

EVIDENCE-BASED NEBRASKA

EVALUATION OF SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT FUNDING

FY 2019-2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
CBA Funding	1
Table 1: Number and Percent of SI Programs by Category FY 19/20	2
Table 2: Number of Activities by Juvenile Priority as Reported in JCMS	2
Research Question	2
Methodology	3
Evaluability and Limitations	3
Results	5
RQ 1: Response Rates	5
Table 3: Response Rate by Community	5
Table 4: Response Rate for Communities	6
Table 5: Agency Representation for Communities	6
RQ 2: Levels of Collective Impact	7
Table 6: Mean Levels of CI by Use of SI Funds	7
Table 7: Statistical Difference Between Measures of CI.....	8
RQ 3: Levels of Future Law Violations	9
Table 8: Recidivism by Community	9
Other Findings: Number of Services	9
Conclusions and Recommendations	10
Limitations	11
References	11

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has long held that strong communities are a salient factor in reducing delinquency (1995). They specifically note, “community planning teams that include a partnership of agency and lay participants can help create a consensus on priorities and services to be provided. They also build support for a comprehensive approach that draws on all sectors of the community for participation, such as the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems” (National Juvenile Justice Plan, 1996).

Prior research has noted that successful collaborations seem to tap into the group’s potential using a specific formula. This creates a certain synergy within the group. In 2011, Kania and Kramer provided a framework that outlined “the five conditions for collective success,” which brought to life the notion of Collective Impact. While successful collaborations had surely tapped into these elements before, Kania and Kramer (2011) outlined them in a way that succinctly captured the critical elements of success and the movement caught fire. In Nebraska, community planning has been organized under the philosophy of collective impact since 2009.

CBA FUNDING

The Nebraska Community-based Aid (CBA) fund allows for funding for system improvement programs. These entities are not programs that work directly with youth. Instead, they *support* the programs, agencies, and initiatives that work directly with youth. These programs may provide the infrastructure for stronger community teams. The funds may be used for coordinators, grant writers, evaluators, training/quality improvement efforts, and/or data collection (Program Definitions, 2019).

System improvement funds can also be used to support backbone organizations, which are organizations that serve as the support for the entire initiative by coordinating participating agencies, facilitating communications, and handling logistical and administrative details. Often they are responsible for data collection and reporting.

We started this study by examining how communities use their funding (Table 1). If the funds are directed at training and quality improvement, individual agencies may be gaining skills, but this may not affect the overall community. Similarly, if communities are using funds to build or maintain data or evaluate juvenile justice programs, individual programs may improve their data, or gain insight on evidence-based approaches, but this may not improve the overall community.

Overall, only 15% of CBA programs funded since July 1, 2019, are classified as system improvement (33 of the 221 programs). At the time of this report, some of these have been reclassified.

TABLE 1. Number and Percent of System Improvement Programs by Category - FY 2019/2020

	Number of Communities	Percent
Training/Quality Improvement	4	12.2%
Evaluator	0	0.0%
Administration	27	81.8%
Data	2	6.06%
System Improvement - Subtotal	33	100.0%

The majority of communities used system improvement dollars for administrative purposes, including: training supplies, travel, software, utilities, and costs related to the person with bookkeeper/financial responsibilities. The administrative category also includes personnel who are responsible for coordinating and strengthening their community teams. Of the 118 entries in Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS), 79.6% indicated that funds were used to organize the community around juvenile justice priorities. No communities reported using CBA funds to address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) or racial inequality issues (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Number of Activities by Juvenile Priority as Reported in JCMS

	Number of Communities	Percent
Community-based Aid Organizing (CBA)	94	79.6%
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)	13	11.0%
Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) or Racial and Ethnic Disparity (RED)*	0	0.0%

*No communities reported work in this area

RESEARCH QUESTION

We selected three research questions that allowed us to evaluate whether system improvement funds are effective at strengthening communities, broadening representation, and ultimately achieving better outcomes for youth.

