized topics and issues were also held (CCF and Liberty Hill, 2022, pp. 58–60).

Interviewees noted that organizations that participated in R2R took advantage of various types of assistance. One interviewee mentioned that they decided to revamp their organization’s website and social media presence and revisit its mission, vision, and guiding principles. The interviewee was guided by their coach in developing a logic model. Another interviewee mentioned getting assistance with managing board relations, which allowed the organization to bring on two more board members. As that individual stated,

I was all over the place—nobody ever funded me for capacity-building. I felt almost guilty saying, “Well, let’s take part of the funds for capacity-building,” but he [the coach] came out and we walked through some of the areas that he thought I should focus on and that was, “Let’s look at your staff. Let’s look at the job descriptions. How do you operate? Where’s your accountant coming in? Where does your grant writer come in?” We just went through and talked out how my operating the nonprofit looked like. And then we got into the board discussion and I think that’s where it veered off because that was, to me, the greater need. It was developing a diverse board and engaging the board.

Imoyase was hired as the evaluator for R2R through a competitive process and was responsible for collecting information about individual youth from CBOs that received capacity-building support. Imoyase also provided capacity-building assistance for grantee organizations to fulfill their reporting requirements for their grants. Imoyase’s evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach using community-based participatory research over the course of the three-year funding cycle. Evaluation activities included monthly reporting on the number of youth served and their characteristics; quarterly reports from participating CBOs on their accomplishments, needs, approaches used, and capacity-building activities; a pre-post questionnaire to measure relational and goal-based outcomes for youth; and focus groups on youth satisfaction (CCF and Liberty Hill, 2022).

Implementation Findings

In this section, we present findings related to the implementation of the three capacity-building efforts: CSULA, OVP, and R2R. We draw from our analysis of interviews of staff and review of documents from the three efforts.

Barriers and Challenges

Interviews for the evaluation of the three efforts took place between May 2022 and May 2023. At that time, interviewees from all three efforts described how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them and other JJCPA-funded programs. Each had planned to conduct their capacity-building efforts

in person but had to quickly pivot to online formats. The capacity-building efforts experienced additional barriers and challenges over the course of their funding period. However, all three efforts adapted to address the challenges by drawing from the strengths of their organizations and partners. In the following sections, we discuss barriers and challenges encountered by the three capacity-building efforts, weaving in how the COVID-19 pandemic affected operations and experiences. We break challenges into three types: those centered *within* the CBOs receiving the capacity-building services, those that the three capacity-building efforts—CSULA, OVP, and R2R—experienced in *delivering* capacity-building efforts; and those related to *how to measure success* of the capacity-building efforts.

Challenges Within Community Programs

Staff from all three capacity-building efforts noted that their capacity-building meets the organizations they work with “where they are” to assist in promoting capacity. In other words, the capacity-building efforts are tailored to the organizations’ needs. Within the CSULA effort, for example, staff requested information from Probation on the types of interactions officers have with youth and designed activities that would support the officers; OVP and R2R worked with programs to identify specific capacity needs to focus on. It is not a surprise, then, that one of the challenges is the existing capacity of the selected nonprofits. As one interviewee stated,

These are youth-serving organizations. Many times, on the ground, especially when you hit a crisis moment that everyone’s experiencing like the pandemic, they’re stretched even more thinly than before. That has been one of the main challenges, just the capacity of the nonprofits.

Staff in the participating programs can be stretched thin trying to run their organizations, which can affect their ability to take part in the coaching and other capacity-building efforts. For example, one interviewee noted that agencies needed to deal with competing priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Program staff had to pivot quickly to an online environment and contend with staff who were out ill; they described the time as having to “put fires out.” As a result, program staff were not always able to meet with capacity-building staff.

Staff from the grantee organizations participating in the capacity-building programs had different experiences with time management. One noted that it was challenging to squeeze in the extra time to meet with consultants and do all their other work. However, the interviewee noted that both the agencies and coaches were flexible with moving their schedules around. Another interviewee said that time was always an obstacle, but the coaches did a good job communicating in advance, so the interviewee and other staff members were able to plan and keep conflicts to a minimum. A third interviewee mentioned that he did not find time management to be a challenge given the small size of his agency, though he noted that time management could have been an issue if a lot of individuals had been involved in the capacity-building efforts.

