LA Probation Governance Study

Final Report

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About Resource Development Associates

Resource Development Associates (RDA) is a consulting firm based in Oakland, California, that serves government and nonprofit organizations throughout California as well as other in states. Our mission is to strengthen public and non-profit efforts to promote social and economic justice for vulnerable populations. RDA supports its clients through an integrated approach to research, evaluation, planning, grant-writing, and organizational development.
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In addition, the Governance Study Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from an array of LA County public agencies and non-profit organizations invested in the success of the Probation Department and its staff and clients, contributed critical insight into project priorities and recommendations.
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Executive Summary

We begin this report by presenting seven primary recommendations that we believe will have the greatest impact on transforming the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Department) into a high functioning, 21st Century agency that will become a model jurisdiction. Following a description of our primary recommendations, the final report articulates the primary areas of research and evaluation that we have completed, including a description of our methods and reasoning for undertaking the steps and activities that we undertook, and the key findings and recommendations from each report submitted to date.

Organizational Structure

Recommendation 1. Organize the LA Probation Department into an agency model with centralized administrative functions to support separate juvenile and adult client service operations.

There is neither research nor experiential evidence to indicate that establishing separate probation departments to work with juvenile versus adult clients is necessary to achieve specialization. Implementing the agency model and reorganizing all client service operations under separate juvenile and adult divisions would allow for specialized training and approaches within each division. Both juvenile and adult divisions should have specialized TAY units to serve and supervise individuals age 18-25, who would be supervised under juvenile or adult divisions depending on whether they were processed via the delinquency or criminal court. The LA Probation Department must also strengthen centralized administrative operations by establishing a data and research unit as well as a recruitment unit within Human Resources, while also integrating and centralizing fiscal functions.

Mission, Vision, Values

Recommendation 2. Create and publish a client-focused, forward-thinking, mission, vision, and values statement for the LA Probation Department.

The LA Probation Department should redevelop a departmental mission, vision, and values statement—and, more importantly, make the mission a living document in the day-to-day operations of the department. As a first step, RDA recommends that the LA Probation Department take the interim step of adapting the mission, vision, and values of a model jurisdiction to create a shorter time frame to secondary action steps. Step two is to initiate a collaborative process including the Board, staff, community, and key stakeholders to develop a new mission, vision, and values statement. Step three is to align operations and service delivery with mission and values. And, finally, RDA recommends that LA Probation Department implement an accountability plan, tied to a data-driven performance management structure throughout the LA Probation Department to reflect the refined mission and vision. Throughout the implementation of these recommended actions, it is urgent that the LA Probation Department communicates with frequency and transparency, both internally and externally regarding each step.
Community Partnership

Recommendation 3. Partner with communities where large numbers of probation clients live to build on indigenous supports and ensure effective service delivery.

The LA Probation Department should expand and improve community services and develop community-oriented probation field offices akin to the Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeON) established across New York City by the NYC DOP. An essential element of expanding and improving community services is developing community-oriented probation field offices. To do so, the LA Probation Department must identify the best geographic locations within each region based on probation population density, transportation opportunities, and consultation with community stakeholders. Within each of these areas, the LA Probation Department should facilitate a community-planning process for (a) site design and (b) service planning with clients and families, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, local businesses and merchants, residents, schools. This process should involve communities in the selection of site leadership and identify opportunities for localized community services to promote use of facilities by more than just clients (e.g., education, mental health services, community rooms for public events, food pantries). In partnership with community planning committees, the LA Probation Department should renovate existing field offices to create community-oriented probation offices that reflect input of the communities and the Department’s commitment to rehabilitation. In addition, the LA Probation Department should identify opportunities to co-locate neighborhood-based probation sites at other community based organizations (CBOs), non-profits, or community centers and train staff to work side by side with community partners.

Structured Decision Making (SDM)

Recommendation 4: Implement structured decision-making throughout the LA Probation Department beginning with the implementation of the juvenile dispositional matrix. In addition, the LA Probation Department should adopt risk-based supervision based on validated risk assessment tools, and graduated responses to compliance and violations.

The LA Probation Department should identify and adopt a validated post-adjudication risk and needs assessment for youth, dispositional matrix for youth (already developed by RDA), and graduated response matrices for youth and adults. These tools should all be integrated into the Department’s electronic client management systems, and their use should be built into DPO training and job descriptions. The LA Probation Department should also assess the use of and fidelity to existing tools, since RDA’s analysis indicated some fidelity concerns in the use of the LADS, Modified Wisconsin, and LS/CMI. As part of all of these processes, the Department should take steps to limit DPOs’ ability to override the recommendations of these tools by requiring supervisors to review and approve most overrides and all recommendations for returns to custody for supervision violations. The LA Probation Department should take actions to reduce contact with low risk clients and clients who are demonstrating success in complying with their supervision terms. These include ending probation services to at risk youth currently serviced via Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) §236 and not actively supervising any juvenile or adult clients assessed as low risk. In addition, the Department and judiciary
should reduce supervision terms for successful youth and adult clients by 1) stepping down supervision active to banked caseloads after a year of compliance and achievement of case plan goals; and 2) working with the Court to establish criteria for early termination.

**Juvenile Facilities**

**Recommendation 5: Redesign all juvenile facilities to align with best practices.**

The LA Probation Department must continue the progress it has made in recent years by **transitioning all camps to small home-like locations within communities where most of the population live and base these facilities on a rehabilitative model.** By continuing to reduce the numbers of youth that are placed in facilities and using alternatives set in communities, this effort will be less burdensome. The LA Probation Department should also work with the CEO’s Master Planning Unit to **completely overhaul Central Juvenile Hall (CJH).** Due to its location, even though this facility, of all three halls, is the most convenient for the majority of families, the physical conditions make it unfit for housing young people and a terrible environment for staff. The LA Probation Department must also work to **improve programming, services, and education inside its juvenile halls.** LA Probation should strengthen its incentive-based behavior management systems for youth and reward facility managers and unit supervisors who can reduce critical incidents and increase school attendance. Such systems, i.e., Token Economy or Positive Behavioral Management System, have been successful in other juvenile detention facilities around the country.

**Staffing, Hiring, Training**

**Recommendation 6: Align staffing, hiring, and training with revised mission, organizational structure, and approach.**

The LA Probation Department should **establish a recruitment unit** to lead recruitment efforts and coordinate with HR and background investigations to ensure consistent communication within the Department and between the Department and a job candidate throughout the hiring process. In addition, the Department should revise job descriptions to focus more explicitly on client services and evidence-based practices, as well as to highlight the importance of skills such as communication and use of data. Having done so, the recruitment unit should establish memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with local colleges and universities that allow social work, human services and/or criminal justice programs to create probation field placements for students that will create a pipeline of candidates. Reevaluating the background check process, including eliminating the credit check, will also widen the pool of potentially qualified candidates who can be recruited and hired.

The LA Probation Department should also **renegotiate its agreement with AFSCME 685** to address the range of issues discussed above, including 1) restoring the Department’s ability to transfer staff to lateral positions to meet the needs of the Department and its clients, 2) eliminating the 56-hour work schedule at juvenile camps, 3) making changes to the Detention Service Office (DSO)/Deputy Parole Officer (DPO) hierarchy and process so that staff who excel in working in juvenile facilities can be promoted in that role while staff who are better suited to community-based work do not have to start in juvenile halls, and 4) allowing the Department to promote the most qualified candidate within a Civil Service band instead of
mandating the promotion of the most senior person. Once the LA Probation Department has established a more appropriate and client-centered MOU, leadership should move to establish a more robust performance management system that evaluates and promotes staff based on clearly defined metrics tied to its mission.

Data/IT

Recommendation 7: Prioritize investments in information technology (IT) systems and the use of data.