First, we examined the response rate and broad community representation of the community teams.

We then examined whether communities that direct funds towards coordinators, backbone support, or community organization have higher rates of collective impact, as compared to communities that do not receive funding for community organizing.

Finally, we examined rates of juvenile recidivism by community to determine whether communities that direct funds towards any system improvement (administrative, training, or data) have lower rates of recidivism, as compared to communities that do not receive funding for system improvement.

METHODOLOGY

JJI utilized two data sources to complete the evaluation of funds directed at system improvements: The Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS) and the Collective Impact Survey. The first data source, JCMS, is available because communities are required to submit data to the Nebraska Crime Commission (NCC) quarterly in order to continue to receive Community-based Aid (CBA) funds. JCMS had 388 entries between July 6, 2018 and October 30, 2019.

Secondly, we gathered data by surveying members of each community's comprehensive juvenile services team. The list of survey participants was compiled from the Comprehensive Juvenile Services Plan members found on the NCC's website. In August 2019, JJI verified the composition of each community team with the community lead. We intentionally completed this within three weeks of the survey going out to ensure we accounted for any changes in the team composition and/or participant emails.

Despite these efforts, three teams (Gage, Sherman, and Merrick Counties) were not listed on the NCC website and had to be added to the survey at a later date. In addition, 15 emails "failed" and were returned as undeliverable because the individual had changed professional positions.

On September 5, 2019, the Collective Impact survey tool was emailed to 721 individuals (participants on 30 Comprehensive Juvenile Services teams) across Nebraska. Some emails were returned as duplicates, others bounced (as non-deliverable), and some emails did not make it through agency SPAM filters. As a result, the survey only reached an estimated 629 people.

From September 5 through November 20, 2019, JJI encouraged team leads and participants to participate in the survey. JJI faculty and staff contacted team leads, sometimes multiple times, to communicate the importance of the survey.

EVALUABILITY AND LIMITATIONS

Evaluability refers to the degree to which an intervention or program can be evaluated in a credible and reliable manner. If a juvenile justice intervention lacks data on a substantial number of cases, the program cannot be evaluated in a reliable fashion. However, the lack of data can also reveal important information. This is the case for system improvement funding. Because specific system improvement programs are supposed to assist organizations by providing structure and facilitating communication, and there is an emphasis on data; a low response rate may mean that the community is not very cohesive and responsive.



RESULTS

Research Question 1: Response Rates

Despite multiple reminders, the overall response rate on the Collective Impact survey was 35.30% (222 started the survey, out of the 629 of community team members who were sent the survey). Of the 222 that started the survey, 206 individuals completed the survey. Response rates ranged from 0% to 80% by County (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Response Rate by Community	
Community Team Name	Response Rate
Buffalo County Youth Services Group Team	24.3%
Cass County Juvenile Services Team	9.4%
Colfax County Juvenile Services/Community Team	18.2%
Custer, Blaine, Dawson, Gosper, Greeley, Loup, Valley Juvenile Services Team	10.0%
Dakota County Juvenile Services Team	46.4%
Dodge County Juvenile Services Team	80.0%
Douglas County Community Team	53.3%
Four County Juvenile Services Team	51.5%
Hall County Juvenile Services Team	66.7%
Holt and Boyd Juvenile Services Team	54.6%
Howard County Community Prevention Team	21.3%
Jefferson County Community Planning Team	38.1%
Lancaster County Juvenile Services Team	41.7%
Lincoln County Juvenile Services Team	37.5%
Merrick, Hamilton, Nance, and Polk County Juvenile Services Team	55.6%
Northeast Nebraska Juvenile Justice Partnership Team	17.9%
Panhandle Partnership, Inc. Team	50.0%
Otoe County Juvenile Services Team	23.5%
Platte County Juvenile Services Team	58.6%
Saline County Juvenile Services Team	46.7%
Sarpy County Juvenile Services Team	37.0%
Saunders County Juvenile Services Team	12.0%
Seward and Butler County Three Year Plan and Prevention Coalition Team	33.3%
Sherman County Prevention Coalition Team	60.0%
South Central Youth Task Force Juvenile Services Team	18.9%
Thayer County Juvenile Services Team	25.0%
Washington County Juvenile Services Team	0.0%
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska Juvenile Services Team	17.7%
York County Drug Task Force/Juvenile Services Community Team	21.4%
Overall Survey Response Rate	35.3%