In addition, staff leadership transitions can affect the progress of capacity-building efforts because they interrupt the close relationship between the coaches and program staff. These relationships may take months to rebuild with a new person. Programs may also need assistance in understanding “where they are” and what is realistic to accomplish during the capacity-building relationship. As one interviewee stated,

Sometimes they have a larger goal they need to accomplish. An example is someone who wants a five-year strategic plan, but they've never set a goal within their organization's main goal. Now we really have to talk about what's the vision of it because they never talked about the complete vision of their organization and getting together some basic goals before they come to think about what a strategic plan is and getting them to have an understanding of that. This is all completely OK with us. We understand what your ultimate goal is but we just may not be in step with you when you get there; but what can we set in place to set you up so that you're successful when you choose to work on that, when it makes sense for you to actually work on that.

Another challenge interviewees raised was that organizations may need to get past what one interviewee described as "learned helplessness"; that is, not looking past what a funder or others may tell a program is important. Program staff may know their participants' outcomes but need assistance translating what they know into acceptable documentation of their program's effectiveness. With respect to CSULA, interviewees noted that some of the Probation Officers were resistant to the training offered. As one CSULA interviewee stated,

And they communicated that they knew the approach was important and they knew and they understood why it was so important, and then they understood how it could work, but they seem to be very defensive about what they could do or couldn't do because of their workloads and because of the expectations of them that were logistical or whatever, which again I'm sure is valid, but again, it was a little tough.

CSULA interviewees also noted that some Probation Officers participating in the effort recognized that what they had been doing was not working well with youth, and they reflected on this with their other colleagues. One individual commented that what Probation was currently doing was "not working" and that there were other approaches to youth supervision they could be using instead. Although Probation Officers might not use all the lessons from CSULA, they might use some of what they learned and modify it for improvements in their youth supervision. CSULA also experienced challenges related to the different roles Probation Officers held. From the perspective of CSULA staff, there were significant differences between the Probation Officers who worked directly with youth and those who appeared to be supervisors. CSULA staff found that delivering the program was more challenging with supervisory Probation Officers in the group.

Challenges in Program Delivery

Challenges in the *delivery* of the capacity-building efforts resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and contractual issues, especially as noted by interviewees involved in the R2R effort. Interviewees expressed that there was a lot to do in a short period and changes had to be made rapidly in program design and delivery. All three capacity-building efforts had intended to conduct their programs in person. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a fast pivot to online programming.

For OVP, the original conception was for a team of consultants to provide workshops covering such topics as grant writing, program development, evaluation, and one-on-one consultation countywide. The program model morphed into short-term consultation services for 100 organizations, lasting for several months as described above. Just keeping track of the services delivered by the ten consultants was a challenge. According to one interviewee, OVP needed to build a new data

system that was facilitated by some of their consultants. The system required a design and a redesign to capture items to accurately reflect the workload. One interviewee described the effort as trying to “rebuild the airplane at 40,000 feet.” Getting accurate data into the system by all ten consultants was a challenge. The majority of the consultants entered the required information, although some of the more seasoned consultants were not as detail-oriented as leaders would have liked. According to the OVP evaluator’s report, challenges for the team members included limited staff capacity and budget and the condensed timeline to develop the effort within the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nonprofit Management, undated).

Our interviews with individuals from R2R highlighted the effect of contractual and time delays that resulted from changes Probation made to the structure of the initiative. In the second year of the capacity-building efforts’ three-year funding period, contractual issues delayed grant renewals for the first program cohort. This affected R2R in many ways. According to R2R interviewees, year two was condensed so much for some grantees that they were still finishing their year-two activities well into the first six months of year three. As one interviewee put it,

[C]apacity-building coaching is a continuous relationship and you have to have that continuity for it to really build on itself. You need to build on the work. You saw one thing or you get clarity on one thing and it helps [if] you move on to the next. We had a six- to seven-month delay with the contracting with L.A. County and it was a very jarring pause because it was unexpected; at least our partners didn’t expect it. . . . Then you had uncertainty when we could we [sic] start again and it just—it broke that continuity. We kind of had to restart again when we did and it just slowed things down.

The contracting process of year-to-year agreements added to perceptions of time constraints. As one interviewee noted,

And I do think that R2R is very rushed and pressured, especially for organizational capacity where the timelines were just really Even in . . . a comparable three-year initiative that we evaluated, they had three years to implement it. And within R2R, some of the biggest challenges that they [had] were having to implement things sometimes in six months. It was kind of like that year, you only have a year to do it, to do the capacity-building activities. It’s not across the three years. It was kind of set up because of the county contracts that can only be a year, in a way that I think put more pressure on the grantees.

An additional concern with the contracting process was the perception that the process was nebulous, inconsistent, and drawn out. Interviewees expressed that subcontract approvals delayed the process and disrupted the original scopes of work, timelines, and curricula development. The consultants were then required to adjust and drastically revise their program plans to align with contract approvals.