The LA Probation Department should establish an internal Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) that is comprised of a minimum of 10-15 staff who have expertise in IT systems and structure as well as research methods, data analysis, and an understanding of the operations, purpose, and mission of the LA Probation Department.¹ This unit should prioritize two key strategies: 1) aligning the Department’s data collection and reporting processes to research and evaluation needs, and 2) establishing a local inter-university consortium to support ongoing research efforts. The Department must also invest in updated data/IT systems that can simplify the process of data extraction and provide real-time data via dashboards to assess key performance indicators on an ongoing basis. This will require both investing in upgrading ISB-developed data systems, purchasing new data systems, and engaging in public-private partnerships to develop new data systems.

¹ The REU would require at least three managers – one for the unit overall and one assigned each to juvenile and adult services. Analysts and administrative staff would be required for each core Department function, including adult field services, juvenile field services, and facilities. Specialized units or divisions, such as AB 109 or pretrial services, likely require dedicated analysts as well.
Overview of LA Probation Governance Study and Project Methodology

In September 2016, RDA was retained by LA County to conduct a comprehensive study and analysis of the LA Probation Department that would articulate its strengths and weaknesses and provide recommendations for building the Department into a high-functioning 21st Century agency that models best practices in the field. To ensure our team was equipped with the content expertise, local knowledge, and capacity to successfully complete the LA Probation Governance Study, RDA identified a Project Team comprised of experts in the field from both inside and outside of our organization (see the Project Team section below for a description each key team members and their roles on the project) to oversee and conduct the study. In order to be inclusive of numerous cross-system stakeholders with valuable and unique perspectives, RDA also convened a project advisory committee that was able to vet project activities and findings from each report.

To date, RDA has issued five reports as part of the Governance Study, which are included as attachments in this report. An overview of RDA’s data collection activities completed in order to develop each report is highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Overview of LA Probation Governance Study Data Collection Activities

<table>
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| 120 Day Status Report (February 2017)       | • Reviewed over 100 existing reports and documentation related to the structure and operations of the LA Probation Department  
• Conducted preliminary meetings with project stakeholders to gain insight into how the Department currently operates; what other research, reports, audits, and assessments have identified as the Department’s strengths and challenges; and the Department’s stated goals and objectives, and plans for achieving those |
| Review of Best Practices in Probation (April 2017) | • Synthesized research across a number of subject areas, including criminal and juvenile justice as well as organizational development and leadership, developed by government and professional Probation agencies; non-profit and private organizations; and independent researchers published in peer reviewed journals |
| Model Jurisdiction Report (August 2017)    | • Organized and led a week-long site visit to New York City and Washington D.C. for over a group of over 30 LA County Stakeholders  
• Conducted interviews with staff and leadership from New York; Washington, D.C.; Maricopa County, AZ; Multnomah County, OR; San Francisco County, CA; San Joaquin County, CA; Santa Clara County, CA; Solano County, CA; and, Wayne County, MI |
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### LA Probation Department Assessment (August 2017)
- Conducted face-to-face interviews and focus groups with 384 Department stakeholders (approximately 70% were with LA Probation staff and 30% were with agencies that work with Probation, CBOs and advocates, and clients)
- Visited more than a dozen Probation field sites and institutions for observation
- Reviewed documentation related to training, hiring, contracted programs, and fiscal operations
- Assessed adult and juvenile probation data to provide an overview of the probation population from 2012 through 2016.

- Reviewed findings from each report above and produced a memo comparing LA Probation Department practices to best practices in the field in order to develop preliminary recommendations for the Department to consider.

### Findings

The following sections summarize key findings from our assessment of the LA Probation Department and highlight the extent to which the Department’s organizational structure and practices align with best practices in the field.

#### Organizational Assessment

RDA’s review of best practices implemented in model jurisdictions demonstrated the importance of: 1) fostering a positive organizational culture in order to successfully manage change and drive organizational success; 2) developing trusted relationships with advocacy organizations, local government, and media outlets in order to manage pressures that would arise from disparate, often competing, perspectives; 3) implementing an agency model and reorganizing all client service operations under separate juvenile and adult divisions to allow for specialized training and approaches within each division; and 4) using data to measure staff performance and make decisions about budget allocation, organizational structures, and changes in practices in order to help promote positive organizational- and client-level outcomes.

RDA’s **LA Probation Department Assessment** found that across the areas highlighted above, the LA Probation Department has much room for improvement. For instance, a lack of leadership stability and succession planning within the LA Probation Department has had a negative impact on organizational culture, and inhibited the development of a shared vision and goals to guide operational practices. In addition, many Department staff and CBOs report a strained relationship and doubt a shared commitment to high quality, client-focused services. Finally, the current district model in the LA Probation Department has resulted in an organizational structure that has many components operating in silos, and the Department’s data systems and processes are inadequate to meet the standards and practices of a 21st century model department.
Staffing, Hiring, and Training

A well-functioning and productive organization has staff with the skills and experience necessary to further the organization’s objectives. Therefore, job descriptions, hiring practices, accountability and performance management structures, and high-quality training programs for staff development must all align with the organization’s mission, vision, and values.

Currently, job descriptions within the Los Angeles County Probation Department do not reflect the values, mission, or vision of a Department whose main purpose is to further client well-being and reduce recidivism. Recruitment practices, including the extensive background check and long hiring process, as well as insufficient communication with job candidates, results in many qualified candidates being lost. Finally, while staff received required training, a lack of continuous coaching and gaps in trainings such as mental health, trauma-informed care, positive youth development, and official transfer training programs make it difficult for staff to carry out all of their job tasks.

Client Service Delivery

Probation departments across the country are under transformation and implementing new strategies and processes, including evidence-based practices and community partnerships, to place increased emphasis on client well-being, rehabilitation, and youth development as a means for promoting public safety. One of the most important shifts has been the implementation of structured decision making (SDM), an evidence based, data-driven, research-based approach to inform decision making within the justice system. SDM is intended to create a more effective, consistent, and fair justice system, as well as facilitate greater efficiency and smarter resource allocation by directing more resources towards the highest risk clients who pose the greatest risk to public safety while reducing—or eliminating—contact with low risk individuals who do not need it. Cost savings that result from not actively supervising low risk cases can be redistributed to support rehabilitative services and community partnership, including the development of community-based probation offices where probation clients can check-in on computerized kiosks, meet in-person with their POs, and access services and programs through extensive partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies.

Our assessment of the LA Probation Department found that while the Department is shifting its approach to focus more on client well-being and move toward the greater use of structured decision-making based on validated assessments and evidence-based practices, a lot of work is needed to fully implement these processes. Challenges with data systems and insufficient training in structured decision-making, assessments, and case management must be addressed to support a more systematic approach to client services in LA County. Additionally, too many low risk clients are currently supervised in LA County, including youth who are not court involved but work with probation officers pursuant to WIC § 236. This practice is contrary to a shifting juvenile justice paradigm, which recognizes that youth should be diverted from justice involvement to the greatest extent possible.
Juvenile Facilities

To the greatest extent possible, probation departments should minimize the number of youth placed in juvenile facilities, and work to divert youth from pre-adjudication detention and minimize post-adjudication out-of-home placements. If youth are incarcerated, they should remain in the communities where they live (or near where they live) so that they remain close to their prosocial supports and their lives are interrupted to the least extent possible. Facilities should not look like jails; instead they should be developmentally-appropriate environments characterized by a homelike and non-correctional physical environment with programming and trauma informed staffing inside the facility, as well as parent-family engagement bridging the facility and the community. Additionally, youth should receive continuous case management and a continuum of services to address identified needs, including but not limited to education, medical care, mental health treatment, translation services, and access to religious services, as needed and required by law.