The average response rate for email surveys is 30% (Lindemann, 2019). Despite this, we had anticipated a much higher response rate because the participants are motivated members of a team.

Response rates by community team ranged from 0% (no one completed the survey) to 80% survey completion. The average response rate was higher for communities that directed funds toward system improvement ($M = 39.4$), compared to those that do not direct funds toward system improvement ($M = 30.5$). However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups' response rates (Table 4).

TABLE 4. Response Rate for the Communities that Receive SI Dollars (Compared to Those That Do Not)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Not Funded for SI	32.92	17	20.62
Funds Directed to SI	38.42	13	18.46
Total	35.30	30	19.57

Diverse representation across multiple agencies is another factor that is critical to an effective community team. Teams received a score from 1 to 10, based on the number of different agencies represented in the response rate. Agency representation ranged from 1 to 10 agencies, with an average of 6.6 agencies represented per team ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 3.16$). Agencies that receive SI funding had significantly more community partners involved $F(1, 30) = 3.17$ ($p = .04$) (Table 5).

TABLE 5. Agency Representation for Communities that Receive SI Dollars (Compared to Those That Do Not)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Not Funded for SI	5.6	17	3.38
Funds Directed to SI	7.9	13	2.39
Total	6.6	30	3.17

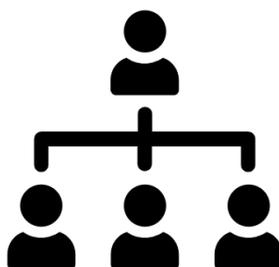


Research Question 2: Levels of Collective Impact

Overall, many community teams reported high levels of collective impact, which may be a proxy for their ability to reach “consensus on priorities and services.” We hypothesized that teams that receive funding for coordinators or a backbone agency would be more likely to have members who share a common agenda (CA), support a backbone agency (BA), do mutually reinforcing activities (MR), share data and measurement (SM), and communicate effectively and often (CC). The data does not support this hypothesis, however. (Table 6)



Mutually Reinforcing:
Provides support in labor or resources (not financial)



Backbone Agency: Organizes and delegates



Continuous Communication:
Disseminates information and keeps workers informed



Common Agenda: Creates agreements between agencies and individuals



Share Data/Measurements:
Standardizes measures of success and share information

TABLE 6. Mean Levels of Collective Impact by Use of System Improvement Funds						
		CA	BA	MR	SM	CC
No System Improvement Funds	Mean	5.29	5.54	5.45	5.39	5.54
	<i>N</i>	84	84	82	81	83
	Std. Deviation	1.08	1.15	1.12	1.18	1.29
Coordinator or Backbone Agency	Mean	5.38	5.58	5.38	5.21	5.50
	<i>N</i>	103	101	103	103	102
	Std. Deviation	.767	.947	.921	1.05	.976
Training, Data, Other Administration	Mean	4.85	5.09	4.95	4.49	5.19
	<i>N</i>	19	19	19	19	19
	Std. Deviation	1.03	1.28	1.27	1.61	1.18
Total	Mean	5.29	5.52	5.37	5.21	5.49
	<i>N</i>	206	204	204	203	204
	Std. Deviation	.936	1.07	1.05	1.19	1.13

When we compared the mean levels of collective impact domains between communities that direct funds toward coordination and support (compared to those that do not), there is not a significant difference in the mean score on most of these measures. Although common agenda approaches significance, only shared measurement appears to be statistically different in communities that use funding for coordination, but it is not in the expected direction. The data indicate that there are higher levels of shared data and measurement in communities that do not fund any system improvement (Table 7).