Disruption with the contracting process was also mentioned by one of the programs participating in the capacity-building efforts. Program staff reported that they felt that the lapse in the contract in the second year came out of the blue and posed challenges for continued operation. The program was able to allocate funds to keep running; however, they noted that other organizations came near to closing.

Challenges mentioned by CSULA included the online learning format. Based on feedback the effort received from participants, Probation Officers who participated were generally engaged. However, interviewees said that they felt that if they could have delivered the program in person, there would have been higher-quality interactions between the delivery team and participants. They noted that with Zoom, individuals could easily get distracted or multitask.

Challenges with How to Measure Success

Historically, the JJCPA initiative required standardized reporting of a set of six outcome measures reflecting involvement in the criminal justice system. The “big six,” as the outcomes were referred to, included arrest rate, incarceration rate, probation violation rate, probation completion rate, restitution completion rate, and community service completion rate. Individual programs could also report on additional measures that were more closely tied to their goals (such as school attendance for school-based programs); however, all programs were required to report on the big six even if the participating youth were not formally involved in the justice system. Programs provided participants’ identifying information to Probation, which in turn used its data systems to measure the big six for youth who participated in JJCPA-funded programs. Probation reported the data to the Bureau of State and Community Corrections.

In recent years, counties have not been required to report on the big six; however, in L.A. County, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council and subcommittees continue to discuss what appropriate outcome measures should be. The California state auditor recommended that “L.A. [County] should collect data on all participants in each JJCPA program and service to adequately assess the effectiveness of those programs at reducing juvenile crime and delinquency” (Auditor of the State of California, 2020, p. 94). However, R2R interviewees revealed strong opposition to providing identifying information about youth, which would be run through Probation systems to gather information about contact with the justice system. Interviewees noted that doing so was contrary to the focus on positive youth development in the capacity-building initiative. They also voiced concerns that providing the information might place at-risk youth at risk of being labeled in the juvenile delinquency system.

Our interviews with both Probation administrative staff and capacity-building initiative staff revealed that the issue of measuring outcomes remained unsettled and at cross purposes. Staff from Probation mentioned that they are responsible for reporting JJCPA outcomes to the state, and they needed to include youth outcomes related to juvenile justice for the youth-serving programs that participated in the capacity-building efforts. According to a Probation Officer,

We want to make sure that we’re really able to show the outcomes, and it sounds like they have good outcomes. We just have to be able to quantify it so that we can show that the programs that are funded through [a] fiscal intermediary are doing what it says in the legislation—evidence-based programs that are shown to reduce crime and delinquency. Right now, it’s not readily available to do all of that.

Probation administrative staff also recognized that it was important to measure changes in the capacity of the programs that participated in capacity-building but suggested that the level of detail and specificity shared with Probation was not enough. A Probation staff member noted,

There's got to be a way to do that for the agencies specifically, and then summarize it generally. . . . increase the amount of youth they serve, [or] something, because they were able to use the fiscal intermediary, and then because maybe they could streamline something, and maximize another resource, then they could expand programming because of it, or something. Then, through capacity-building—if that was able to be done—because they were able to get a system where billing took half the time so they could do budgeting and maybe strategic planning now, then they're able to forecast, and then they could apply for grants.

The desire to collect outcome information for the programs that were part of the capacity-building initiative has potential challenges. Most of the traditional JJCPA-funded service programs have a start and end date, which is useful for program evaluation. As one interviewee noted, however,

[A]ll these programs do not have concrete start and end dates. These are not prescribed things, like “You’re going to go [do] this thing for six weeks.” That’s not how this works. A lot of the programs that are supported through Ready to Rise are in alignment with a Boys & Girls Club, so they’re engaging at their will, at their interest. There’s no, “You’re graduating from this program at the end of the day.” These young people are engaging and developing over time based upon their need, their level of engagement with staff and programs and activities that’s [sic] provided by the organization. Very few of them have that clear “this thing starts at this time and ends at that time,” and some of them are providing multiple programs to the young people that all fall under Ready to Rise, so it’s hard to disaggregate. One kid might be coming here for some kind of music program that we have. The other kid might be coming for afterschool tutoring, but they all fall [under] the umbrella of Ready to Rise and positive youth development.

Though Probation highlighted a desire for data on youth outcomes and changes in the capacity of CBOs, this is not to suggest that the youth capacity-building programs did not collect information about their programs. Both OVP and R2R collaborated with evaluators who produced their own reports on their capacity-building efforts. The evaluation for R2R was extensive, multiyear, and focused on both the implementation and perceived effects of the capacity-building efforts for the programs, as well as changes on positive youth development outcomes. CSULA was also in the process of collecting data from Probation Officers who participated in trainings. However, no official delinquency measures were reported for any of the capacity-building efforts.