RDA’s visits to the LA Probation Department’s institutions revealed that there is wide variation in the physical infrastructure of different juvenile facilities as well as in the programs and services available. Juvenile halls, in particular, are run down, and in some cases, beyond repair and a danger to youth, while many halls and camps are organized in barracks styles that are not consistent with best practice. Youth speak of a punitive environments characterized by “prison-like” conditions in many county facilities, and staff in many facilities report very low morale, which impedes their ability to work effectively with young people. The recent opening of Campus Kilpatrick is an indicator of the LA Probation Department’s interest in improving the layout, approach, and services in its juvenile facilities, and the camp closure plan also indicates a commitment to shifting resources to community-based services. Nonetheless, the County of Los Angeles has a long way to go if they are to become aligned with best practice across the County.

Fiscal Operations

While RDA’s research found that there are not identified best practices for fiscal operations in probation, there is an emerging body of research identifying participatory management approaches as best practice. Reinventing government under a participatory management framework means envisioning new roles for public sector leaders to include developing a clear vision; creating a team environment; empowering and communicating with employees; putting clients first; cutting red tape; and creating clear accountability. Implementing these practices can transform the culture of probation to be more inclusive of staff in decision-making processes, helping to reduce employee stress, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing turnover. We also uncovered promising practices that inform how probation departments can circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to establish community partnerships, such as developing direct agency-to-agency partnerships or public-private partnerships. One way to formally partner with the private sector is through master contracting with a CBO that can more easily distribute funds to the community or subcontract to other CBOs.

RDA’s LA Probation Department Assessment found that the LA Probation Department does not take a participatory management approach, and that while its budget has grown by $75 million between 2012/13 and 2015/16, several grant-specific fund balances have increased dramatically within that
timeframe because money is not making it into the community. The inability to draw down certain funds appears to be at least in part due to limited collaboration between the functions within the Fiscal Service Division, as well as siloes between Fiscal Services functions, program or operational divisions, and the Contracts and Grants Management Division. There is a wide communication gap between program operations and Contracts, and no effective processes by which fiscal functions collaborate on the back end to deliver client-oriented administrative services. As a result, significant administrative delays and bottlenecks prevent Probation from getting allocated community funds into service contracts. Firewalls between each fiscal area create an environment of dysfunction and bureaucratic loops for employees from every corner of probation, and the LA Probation Department has significant work ahead to develop authentic community partnerships with CBOs across the County.
Introduction

We begin this report by presenting seven primary recommendations that we believe will have the greatest impact on transforming the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Department) into a high functioning, 21st Century agency that will become a model jurisdiction. Each of these seven primary recommendations consists of 2 to 4 pages of narrative describing why it matters, the problem as it relates to the LA Probation Department, and steps for addressing the problem. The recommendations are drawn from the previous reports that we have published throughout this past year. You will find links to these previous reports that go into greater depth on each recommendation.

You will note that these recommendations emphasize the interconnectedness each has to all aspects of the probation system. This interconnectedness is the primary reason that we have chosen these seven recommendations as the primary focus. However, these recommendations are not the only recommendations we are making. A comprehensive list of all of the recommendations is on page 54, following the final report.

The final report follows right after the primary recommendations and articulates the primary areas of research and assessment that we have completed. This report describes our methods, our reasoning for undertaking the steps and activities that we undertook, and the key findings and recommendations from each report submitted to date.
Organizational Structure

Recommendation 1. Organize the LA Probation Department into an agency model with centralized administrative functions to support separate juvenile and adult client service operations.

Why does this matter?

Over the past two decades, a sizeable body of research has emerged to demonstrate the differences in youth and adults as these differences relate to justice system involvement and interventions. Research in developmental psychology and neurobiology, for example, reveals that the human brain does not reach full maturity until the mid-to-late twenties, and that during adolescence and young adulthood, emotional regulation and impulse-control function are still inchoate (see Review of Best Practices in Probation, Section 3: Juvenile Service Delivery for more information). Juveniles and young adults are more volatile in emotionally-charged settings, less future-oriented, more susceptible to peer influence, and greater risk takers. This renders them, according to legal scholars up to and including the Supreme Court, less culpable for their actions and more malleable and therefore, amenable to rehabilitative programming. This research has had an important impact on the manner in which probation officers and the probation system work with youth.

In applied research, strengths-based youth development is being employed in juvenile justice settings with positive results. Research demonstrating the close correlation between trauma and criminal justice involvement has resulted in a surge in trauma-informed programming in correctional settings, where evidence-based programs are helping incarcerated individuals identify safe coping strategies. The evidence of the effectiveness for these approaches is promising. Moreover, the implications of this research for justice reform are manifest, and, in addition to underscoring the need to take an asset-based approach to working with all justice-involved populations, also highlight the importance of treating youth, transition aged youth (TAY), and adults differently (see Review of Best Practices in Probation, Section 4: Transition Aged Youth for more information). In this context, it is essential that probation staff who work with youth and young adults have specialized training in the specific developmental needs of these populations along with age-specific interventions that are most effective.

However, there is neither research nor experiential evidence to indicate that establishing separate probation departments to work with juvenile versus adult clients is necessary to achieve this specialization. Separate, specialized cultures can and do develop in separate juvenile and adult divisions under one probation department. Moreover, because justice-involved transition aged youth (TAY) may be under the supervision of either juvenile or adult probation, depending on whether they are processed in delinquency or criminal courts, there may be advantages to having a single department so long as both juvenile and adult divisions have specialized units whose officers have appropriate training for working with TAY.

There is also a sizeable body of research in organizational development – in community corrections and elsewhere – that underscores the importance of clearly delineated, streamlined organizational structures.
and hierarchies that are transparent and sensible to people, both inside and outside of the department so that lines of responsibility and authority are clear.

The California Judicial Council’s Probation Services Task Force came up with five fundamental principles for the governance and operational structure of probation in California. These principles consolidate and streamline, rather than disperse and separate, probation department oversight.

1. Authority over operations and administration must be connected.
2. Courts and counties should collaboratively administer probation departments, ensuring appropriate levels of service, support, and oversight.
3. Probation services should be administered primarily at the local level.
4. Measurable outcome standards are necessary.
5. Adult and juvenile services should be administered within a single department.

These principles align most closely with the “agency” model that shares administrative, technological, and financial infrastructures to maximize departmental efficiency, but separates and consolidates juvenile and adult supervision and service functions.

Problem Statement: LA Probation Organizational Structure

Since the beginning of 2017, the LA Probation Department has begun to untangle its executive structure to streamline client services, moving toward an agency model. Currently, responsibilities are divided between Assistant Chief Sheila Mitchell, who oversees juvenile operations, and Assistant Chief Reaver Bingham, who oversees adult operations. Both are overseen by Chief Probation Officer Terri McDonald and are supported by a common administrative infrastructure.

Despite these important changes, at the level below the assistant chiefs, the LA Probation Department’s current structure remains convoluted, with significant overlap in oversight of juvenile and adult functions, as well as an inefficient overlay of both geographically specific and countywide functions via the “district model.” Under the current structure, Bureau Chiefs manage all field offices within a district, and almost every district provides juvenile supervision, adult supervision, day reporting centers, as well as specialized programs.

The district model is inefficient, most notably because staff roles and the division of responsibilities are not clear; information flows are irregular and stagnant; and lines of authority overlap in many directions (see LA Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 1: Organizational Assessment for more information). Executive managers and bureau chiefs oversee a range of disparate functions, including areas of both juvenile and adult services, which clouds accountability and creates artificial silos that do not map to actual areas of discrete function. Without creating internal structures to deliver streamlined, specialized and developmentally appropriate youth services, as well as separately streamlined and similarly age-appropriate adult services, the LA Probation Department sacrifices quality for each group.