TABLE 7. Statistical Differences Between Measures of Collective Impact in Communities that Receive SI Dollars

Collective Impact Domain		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Common Agenda	Between Groups	4.394	2	2.197	2.547	0.081
	Within Groups	175.141	203	0.863		
	Total	179.535	205			
Backbone Agency	Between Groups	3.820	2	1.910	1.674	0.190
	Within Groups	229.384	201	1.141		
	Total	233.204	203			
Mutually Re-enforcing	Between Groups	3.868	2	1.934	1.782	0.171
	Within Groups	218.106	201	1.085		
	Total	221.975	203			
Shared Measurement	Between Groups	12.525	2	6.262	4.602	0.011
	Within Groups	272.140	200	1.361		
	Total	284.664	202			
Continuous Communication	Between Groups	2.003	2	1.002	0.780	0.460
	Within Groups	257.979	201	1.283		
	Total	259.983	203			



Research Question 3: Levels of Future Law Violations

We also examined recidivism rates for communities that receive system improvement dollars to see if there was any relationship between SI funding and overall outcomes for youth. To do this, we looked at youth who had completed a diversion program in FY 2015-2016, and utilized JUSTICE data to see if any subsequent law violations were filed on that youth. We used law violations post diversion as a proxy for rates of overall recidivism because diversion data on recidivism is more available than any other system point.

Of the thirty communities studied, only twenty had diversion programs funded through CBA dollars in FY 2015-2016, so future system involvement was only available for twenty of the thirty communities we examined.

TABLE 8. Recidivism by Community (SI Funded or Not)			
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Not Funded for SI	29.01	9	10.48
Funds Directed to SI	24.51	11	5.88
Total	26.57	20	8.36

Communities that receive system improvement funds do report lower rates of recidivism and future law violations for youth in their community (24.5%) compared to those that do not receive funding (29.1%). However, these findings were not significant at the .05 level.

Other findings – Number of Services

The majority of respondents (70%) felt that their community lacked important juvenile services. There is almost no difference between communities that use funds toward system improvement (69.2%) and those that don't (71.4%). Overall, only a third of the communities surveyed (30.0%) felt that they had a solid continuum of juvenile services.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Communities that **direct system improvement dollars** to fund coordinators, backbone agencies, and community organizers are able to achieve **higher response rates** and bring together a **more diverse team**.
2. Overall, **Community-based Aid funded programs have high levels of collective impact**; they communicate well and support one another. One area for discussion should focus on why shared measurement consensus is lower for teams with coordinators.
3. The relationship between communities that fund community organizers (coordinators or backbone agencies) was not as robust as we hypothesized. Specifically, we anticipated that agencies that fund coordinators and community organizers would achieve survey response rates closer to 75%. We anticipated this because the team should be motivated responders because they will likely seek future funding. We also assumed that there is a coordinator or backbone agency communicating that message. **Although response rates were higher for teams with coordinators, they were still low, with a 38% response rate.**

Future research should examine how some teams were able to achieve high response rates, (i.e. did they complete the survey during a team meeting, did they call each member individually, etc.). Motivating community action is an important aspect of community teams, even when it is simply to complete a survey.

4. **Communities with a coordinator were able to bring together more diverse agency representation at a significantly higher rate.** This is critical for consensus building around solutions to delinquency in communities.
5. Consensus building does seem to impact outcomes for youth in those communities. Our findings show that **communities that receive system improvement funds have lower rates of recidivism and future law violations** for youth who completed diversion in their community. Communities with system improvement reported a 24.5% re-offense rate, compared to an average of 29.1% re-offense rate for communities that do not receive funding for system improvement.

Limitations

Many of our findings did not reach a statistically significant level, so these findings should be incorporated with caution. In addition, the low response rate impacts the generalizability of these findings.

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