It does appear that there is no agreement on which measures should be collected and by whom. Probation administrative staff said that they felt it is more appropriate for RAND, as the JJCPA program evaluator, to play the more central role. However, we note that it is a best practice for programs to conduct their own evaluations to monitor implementation, make needed changes, and develop outcome measures that mirror program goals. An open question is whether JJCPA funds should pay for such internal evaluation.

Clarification for capacity-building efforts and data collection on youth outcomes may be improving with respect to justice outcomes for youth participating in the programs receiving capacity-building services. The most recently available report on the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council’s fiscal year (for FY 2025) indicates that programs that serve Probation-involved youth—as well as at-risk youth—will need to make sure they develop processes to submit data that allow for the

reporting of justice outcomes (County of L.A., 2023). We discuss the issue of outcomes again in the “Concluding Thoughts” section of this report.

Facilitators to Implementation

Two primary facilitating factors stood out from our conversations with interviewees. One was related to staffing and team collaboration. The second related to the approach used to assist programs.

Staffing and Team Collaboration

Leadership and staff competencies were noted as facilitators for CSULA. CSULA leadership staff built a team with a wealth of experience in youth development. In addition, the leader had more than ten years’ experience in program delivery and research, which she brought to the capacity-building effort. Staff had prior experience in the model being used and leveraged their experience with the JJCPA-funded effort. The team members had complementing expertise and worked well together under leadership they enjoyed working with. According to one interviewee, the collaboration was “amazing.” OVP staff also drew on their consultants’ strengths in their efforts and noted that these helped ensure successful efforts.

For R2R, the fiscal intermediary played an important supportive role in the capacity-building effort. According to our interviewees, the intermediary allowed the coaching and evaluation teams to work collaboratively with the grantees; the intermediary also worked collaboratively with the coaching and evaluation teams in providing support.

The coaching role was seen as very important to the capacity-building efforts. For R2R, coaches facilitated many relationships and communications in their role on the ground as educators. An R2R interviewee noted,

The Ready to Rise initiative had a lot of moving parts, and if there were not coaches on the ground to help link those parts together, it would have been a little bit more difficult for the grantees to function in that initiative like this.

A suggestion from the coaching staff was that future efforts should continue the use of coaches to help ensure successful links between capacity-building staff and grantees. Coaching also allowed programs and capacity-building staff to co-design changes they would like to see. The relationship with coaches was nonjudgmental and allowed grantees to take a little more risk and try things they otherwise might not try, knowing that the coaches were there as a safety net to support them.

The role of consultants was also important for OVP. Consultants would report on their efforts in weekly team meetings. This was a forum not only for updating their activities, but it was also a forum where the more seasoned consultants were able to provide guidance to staff with less experience.

In addition to leaders and staff of the capacity-building efforts, engaged leaders in the programs participating in capacity-building efforts were also helpful. As one interviewee stated,

I think a factor for me is the leadership buy-in, too. It definitely works a lot better when the leaders are leading the capacity-building and the staff see that. I think [that] kind of leadership has to be kind of vulnerable and be able to say, “Hey, I might not be doing everything the way I should be. There might be other ways of doing it besides the way that I’m doing it for the last 20 years.” A lot of them, it’s a relationship-building [need], because they might not be able to say that in the first

month meeting with us. They might not be able to say it in six months, but maybe once we establish a relationship or demonstrate our value or usefulness, then all of [a] sudden things click. They start calling you for things.

Because the R2R activities would bring participating organizations together, interviewees were also able to learn from each other. With respect to one of the learning tracks in R2R, one interviewee mentioned that there was a sense of camaraderie and sharing among the participating organizations' staff. They would be able to let other staff from participating organizations know what worked for them or what did not, offering others how to learn from mistakes within the approaches of the other programs in the track.

Approach Used to Assist Programs

A second major theme was how the capacity-building efforts approached working with the individual programs. As noted earlier, interviewees said that a strength of the capacity-building effort was the ability to work with the programs "where they are," rather than imposing an external model. This was expressed in various ways by interviewees involved with all three capacity-building efforts. One interviewee noted that many problems arise when organizations come in and mandate that a program follow a defined intervention with funding explicitly tied to that particular intervention. As one interviewee from a capacity-building effort stated,

We let them [the program] be themselves and bring their best selves to the program and then share with us. They really appreciated that true partnership. They really appreciated the evaluation, coaching and training, and knowledge that they got.