Finally, the current structure reduces overall efficiency because the administrative infrastructures do not easily map to a district model, serving, instead, the whole system. A prime example is that the district model increases workloads for budgeting and fiscal teams, which contributes to the LA Probation Department’s problems with transparency around the budgeting and fiscal processes (see LA Probation
Department Assessment, Chapter 5: Fiscal Operations and Financial Management for more information). Fiscal and budget need to view their purpose as closely connected to the purpose of procurement and contracting, which all need to be in service to the larger organizational mission. All components of a department must be integrated, must collaborate, and must communicate continually with each other in order to fulfill that mission. All employees should see themselves as part of a whole that is governed and held accountable by the Department’s mission, vision, and values, which is currently not the case.

**Recommendations**

First, the LA Probation Department should **re-organize into an agency model with centralized administrative functions that support separate juvenile and adult client service operations**. This would dissolve the district model and reorganize all client service operations under separate juvenile and adult divisions, allowing for specialized training and approaches within each division. Both juvenile and adult divisions should have specialized TAY units to serve and supervise individuals age 18-25, who would be supervised under juvenile or adult divisions depending on whether they were processed via the delinquency or criminal court. We recommend that the LA Probation Department regionalize community supervision and services under the juvenile and adult client service divisions:

- Organize all juvenile field services, and separately all adult services, within regions.
- Re-assign human and fiscal resources to regions based on client populations.

Secondly, the LA Probation Department must **strengthen centralized administrative operations**. It should establish a data and research unit, create a recruitment unit within Human Resources and integrate and centralize fiscal functions. By investing in improved data collection systems and processes, as well as in a research and evaluation unit, the LA Probation Department will build internal bridges between Information Systems Bureau (ISB) staff and programs/operations staff. These infrastructural improvements will improve efficiency and also help with contracting with external researchers and evaluators, as well as an inter-university consortia (IUC). (See Sections Staffing, Hiring, Training and Data/IT for more details on recruitment and research and evaluation units.)
Mission, Vision, Values

Recommendation 2. Create and publish a client-focused, forward-thinking, mission, vision, and values statement for the LA Probation Department.

Why does this matter?

The mission, vision and values statement of a department is a critical component of ensuring accountability and should be the standard against which success is measured. The mission statement impacts every aspect of a probation department’s operations. While efforts in the LA Probation Department are underway to professionalize and increase efficiencies, without a forward thinking and modern mission statement that serves as a foundation, the LA Probation Department may succeed in making the trains run on time, but it will not transform into an agency that emphasizes services for clients, individual rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, or partnership with the broader community.

A 21st century probation mission, vision, and values statement will direct operations throughout the department, including individual staff choices, requests for proposals, position descriptions and staff evaluations, and system task prioritization. A refreshed mission, vision, and values will provide leadership with a direction from which to make decisions for resource allocation, staffing, prioritization of problems to solve, and it will connect the department with the larger community.

A compelling and aspirational mission and vision for the future of the organization is critical to establishing a positive and progressive organizational culture. Establishing, implementing, and communicating this reinforces agency-wide operations. The mission, vision, and values should reflect the organization’s (a) purpose, (b) ideal state, and (c) the beliefs and practices that will help the organization arrive at that ideal. These statements guide organizational operations and shifts in practice and should follow the practices found in the literature regarding best practices.

To the degree that the mission, vision and values are created with input from the larger community and understood and appreciated by that community, the ongoing processes of accountability will not only enhance the operations of the organization but also provide an ongoing dialogue that leads to continuous improvement. However, in absence of input, and communication there will be confusion, distrust and a lack of alignment between outcomes and accountability. The organization’s operations and culture flow from the mission. A mission and culture predicated on rehabilitation and strength-based support of clients is reinforced in job descriptions, program descriptions, services purchased from community stakeholders, internal and external communications, and the way the staff work and engage with clients.

There is no specific time when mission statements should be revised; rather, they should always be under review. Shifts in the environment, organization, or field will often require revisions to these statements.

Problem Statement: LA Probation’s Mission, Vision, and Values

In recent years, shifting leadership, reactivity to changing policy demands, and limited internal communication has inhibited the development of a shared and modern departmental vision (see LA
Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 1: Organizational Assessment (for more information). This prevents the LA Probation Department from operating as a mission-driven organization. RDA’s LA Probation Department Assessment highlights the interconnectedness this problem has to the LA Probation Department’s challenges. For example, lack of clarity in organizational mission impacts staff morale. If people are not clear on why they are doing their work and are not given clear messages from leadership that align them to that mission there will be confusion regarding their responsibilities. If the mission is not clearly stated and understood, recruitment efforts may attract individuals who are not aligned with the principles of client-focused rehabilitation as the primary means of obtaining public safety. If the mission statement is not clear then how budgeting and fiscal priorities are determined will not realize outcomes that are aligned to a mission. If the mission is not clearly communicated to key stakeholders, the community may be suspicious of the Department and nonprofit organizations serving probation clients may be inadequate to the task. The mission, vision and values will also help direct the collection and use of data (e.g., evaluating positive achievements, like educational attainment and workforce development).

The current mission statement does nothing to articulate community focus, individual rehabilitation, commitment to best practices, reducing recidivism, or reducing the disproportionate impact the justice system has on people of color. This is despite the fact that these are the values and goals expressed by key stakeholders from the Board of Supervisors, to the LA Probation Department’s leadership, to the various stakeholders on the advisory body for this analysis. Achieving “public safety” is a distal outcome of probation services, which requires complex legislative and policy conditions beyond the realm of probation alone. We recommend a mission that seeks to promote the positive development of clients, focus on rehabilitation, and partner with the community.

If a probation department expects to reduce recidivism, provide meaningful support towards rehabilitation, and work as partners in the community, it must explicitly embrace these concepts in its mission, vision, and values.

Staff throughout the LA Probation Department do not utilize the current mission to inform, impact, or prioritize their work. The mission statement is not regularly included on advertised position descriptions or requests for proposals issued by the department. Without regularly communicating the mission, vision,
and values to staff and the broader community, there is no means to hold anyone accountable to furthering the mission. Importantly, LA Probation Department’s current mission does not look or sound like the missions of model jurisdictions across the country or like what we heard during our interviews with the LA Board of Supervisors, departmental leadership and staff, or community stakeholders.

LA Probation Department job descriptions do not link to any mission, making it impossible to hold staff accountable for furthering one. There are few mechanisms or accountability structures in place to measure how the Department meets its mission for aligning operations with the mission.

RDA’s interviews and focus groups with staff across the organization found that there is no clear understanding of the organization’s core mission and vision. Moreover, staff clarified that they do not operate or make decisions based on a common set of shared principles. The lack of a clear mission, vision and values prohibits the LA Probation Department’s human resources, contracts and fiscal operations from aiming their day to day actions to align with positive outcomes for the Department, its clients, and Los Angeles’ communities. Instead, each of these units act as silos and adhere only to following administrative procedures that are absent any underlining mission.

The responsibility for furthering the LA Probation Department’s mission should not fall to any one person, role or function; it should be interconnected throughout all areas of the agency’s administration and operations. If procurement understands that it is connected to a mission to, for example, “foster positive change” or “treat probation clients with legitimacy and decency,” they may then re-prioritize requests for items such as socks and underwear for confined youth so they do not suffer the indignity of wearing recycled underwear. If contracting understands that it is connected to a mission to “help build stronger and safer communities” they may then better understand the urgency of ensuring resources reach community service providers.