OVP staff also indicated that their efforts were designed to meet the client "where they are" and to provide capacity-building services as best they could, given that the effort was working at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and with limited resources. CSULA staff expressed the importance of flexibility in delivering their training, both with their own staff and with Probation Officers. CSULA obtained important information on what Probation Officers did during their jobs to tailor the coaching to the routine activities already in place, which was another way staff met the participants "where they are."

Closely related to meeting programs "where they are" was the effort to translate strengths that grantees already had into more-formalized approaches that would help obtain future grant funding. According to R2R interviewees, grantees shared that they appreciated R2R's approach to evaluation because it made them think about evaluation in a way that they had not done before. As one interviewee noted,

We really wanted them to understand that it was a process of—they have a lot of their own expertise and that they had an understanding of the questions that they wanted to ask. The evaluation might be more formalizing that process so they could actually ask those questions and then think about what ways they would best collect that data.

Role of Partnerships in Implementation

As noted earlier, the interviewees from capacity-building efforts stated that partnerships within their organizations and with the participant programs were important facilitators in the implementation of their work. In fact, partnerships were explicit components of the models. For example, with R2R, fiscal intermediaries partnered with coaches, the evaluator, and the individual programs that received the capacity-building efforts.

One partnership, however, stood out in discussions: the partnership between Probation and the capacity-building efforts. Interviewees from the capacity-building efforts generally indicated a desire for a stronger partnership with Probation.

For CSULA, interviewees explained that more presence by Probation administrative staff would allow them to work closer with the department and develop content that would more closely align with activities and responsibilities of Probation Officers. One interviewee suggested that they would like to see someone from Probation as part of their team.

Interviewees from R2R noted that Probation could have been a great partner but that Probation was absent in the capacity-building effort. This lack of partnership led to concerns from both the capacity-building efforts and their participating programs about Probation's feedback on performance. As one interviewee stated,

[T]hey [Probation] just felt absent and so folks were often yearning for that connection of understanding, like, "How is Probation feeling about this? Are we doing a good job in their minds?" Because they really did see themselves as a part of this thing that was doing something different, and they didn't get to hear that from the lead agency.

The JJCPA-funded capacity-building initiative was new for Probation and had been established under prior leadership. Probation administrative staff whom we interviewed started with the JJCPA-funded initiative in the second year and were not privy to earlier discussions between the capacity-building efforts and the department, which may have affected expectations about collaboration, including how best to gather information about outcomes.

Related to partnerships, Probation staff noted that they received information about the capacity-building effort implementation via public comments at various public meetings, particularly with respect to the delay in the fiscal intermediary contract that affected the direct-service providers. Probation staff indicated that they welcomed collaborations going forward to enhance programming services for youth. Probation staff were also strengthening their approach based on the lessons they learned during peer-to-peer learning sessions with the first cohort. They were also engaging directly with the second cohort to receive feedback on the effects of the capacity-building efforts. In addition, Probation staff suggested setting up a meeting with funded programs to support engagement regarding the different roles for the capacity-building efforts.

Changes over Time

Our evaluation was also an opportunity to understand how capacity-building efforts were evolving over time in the county, and what factors were influencing those changes. Many of the changes in the programs were directly in response to challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned

earlier, all three programs had to quickly pivot from in-person to online formats. For example, the coaching partner for R2R noted that, before the pandemic, they were meeting in person with their grantees. In-person skills-based workshops or opening launches provided information and gave an opportunity to the grantees to meet each other. Once the pandemic hit, activities had to take place online. The development of coffee talks evolved as a way for organizations to stay connected with other programs participating in R2R during the pandemic.

The R2R model was modified in the third year based on feedback from programs that participated in the second year. Participating programs, especially those with fewer staff or that relied on volunteers, indicated that it was hard to do both the capacity-building efforts and their own organizational activities. Several of our interviewees stated that grantees felt there was a lot to do in a relatively short period. As one interviewee stated, efforts were made in the third year to right-size the number of activities and the demands on the grantees outside of their day-to-day work.

Specifically, the R2R model was consolidated and streamlined in the final year, with fewer coffee talks and shortened convening sessions. In the final year, the goals set with the primary coaches were streamlined so that grantees were allowed to focus on one track-specific goal. Grantees partnered with their track coach to prioritize the specific goal for the third year. Each six-month track had its own structure and cadence for content and had various activities, such as virtual sessions, homework, or one-on-one conversations with that track's coach. Grantees, however, could continue to work on goals in partnership with the Destiny coaches they worked with over the prior two years, but attention was given to the track goal for the third year.