**Recommendations**

Redevelop a departmental mission, vision, and values statement—and, more importantly, make the mission a living document in the day-to-day operations of the department. This requires an internal and external stakeholder engagement process. It is understandable that the LA Probation Department and County may have concerns about the time required to undergo this process, and we are not suggesting that departmental reforms halt until a mission and vision statement is developed and promulgated. However, it is crucial that all stakeholders participate in the development of the mission, vision and values to ensure alignment and successful implementation. In the meantime, as a first step, RDA recommends that the LA Probation Department take the interim step of adapting the mission, vision, and values of a model jurisdiction to create a shorter time frame to secondary action steps.²

In the long run, undergoing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process to redevelop a mission, vision, and values statement is an essential and critical element of long-term organizational

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² Recent communication with the Department leadership indicates that a review of the mission and vision are underway.
transformation. **Refining a departmental mission and vision will better reflect existing core values and will act as an anchor for accountability.**

**Step two** is to **initiate a collaborative process** including the Board, staff, community, and key stakeholders to develop a new mission, vision, and values statement. The following recommendations will help the LA Probation Department embed the resulting mission and vision into operations and processes in all documents and communicated messages.

**Step three** is to **align operations and service delivery with mission and values.** In alignment with mission and vision, update and/or revise:

- Website
- Job descriptions & recruitment materials
- Performance Evaluations
- Data collection plans
- Requests for Proposals and evaluation efforts
- Staff trainings and their supervised results

Some ways to achieve this are through redefining the job of a probation officer to focus on rehabilitation and referrals, through ensuring that placements align with the least restrictive setting consistent with public safety and youth development, and to **expanding community services and supports** for individuals on probation.

We also recommend that the LA Probation Department **align administrative and back office functions and accountability structures with the refined mission and values** and, as part of this process, **expedite disbursement of funds into the community.** In order to **be responsible stewards of public funds,** the Department should **reinvest funds saved from reduced probation populations into community services.**

And, finally, **RDA recommends that** LA Probation Department **implement an accountability plan,** tied to data-driven performance management structure throughout the LA Probation Department to reflect the refined mission and vision. To achieve this, the LA Probation Department should **implement performance measures for department, divisions, and units** in alignment with the Department’s mission, vision, and values. This requires the development of **timelines, processes, and structures,** and the identification of responsible parties for ensuring acceptable attainment of performance measures and accountability.

Throughout the implementation of these recommended actions, it is urgent that the LA Probation Department **communicates with frequency and transparency** regarding each step. This includes:

- Holding regular accountability meetings to review measures and outcomes;
- Submitting key performance measures to the Board of Supervisors at regular intervals;
- Developing quality assurance/monitoring policies for all assessment tools and structured decision-making processes (including checking overrides and assessing for racial disparities); and
- Ensuring staff use validated tools by integrating into performance measurement criteria.
Community Partnership

Recommendation 3. Partner with communities where large numbers of probation clients live to build on indigenous supports and ensure effective service delivery.

Why does it matter?

Engaging positive supports in a probation client’s community has long been recognized as one of the key principles of evidence-based practice. Too often, however, this principle is thought of only at the individual-level—as something that a probation officer does with his or her clients—rather than at the organizational level—as something a probation department does with the institutions, businesses, and other systems and stakeholders within the community from which most clients come. This approach misses a huge opportunity to engage the indigenous institutions in clients’ neighborhoods and communities of residence in order to connect probation services to such supports and work with communities to establish more responsive and more effective systems of care (see Model Jurisdiction Report, Chapter 3: Client Service Delivery for more information).

Probation departments should identify neighborhoods where large numbers of probation clients live and establish offices and other operations in these neighborhoods. In addition, probation officers should develop relationships with community members and other community supports necessary to improve outcomes in highly impacted neighborhoods. Probation leadership and staff should create community stakeholder groups or advisory panels to inform community members of probation’s work and learn from neighbors, what challenges and opportunities exist in their home communities. In this way, probation can engage with indigenous supports, business associations, neighborhood organizations, faith leaders, and local service providers, and become familiar with the types of services, supports, and opportunities that are available within the community. Probation departments should also intentionally foster structured—and funded—partnerships with community-based organizations in order to meet the treatment, housing, educational, employment, and health-related needs of clients which will result in better outcomes and reduced costs associated with these services.

Problem Statement: Partnerships between LA County Probation and Local Communities

The LA Probation Department is well situated to expand its partnerships with the local communities in which many probation clients reside, and a number of critical steps have been taken in recent years that indicate a commitment toward doing so. The planning process for Campus Kilpatrick and the development of the “LA Model” was a stakeholder driven process that engaged an array of community representatives, including advocates, researchers, former probation clients, and CBOs, in developing an approach that built upon established best practices and adapted those practices to meet local needs and leverage local resources. The recent creation of a Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) Community Advisory Committee to similarly engage local stakeholders in the development and oversight of a system of care for youth on probation represents a further commitment to this approach. On the adult side, the 2017 Senate Bill (SB) 678 CORE plan and the development of a multi-partner reentry center in the second...
district reflect an increased investment in an approach centered in communities and community partnerships.

At the same time, there are a number of missed opportunities and areas for improvement. Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109), with its infusion of money to fund services for adults under probation supervision, represents an opportunity for the LA Probation Department that has not been fully leveraged. While the development of AB 109 HUBS and the establishment of contracts for community-based services are important steps, both need to be improved and expanded. Specifically, while the HUBS do offer co-location of probation and other services, many remain overly correctional in nature, with barbed wire, imposing facades, and unwelcoming waiting areas—much like many of the Department’s field offices. In addition, by limiting AB 109-funded services only to individuals under AB 109 supervision, despite their being no statutory or regulatory provisions requiring this, the LA Probation Department is missing an opportunity to more fully engage the community to partner in rehabilitating some of its most challenging clients.

These missed opportunities echo longer standing processes that have limited the LA Probation Department’s partnerships with communities from which clients come. Field offices, in general, were designed years ago and not with input from local community institutions, which is reflected in their uninviting physical design. The relatively small amount of funding reserved for community supports and the slow process of disbursing those funds have created frustration among community-based organizations that could otherwise be leveraged as partners. It is promising that the LA Probation Department has recently taken steps to improve these processes by creating master service agreements for juvenile services and looking to establish partnerships with foundations that can more easily disburse funds. In addition, Probation has set aside funds to renovate area offices.

**Recommendations**

The LA Probation Department should build upon the promising developments described above through two main processes: 1) **expanding and improving community services** and 2) **developing community-oriented probation field offices akin to the Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeON) established across New York City by the NYC Department of Probation**. Both of these processes should be implemented via a planning process that works with residents and institutions in areas with large numbers of probation clients. Both are discussed in greater detail in RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation and Model Jurisdictions Report*.

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3 Counties have significant flexibility in how they choose to use AB 109 funds and all California counties examined as part of this project’s identification of model jurisdictions use these funds to provide services for a wider range of individuals than those who are part of statutorily defined AB 109 populations (PRCS and 1170(h)). For example, both Santa Clara and San Francisco Counties have used AB 109 funding to open reentry centers, where any individual on probation or recently released from custody can go to access community services. Alameda County has allocated a portion of its AB 109 funding to Community Capacity Fund to build the capacity of local CBO to contract with the Probation Department to provide services to reentry clients.

4 It is important to acknowledge that slow contracting processes and fund disbursement are not unique to the LA Probation Department and are often tied to countywide processes and requirements.
There are both short and long-term steps the LA Probation Department should take to expand and improve community services. As initial steps, the LA Probation Department should 1) expand AB 109 service access so that these services are available to all adults on probation, 2) continue and expand efforts to disburse funds via master service agreements and partnerships with foundations, and 3) redefine the job of both juvenile and adult probation officers so that their main responsibility is to directly connect clients (and, where appropriate, their families) to needed services, supports, and opportunities supporting positive change.

Number three represents a fundamental shift in the operations of probation. To change the duties of field probation officers from primarily supervision, drug testing and report writing to be held accountable for connecting their clients with needed services, supports, and opportunities is a significant undertaking. This transformation also ensures that the additional community supports developed and procured by the LA Probation Department are known about and being taken advantage of by clients. While responsibility will also be on clients and community services providers, it is vital that probation officers themselves are responsible not only to give referrals, but also to actually connect their clients to community service providers.