In year three, the Black Affinity Group component of R2R grew out of the coffee talks, convenings, and other racial affinity groups. Destiny's coaching organized the Black Affinity Group series, which consisted of six sessions and was primarily for Black-identifying staff of the organizations to come together and discuss shared issues, problem-solve across organizations, network, and build relationships—similar to the coffee talks but contained to that specific group of staff across organizations.

With OVP, the tracking system, case management, and case review meetings were added as the project evolved. While these changes helped OVP adjust to the changing environment, not all staff saw the addition of administrative functions favorably. Some staff said that these activities limited their creativity in trying new approaches and were not used effectively for consultants to learn from and mentor each other (Center for Nonprofit Management, undated, pp. 11–13).

Perceptions of Effectiveness and Recommendations for Improvement

R2R and OVP interviewees stated that they had been effective in helping their grantees in building capacity, and they based their perceptions on data the efforts gathered. Both efforts used formalized methods to gather information from their grantees. OVP, for example, did an internal follow-up to gather responses and feedback from each agency in terms of how effective the capacity-building was, whether it met the program's need, and what staff experiences were with the consulting team. Both programs also collaborated with external evaluators.

Grantees appreciated the coaching and training, evaluation, and knowledge they gained. The R2R evaluator stated that program staff learned how to track the youth they served, keep consistent

databases and records, and translate what they do into information that funders and other agencies request. As one R2R interviewee noted with respect to what “evidence-based” means,

Now they [program staff] can speak to that and a lot of them were actually able to grow their business because of that, because they understood, “Oh, now I know how to apply to this one thing.” So, when they see “evidence-based,” they say, “Here, I now have something, a tool that’s been provided me through Ready to Rise that I can now share with you. Yes, I do understand evidence-based practices, and here’s how we do it here in my shop.”

Both R2R and OVP interviewees said that they met most of the grantees’ needs that would enable them to reach their goals. Interviewees who participated in the R2R evaluation track said that organizational changes were helpful. Some of these changes included implementing new human resources systems and fundraising systems and improving evaluation and data systems.

OVP staff said that they had addressed at least the programs’ primary requests. For some programs, OVP staff were able to address programs’ secondary needs. Staff might have addressed some programs’ tertiary needs if they were closely tied to their primary needs. In the OVP evaluation report, participants reported that technical assistance helped strengthen their organization (Center for Nonprofit Management, undated, p. 10).

OVP staff indicated that they needed more resources to do more for more agencies. Interviewees stated that the consultants’ level of expertise and ability to work with the grantee agencies worked well for the capacity-building effort. However, they anticipated reducing the number of agencies served in their next effort. Plans for new programming were to drastically reduce the number of agencies in OVP by focusing on 14 agencies and doing a very in-depth and long-term dive into each agency’s capacity-building needs.

Interviewees with staff from programs that participated in the capacity-building efforts indicated that the efforts were helpful. An interviewee from one program that participated in both OVP and R2R efforts commented that the two efforts complemented each other. They noted that OVP was more of a technical assistance effort and very brief, and the collaborative relationship with R2R was over the course of three years, which the interviewee found really helped to build capacity. As another interviewee noted, “One was great support, technical assistance—wise, the other was truly a capacity builder.”

In terms of specific outcomes, an interviewee of one of the grantee programs noted that through the capacity-building effort, they were able to connect to funders and triple their program’s budget. Another interviewee from a program participating in R2R noted that

[F]or evaluation, my position didn’t even exist at the time when we got the grant, so we did not really have a lot of evaluation capacity, and our capacity has grown tremendously over the past couple of years. That [evaluation capacity-building] was really helpful for us.

Program interviewees noted that they were able to implement and sustain changes based on their participation in capacity-building efforts. One of the interviewees from a participating program indicated that they had been able to keep the relationships they built alive. Another also expressed that the learning had “stuck” and was very helpful with continued efforts with their board, because the interviewee had been able to secure a board chair. Another noted that through the capacity-building

efforts, they were able to bring a more intentional approach to both their data collection and analysis through specific feedback. They noted that they did not think “evaluation was unimportant” before their work with the agency; instead, they just needed a kickstart to really think about investing in the evaluation of their activities. They had previously been able to report on dosage and attendance, but they were now able to define tools and metrics that allowed them to assess program effectiveness and alignment with their program’s logic model.

CSULA staff were not as sanguine as the other two capacity-building efforts about effectiveness. According to interviewed staff, initial feedback from participants indicated that they liked participating in the effort. CSULA staff, however, were not privy to whether the participating Probation Officers had taken the skills they learned back to their jobs. Feedback was that some departments were not interacting with youth in the way in which the programming was intended. According to CSULA interviewees, Probation Officers indicated that they had less time to work with youth and were doing more “check-in” types of activities and were not sure how to integrate what they had learned in the shortened time for activities with youth.

Some of the perceived benefits were not just in grantees achieving the goals specified in their action plans. A positive effect of the capacity-building that R2R staff noted was the connections established among programs, and because of their experience in the effort, programs saw each other more as partners and as a community instead of as competitors. As one R2R interviewee indicated,

It’s not even just the feeling—they [the programs] report it. Not only do we feel it’s a good thing, but they do, too, in regards to our approach and how we engage with them. Most of our grantees will communicate how they feel, [which is] very respected. They feel like we are responsive to what it is that they need and they’re really thankful about us coming in and working with them where they are.

The interviews with participating youth-serving program staff echoed this feeling of inclusion and camaraderie as well. The ability to share experiences with staff from other CBOs, including the opportunity to actually participate in delivering some of the capacity-building activities, was appreciated. One interviewee noted that the capacity-building efforts created a little family of nonprofits that is “all in this together.” Although programs were different, they had a shared sense of purpose.

Concluding Thoughts

All three JJCPA-funded capacity-building efforts that we evaluated—CSULA, OVP, and R2R—focused on meeting programs “where they are” and tailored efforts to the needs of the grantee organizations, capitalizing on the grantees’ activities and improving the quality of the activities. As one interviewee noted, “The capacity-building effort was the perfect blend of what was already happening in community programs with what has been proven on an academic or research level.” Because of this approach, these efforts look very different from traditional capacity-building programs, in which a specific program model may be imposed in a more top-down approach with a defined program duration for participants. In the context of the existing JJCPA funding structure, challenges existed for both the capacity-building programs and Probation, which has oversight for monitoring programs and

reporting justice and other outcomes to the Bureau of State and Community Corrections. We summarize below two high-level observations.

As the literature has noted, capacity-building efforts can take a long time to implement. This sentiment was echoed by interviewees from the capacity-building programs. R2R interviewees opined that they could have done a better job with their effort if there had been more time to sit and work with grantees and decide what parts of the effort were actionable. The fiscal intermediary noted that the ideal capacity-building model should last for a period of about three years to accomplish all of the model's goals: During the first year, there is a lot of growth and adjustment, the second year includes fine-tuning and establishing a rhythm, and it is not until the third year when organizations hit their stride and really show readiness to be on their own. Probation administrative staff, on the other hand, said that more programs should be able to participate in capacity-building efforts with assistance moving more quickly.

Not only do capacity-building efforts take a long time, but some programs may not be ready for assistance, as noted by Sobeck and Agius (2007). In fact, readiness was mentioned by one of the track leads for R2R as a necessary factor for success. Specifically, R2R staff reported that it would have been helpful if there were a certain threshold of knowledge to build on. With the high turnover of grantee staff, interviewees mentioned that they could feel as if they were reinventing the wheel at the start of each new relationship. Those grantees who had participated in the track for two years understood the approach and the basics of the track, and they were able to come to the R2R track staff with more-advanced topics or questions. The JJCPA initiative may benefit from more guidance and agreement on which programs may benefit most from funding and the duration of participation in capacity-building efforts.

Interviewees voiced a major disconnect between both the capacity-building efforts and Probation regarding the measurement of appropriate outcomes. Historical and state requirements as of this writing include justice outcome measures for JJCPA youth. As noted earlier in the report, no youth outcomes for grantee programs were reported to Probation by the capacity-building programs (or for youth supervised by Probation Officers participating in CSULA). In conversations with program and Probation staff, outcome discussions centered on what the state required and which outcomes were more in line with a conceptual model of positive youth development and community participatory work. The larger issue of what level of change should be measured—individual, program, or community—was also discussed.

As one R2R interviewee stated,

The one thing that did not fit for me is how we define success. The success of a young person is really defined by so many different aspects and points within their lives where they can go one way or the other way. The job of our organizations in Ready to Rise is to make sure that, at each of those critical points, they [young people] have the right tools to stay on the right path. The right path is not going to be defined by whether or not this person has been involved in law enforcement engagement or [has] [recidivated] or anything like that. These things are going to be defined by how this person feels about their self-efficacy, their agency, their academic success, their professional development, their well-being. Those are the things, the core elements of youth development, are the things that I would have liked for us to hold more at the core of what we were trying to measure, [more] than the crime, delinquency,

recidivism outcomes. Those things don't measure the success of a young person or society.

Probation is required to report delinquency outcomes to the state in annual reporting and has as recently as of this writing revised requirements for agencies requesting funding from JJCPA to ensure that justice outcomes can be reported.