As part of a longer-term process, the LA Probation Department should facilitate a planning process that engages residents and institutions—churches, businesses, CBOs, current and former clients, etc.—in communities with large numbers of probation clients in order to align the local service delivery system with the needs and resources in these communities. As part of this process, the LA Probation Department should increase its ability to contract with local organizations by providing training and technical assistance to CBOs who serve the client population and establishing a community capacity-building fund to support this effort.

An essential element of expanding and improving community services is developing community-oriented probation field offices. To do so, the LA Probation Department must identify the best geographic locations within each region based on probation population density, transportation opportunities, and consultation with community stakeholders. Within each of these areas, the LA Probation Department should facilitate a community-planning process for (a) site design and (b) service planning with clients and families, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, local businesses and merchants, residents, schools. This process should involve communities in the selection of site leadership and identify opportunities for localized community services to promote use of facilities by more than just clients (e.g., education, mental health services, community rooms for public events, food pantries). In partnership with community planning committees, the LA Probation Department should renovate existing field offices to create community-oriented probation offices that reflect input of the communities and the Department’s commitment to rehabilitation. In addition, the LA Probation Department should identify opportunities to co-locate neighborhood-based probation sites at other CBOs, non-profits, or community centers and train staff to work side by side with community partners.
Structured Decision Making

Recommendation 4: Implement structured decision-making throughout the LA Probation Department beginning with the implementation of the juvenile dispositional matrix.

In addition, the LA Probation Department should adopt risk-based supervision, based on validated risk assessment tools, and graduated responses to compliance and violations.

Why does this matter?

Structured decision making (SDM) in the justice system is an evidence-based, data-driven, research-based approach to inform how individuals are supervised, including supervision intensity, juvenile dispositional recommendations, and response to compliance and violations of probation conditions. SDM is intended to create a more effective, consistent, and fair justice system and to ensure that justice system agencies make decisions based on data, effective practice and without bias. When used across a department, SDM also facilitates greater efficiency and smarter resource allocation by directing more resources towards the highest risk clients who pose the greatest risk to public safety while reducing—or eliminating—contact with low risk individuals who do not need it and whose behavior is worsened by excessive system contact. It also avoids unnecessarily depriving probation clients of their liberty for less serious offenses or who have less serious prior records.

The implementation of SDM processes is supported by the use of SDM tools, which are written or electronic guidelines for how probation officers work with, supervise, and respond to clients based on established criteria. The main SDM tools used by probation departments are the following:

- Youth only:
  - Detention Risk Assessment Instrument (DRAI): A DRAI is used to provide guidance on whether a youth should be put in a secure setting pre-adjudication by calculating the risk of a youth committing a future offense and showing up for court. The assessment takes into account prior delinquency history, prior court attendance records, available alternatives in the neighborhood and other factors. If the youth scores low or medium on the tool, he/she will normally get released to a guardian or community-based organization and if they score high, they will normally be put in secure confinement.
  - Dispositional Matrix: A dispositional matrix is used to determine the level of supervision and confinement for adjudicated youth. The matrix organizes supervision levels, programs, and facilities by risk level and offense severity. This data helps determine the level of intervention so that similarly situated youth have similar dispositions. It also reserves scarce and expensive resources for youth with greatest risk and needs and can aid the department in forecasting its bed and programmatic needs.
Youth and adults:

- **Risk and Needs Assessment**: A risk and needs assessment is a post-adjudication (youth) or post-conviction (adults) tool that has two distinct uses: 1) to determine the appropriate level of supervision intensity for a client based on the client’s assessed risk for recidivating, and 2) to develop a case plan to address the client’s psychosocial needs. Although most assessment tools combine these two elements, they should be used separately, with case plans only being developed for clients who are determined to be high enough risk to be actively supervised.

- **Graduated Response Matrix**: A graduated response matrix determines the type of sanctions or rewards to offer an individual on probation based on the type of violation or progress they exhibit. The response grid is couched in the research that shows that incentives and recognition promote behavioral change better than punishment and criticism. At the same time, sanctions must be immediate and proportionate to the violation and history of prior compliance/violations. Appropriate incentives and sanctions support the likelihood that the client will successfully complete probation.

**Problem statement: SDM in LA County Probation**

The LA Probation Department uses a number of tools to assess clients’ background, experiences, and needs to inform decision-making (see LA Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 3: Client Service Delivery for more information). These include a DRAI, the Los Angeles Detention Screener (LADS), which informs whether a youth is detained or released from juvenile hall. In recent years, the LA Probation Department has moved into much greater fidelity with LADS recommendations to make decisions about which youth to detain in juvenile halls, and in 2016, Intake and Detention Control (IDC) officers followed the LADS recommendation to detain or release a youth 75% of the time, a marked improvement from Department of Justice (DOJ) findings that in 2014 IDC detained 80% of youth whose LADS score indicated eligibility for release.

Youth who are placed on probation are assessed using the Los Angeles Risk and Resiliency Checkup (LARRC), which is used to inform case planning. This tool is not validated in its current form and, because it is administered post-disposition, does not inform dispositional recommendations.

The LA Probation Department administers two types of risk assessments to adult clients: a modified version of the Wisconsin Risk/Needs Scales (WRN or DOC-502), which is used for all adults under supervision, except AB 109 clients, to determine supervision intensity. All individuals that score medium or high on the Modified Wisconsin, in addition to all AB 109 clients, receive the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI), which guides case planning. This use of an initial screening tool to determine risk, followed by a more thorough assessment to guide case planning for moderate to high risk clients is in alignment with best practices. In addition, the use of kiosk-based reporting for low risk clients is also in alignment with research that shows that less contact with the criminal justice system leads to better outcomes for individuals with low risk for recidivism.
These tools and processes give the LA Probation Department a good base upon which to build. At the same time, there are clear areas for improvement, including greater fidelity to the LADS; the procurement of a validated post-adjudication assessment for youth, which can then support the use of a dispositional matrix (already developed by RDA, with input from LA County delinquency system stakeholders, see matrix in Appendix A); and the development and implementation of graduated response matrices for youth and adult clients. In addition, despite using kiosk reporting for some adult clients, the LA Probation Department has more interaction than necessary with other low risk clients, especially youth with no delinquency system contact who work with probation officers pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) §236.

**Recommendations**

There are a number of steps for the LA Probation Department to take to improve the use of SDM and, in so doing, better target resources toward those clients who pose the greatest risk to public safety.

As a starting point, the LA Probation Department should **identify and adopt all standard, evidence-based structured decision-making tools described above**. This includes a validated post-adjudication risk and needs assessment for youth, dispositional matrix for youth (already developed by RDA, see Appendix A), and graduated response matrices for youth and adults. As part of the adoption of a validated assessment and dispositional matrix for youth, the Department should eliminate the current pre-adjudication pre-plea report.

**SDM tools should all be integrated into the Department’s electronic client management systems, and their use should be built into Deputy Probation Officer (DPO) training and job descriptions.** The LA Probation Department should also assess the use of and fidelity to existing tools, since RDA’s analysis indicated some fidelity concerns in the use of the LADS, Modified Wisconsin, and LS/CMI. As part of all of these processes, the Department should take steps to **limit DPOs’ ability to override the recommendations of these tools** by requiring supervisors to review and approve most overrides and all recommendations for returns to custody for supervision violations.

The risk tools and SDMs should be incorporated into the Department’s improved data systems to create a dashboard that managers can easily view to assure that their staff are adhering to the tools and not over-supervising or over-incarcerating. RDA understands that the LA Probation Department is currently in the process of selecting and implementing a new post-adjudication risk assessment for youth.