There are limitations to this report that should be taken into consideration when interpreting findings. First, because each effort had already been engaged in program-level evaluations, we attempted to take a cross-program perspective to conducting interviews and analyzing results. We note that having conducted only a few interviews with staff from youth-serving programs receiving the capacity-building services might affect the depth of the information we obtained and how much it can be generalized. At the same time, there are some key differences across the three programs covered in this evaluation, including the size, target, duration, and funding level of the programs. These factors posed some limits to our attempts to elicit cross-effort findings. Second, as indicated earlier in this report, we were not provided quantitative outcome data for any of the three capacity-building efforts or for the youth who participated in the programs receiving the capacity-building services. Thus, we were not able to conduct our own analysis of participant characteristics, services received, or justice and other positive youth-development outcomes. However, R2R and OVP produced internal reports that document implementation, outcomes, and suggestions for improvement, and CSULA was in the process of collecting data to assess the effects of its trainings.

That said, it is also valuable for L.A. County to reflect on the capacity-building portion of the JJCPA portfolio. Though only 5 percent of the funding is allocated to capacity-building, these programs have the potential to create a ripple effect in terms of outcomes, as staff and organizations are enabled to provide enhanced services to the youth they serve. Based on our findings, the capacity-building efforts might be characterized as trying to place a round peg in a square hole—both in terms of a program model and measures of success. Because the goals of the capacity-building efforts are different from those of youth-serving organizations, it is important to consider the ways in which contracts and memoranda of understanding should be tailored to the scope of these efforts. At the same time, Probation must continue balancing the requirements it must meet at the state level—and, in particular, it must continue demonstrating how funded programs reduce juvenile delinquency. When implemented well, these capacity-building efforts have the potential to create systems-level change that can “raise all boats” for youth, programs, and the community. More interaction between Probation and capacity-building partners might help align the interests of both partners in the JJCPA-funded effort. In our interviews, both capacity-building programs and Probation expressed their desire to do just that.

Abbreviations

AIMs	Activating Intentional Moments
AIYDA	Activating Intentional Youth Development Approach
CBO	community-based organization
CCF	California Community Foundation
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSULA	California State University, Los Angeles
FY	fiscal year
JJCPA	Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act
L.A.	Los Angeles
OVP	Office of Violence Prevention
R2R	Ready to Rise
SCOPE	Strengthening Community Organizations to Promote Effectiveness

References

- Auditor of the State of California, *Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Weak Oversight Has Hindered Its Meaningful Implementation*, May 2020.
- California Community Foundation and Liberty Hill Foundation, *Ready to Rise 2022 Cumulative Report*, 2022.
- CCF and Liberty Hill—See California Community Foundation and Liberty Hill Foundation
- Center for Nonprofit Management, *Short-Term Technical Assistance Program Evaluation Report: April 2020–December 2020*, Office of Violence Prevention, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, undated.
- County of L.A.—See County of Los Angeles
- County of Los Angeles, *County of Los Angeles Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan, Fiscal Year 2022–23: A Youth Development Mission, Continuum, and Funding Strategy*, final report, December 3, 2021.
- County of Los Angeles, *County of Los Angeles Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan, Fiscal Year 2023–24: A Youth Development Mission, Continuum, and Funding Strategy*, draft report, December 6, 2022.
- County of Los Angeles, *Final Report of the FY 2024–2025 Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council – Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan and Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act Spending Allocation Ad-Hoc Subcommittee*, November 23, 2023.
- Crane, Kelli, Meredith Gramlich, Richard G. Luecking, Paul B. Gold, and Taylor Morris, “Staff Capacity Building and Accountability in Transition Services,” *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, Vol. 44, No. 2, May 2021.
- DeCorby-Watson, Kara, Gloria Mensah, Kim Bergeron, Samiya Abdi, Benjamin Rempel, and Heather Manson, “Effectiveness of Capacity Building Interventions Relevant to Public Health Practice: A Systematic Review,” *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2018.
- Patrizi, Patricia A., Eric K. Gross, and Samantha Freedman, “Strength in Flexibility: Lessons from a Cluster of Capacity Building Grants in the Juvenile Justice Field,” *Evaluation and Program Planning*, Vol. 29, No. 2, May 2006.
- Reardon, Kenneth M., “Enhancing the Capacity of Community-Based Organizations in East St. Louis,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1998.
- Sobeck, Joanne, and Elizabeth Agius, “Organizational Capacity Building: Addressing a Research and Practice Gap,” *Evaluation and Program Planning*, Vol. 30, No. 3, August 2007.