The LA Probation Department should take actions to **reduce contact with low risk clients and clients who are demonstrating success in complying with their supervision terms**. These include ending probation services to at risk youth currently serviced via WIC §236 and not actively supervising any juvenile or adult clients assessed as low risk. In addition, the Department and judiciary should reduce supervision terms for successful youth and adult clients by 1) stepping down supervision active to banked caseloads after a year of compliance and achievement of case plan goals; and 2) working with the Court to establish criteria for early termination. In addition to furthering the LA Probation Department’s alignment with established best practices, all of these changes will have the added benefit of helping to reduce caseloads for higher risk clients, better align resources with risk and reduce unnecessary resource expenditure.
Juvenile Facilities

Recommendation 5: Redesign all juvenile facilities to align with best practices.

Why does this matter?

The deprivation of liberty is one of the most serious consequences an individual can experience in society and the decision to deprive an individual of his/her liberty should never be taken lightly. This is particularly true for young people, whose brains and personalities are still developing and who are therefore, more malleable and less culpable than fully mature adults. As a consequence, young people by their nature are more likely to make poor decisions that can lead to negative contact with the justice system and who are more often harmed by the implications of that contact because of their developmental stage of life. There has been a long, widespread history in America, including in Los Angeles County, of youth suffering from abuse, neglect, trauma, and torment in juvenile facilities. To the greatest extent possible, probation departments should minimize the numbers of youth that they bring into the probation system, work to divert youth from pre-adjudication detention and minimize post-adjudication out-of-home placements.

When youth must be held in secure confinement, all efforts should be made to minimize the disruption of this confinement on their lives by ensuring that facilities are close to youth’s homes and communities and the physical environments of juvenile facilities are developmentally appropriate, conducive to the stated rehabilitative goals of the probation department and aligned with best practices (see Review of Best Practices in Probation, Section 3: Juvenile Service Delivery for more information).

Problem Statement: LA County Juvenile Facilities

With the opening of Campus Kilpatrick and the planned closure of six other juvenile camps via the Camp Consolidation Plan (CCP), the LA Probation Department has made substantial progress toward aligning its approach to juvenile facilities with established best practices. Campus Kilpatrick is a state-of-the-art youth facility with a physical structure designed to promote rehabilitation and the CCP is based on the recognition that most youth can be effectively served in the community.

However, significant work is still needed to address issues with the remaining juvenile halls and camps (see LA Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 4: Juvenile Facilities for more information). Nearly all the camps are on the outlying areas of the county, often cutting youth off from their families and community support networks for the duration of their confinement. Most of the camps and halls have designs that are not conducive to youth rehabilitation and safety, with youth living and sleeping in “open bay” areas, consisting of large rooms with lines of beds. This makes it difficult to adequately monitor youth or to prevent gang conflicts. Classrooms are poorly equipped and lacking materials that would encourage learning. In addition, all three juvenile halls are more than 50 years old and in urgent need of repair. This is especially true for Central Juvenile Hall, a decrepit jail-like facility with barbed wire and leaking roofs, where most detained youth are confined.
Recommendations

The LA Probation Department must continue the progress it has made in recent years by transitioning all camps to small home-like locations within communities where most of the population live and base these facilities on a rehabilitative model. While the Department should invest in renovations to improve current conditions of existing camps, the focus should be on shutting down older facilities and replacing them with smaller ones that are closer to the neighborhoods where most youth on probation live. By continuing to reduce the numbers of youth that are placed in facilities and using alternatives set in communities, this effort will be less burdensome.

The LA Probation Department should work with the CEO’s Master Planning Unit to completely overhaul Central Juvenile Hall (CJH). Due to its location, this facility is the most convenient for the majority of families of all three juvenile halls. However the physical conditions make it unfit for housing young people and a terrible environment for staff. There are multiple ways in which the rehabilitation of this facility can be accomplished including shutting down specific housing units or temporarily closing CJH and transferring youth to Barry J. Nidorf and Los Padrinos Juvenile Halls while CJH is completely renovated. Upon renovation, the LA Probation Department should consider closing the other two juvenile halls.

While the physical layout of each facility is important to create a humane and therapeutic environment, the programming inside the facilities are even more important. As mentioned above, after a series of closures, LA County Probation must transition each remaining camp into a small, home-like campus that has education and rehabilitation as its focus. Similar to Campus Kilpatrick, these new facilities should be modeled after Missouri’s successful juvenile system.

The LA Probation Department must work to improve programming, services, and education inside its juvenile halls. LA Probation should strengthen its incentive-based behavior management systems for youth and reward facility managers and unit supervisors who can reduce critical incidents and increase school attendance. Such systems, i.e., Token Economy or Positive Behavioral Management System, have been successful in other juvenile detention facilities around the country.
**Staffing, Hiring, Training**

**Recommendation 6: Align staffing, hiring, and training with revised mission, organizational structure, and approach.**

**Why does it matter?**

A well-functioning and successful organization has staff with the skills and experience necessary to further the organization’s objectives. Therefore, job descriptions, hiring practices, accountability and performance management structures, and high-quality training programs for staff development must all align with the organization’s mission, vision, and values.

Job descriptions should emphasize client well-being, principles of social and correctional case work, evidence-based supervision practices, and community engagement rather than law enforcement and public safety; recruitment practices should target a wide range of qualified candidates including former clients and others with lived experience in the criminal justice system; background checks must balance liability concerns with the flexibility and timeliness required to successfully hire the most qualified candidates; and training programs should be formally evaluated either internally or by an outside evaluator to ensure relevance, quality, evidence-base, and fidelity.

Hiring, promoting, and retaining POs should be based on merit, competitive oral and/or written examinations, and experiences demonstrably related to the skills required to perform the work (see *Review of Best Practices in Probation*, Section 1: Probation Department Management, Structures, and Systems for more information):

- **Education.** Most states and the American Correctional Association’s standards require a bachelor’s degree at minimum. Among juvenile detention officers, college leads to more effective behavior management and greater communication skills developed among supervised youth. Probation officers who work specifically with youth should have youth development backgrounds and/or formal education in childhood development, social work, social welfare, or human services.
- **Experience.** Probation departments should view former clients and others with lived system experience as valuable hires due to their potential to connect with clients and model prosocial behavior. Departments must not discriminate against these individuals.

Probation officers with the right education, skills, and experience are most likely to establish clear roles and expectations with clients, model pro-social and supportive behaviors, and achieve the best client and community outcomes.

All probation officers should receive training prior to supervising any clients and should continue to receive training on an ongoing basis to ensure their skillsets remain relevant and updated. Staff trainings must be formally evaluated to ensure fidelity, relevance, and quality. On top of fulfilling state standards, training on restorative practices, trauma-informed care, positive youth development, crisis de-escalation, Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), motivational interviewing and leadership skills are important to promoting the skills that are expected of supervising probation officers. As staff move up
within the organizational hierarchy, additional training and coaching is important, including training in staff development, organizational and project management, and communication.

Booster trainings, observational assessments, and individual coaching are necessary to reinforce and deepen skill development and ensure uniform implementation. Research indicates that training alone is insufficient to enable employees to perform at their best. In addition to conducting trainings, probation departments should also identify staff who are proficient in evidence-based practices and subject matter areas listed above; assign these staff to mentor and coach other staff in these methods; and, create an environment of appreciation and recognition of these staff.

Performance management systems must prioritize and reward achieving organizational goals. In other words, promotions should occur when staff performance aligns with the mission, vision, and values, including goal achievement and the use of evidence-based practices. Implementing performance management structures requires the regular capture and review of performance data in order to track how well performance aligns with the mission, vision, and values of the organization, including reducing recidivism and promoting client well-being. Most importantly, performance management within probation departments must promote and reward reducing recidivism and incarcerating clients parsimoniously. Specifically, staff should be assessed, rewarded, and promoted for things like:

- Communication skills, problem solving skills, initiative, and commitment to mission;
- Time spent targeting criminogenic needs (based on probationers’ assessment results);
- Connecting clients to needed services, supports, and opportunities;
- Consistent use of rewards systems when probationers do well and graduated sanctions when they have set-backs; and,
- Eventually, recidivism, based on risk-level of caseload, for field officers.

Client-level data systems are essential to monitoring performance; these data must track client needs, case plans, progress toward case goals, and client outcomes. The data itself enables the accountability. Without accurate data systems, there is no information from which to evaluate, reward, support, or promote staff performance. Necessarily, client data systems must have the capacity to provide flexible reports by unit, probation officer, and region to inform performance review processes. This enables a probation department to assess areas for growth or training, individuals or units providing exemplary work, or areas for possible re-assignment. Without these data, a probation department cannot systematically and fairly promote staff who perform in line with the department’s mission and vision, which is a best practice.

Problem Statement: LA Probation Department staffing, hiring, and training

Currently, job descriptions do not reflect the values, mission, or vision of a department whose main purpose is to further client well-being and reduce recidivism. Existing job descriptions instead emphasize the enforcement of law and public safety. Therefore, the LA Probation Department has no means to attract and hire candidates that are qualified to further its stated values.
In addition, the current memorandum of understand (MOU) between the LA Probation Department and AFSCME Local 685, the bargaining unit that represents DPOs—and the largest of the Department’s four bargaining units—includes a number of agreements that do not reflect best practices or put clients’ needs at the center of the Department’s staffing practices. In particular, the LA Probation Department’s inability to transfer staff to lateral positions that align with appropriate human resource allocation is a major barrier to meeting the needs of the client population and creates problematic and costly imbalances in staffing distribution. In addition, the 56-hour work schedule for Local 685 staff working at the Department’s juvenile camps is inconsistent with established best practices in juvenile facilities, which highlight the importance of establishing a consistent family-like environment in which staff and youth work closely together to build positive relationships that can promote youth wellbeing.

Finally, the fact that Detention Services Officers (DSO), who work in one of the Department’s most challenging positions inside juvenile detention facilities, serve in the Department’s most entry-level sworn staff position has a number of negative implications for staffing and staff promotional trajectories. Functionally, the DSO position frequently operates as the first position a new sworn staff member is placed in, which means that the most junior staff are often in one of the most challenging positions. In addition, because moving up in the Department requires moving out of this position and generally into a field-based DPO position, there are limited facility-based career trajectories for staff who enjoy and excel at working with youth in custody. Analogously, for staff who prefer and are better suited to working with clients in the community, there often is not a way to avoid starting in a detention facility.

The LA Probation Department faces many challenges with recruitment, starting with dedicating sufficient resources to define whom they should hire, clarifying and aligning job descriptions with the mission and vision, and attracting appropriately qualified candidates (see LA Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 2: Hiring, Staffing, and Training for more information). County Human Resources, Department Human Resources, executive management, and line staff all agree that the LA Probation Department is losing qualified candidates due to an unnecessarily extensive background check process and lengthy hiring process, as well as insufficient communication with job candidates during the process.

The vast majority of staff achieve required training both when they join the LA Probation Department and on an ongoing basis, and training is consistent with state mandates for their respective positions. While the Department offers a wide range of ongoing training in mandated and elective areas, gaps in training, such as court report training, mental health, and trauma-informed care, make it difficult for staff to carry out their job tasks. In addition, more training is needed both in technical functions, such as data systems and writing court reports, as well as in topics related to client well-being and supervision, such as mental health, trauma-informed care, and positive youth development. The absence of official transfer training programs often results in unofficial training from colleagues or supervisors when staff transfer to new positions, which takes them away from dedicated workloads and creates inconsistency across different facilities and offices.

There is also limited management and/or leadership training for staff who move up within the organizational hierarchy. As staff take on new roles and move away from client supervision to leading programs, units, or initiatives, there is little in the way of formal skill building to help them develop the
competencies associated with these new positions, such as project management, staff development, or communication. This is a missed opportunity for the Department to build its own human resources while also laying to groundwork for success leadership succession planning.

Finally, the LA Probation Department does not evaluate staff based on how their performance aligns with stated objectives that support the Department’s mission. This makes it impossible to promote or reward individuals that further the mission or achieve individual performance goals or to discipline and create performance improvement plans for staff falling short of the mark (because there is no “mark”). Moreover, the current promotional process, as agreed upon in the MOU with Local 685, precludes the LA Probation Department from implementing a performance-management approach to promotions since it requires the Department to promote based on seniority with little regard for performance—or misconduct.

**Recommendations**

The LA Probation Department should take several steps to improve its recruitment and hiring practices necessary to attract and hire high quality candidates. The first step is to establish a recruitment unit to lead recruitment efforts and coordinate with HR and background investigations to ensure consistent communication within the Department and between the Department and a job candidate throughout the hiring process. In addition, the Department should revise job descriptions to focus more explicitly on client services and evidence-based practices, as well as to highlight the importance of skills such as communication and use of data. Having done so, the recruitment unit should establish MOUs with local colleges and universities that allow social work, human services and/or criminal justice programs to create probation field placements for students that will create a pipeline of candidates. Reevaluating the background check process, including eliminating the credit check, will also widen the pool of potentially qualified candidates who can be recruited and hired.

The LA Probation Department should also renegotiate its agreement with AFSCME 685 to address the range of issues discussed above, including 1) restoring the Department’s ability to transfer staff to lateral positions to meet the needs of the Department and its clients, 2) eliminating the 56-hour work schedule at juvenile camps, 3) making changes to the DSO/DPO hierarchy and process so that staff who excel in working in juvenile facilities can be promoted in that role while staff who are better suited to community-based work do not have to start in juvenile halls, and 4) allowing the Department to promote the most qualified candidate within a Civil Service band instead of mandating the promotion of the most senior person.

Once the LA Probation Department has established a more appropriate and client-centered MOU, leadership should move to establish a more robust performance management system that evaluates and promotes staff based on clearly defined metrics tied to its mission. The Department should also commission a workload study to determine staffing needs and support the most appropriate distribution of staff across units and divisions. Both a performance management system and a workload study are predicated on investments in data/IT systems and research staff. Continuing shrinkage of the supervised population by adopting the use of structured decision-making tools and processes will require the
assessment of which types of staff need to be hired. There are additional changes the LA Probation Department should make in its approach to and provision of training. These include establishing policies that require staff to receive training in new functions prior to starting a new position; developing a training institute, similar to the Inter-University Consortium established in 1990 at the LA County Department of Children and Family Services, establishing a leadership institute to continue to develop senior and middle management; and increasing the number of trainings in client well-being topics such as trauma informed care and positive youth development and in technical functions such data entry and interpretation.
Data/IT

Recommendation 7: Prioritize investments in information technology (IT) systems and the use of data.

Why does this matter?

Without real time, easy to understand, accessible data, a probation department cannot measure change, adequately plan for facilities or community-based services or know how to best serve the individuals in their charge. As repeatedly indicated in the literature, any organization concerned with the quality and impact of its services must track critical data elements over time to monitor improvements and identify areas of need. Client-level data must be regularly assessed and re-assessed for improvements and changing needs on an individual level. These data, when taken in the aggregate, provide a picture of organizational-level improvements and needs. Streamlined, simplified electronic records help move a probation department toward greater efficiency and effectiveness, with automated reports and more accurate reviews of how personnel, teams, divisions, and reform efforts are doing. Thorough data collection and use are essential to monitoring and tracking whether the department is producing equitable outcomes across race and ethnicity, and if its efforts to address bias and racial/ethnic disparities are succeeding. Finally, and most importantly, the continuous use of data changes the culture of an organization from one that depends on individual decisions, and a person’s experience to one grounded in science. It creates systems that are then able to make rational and well-informed decisions regarding the allocation of resources and the placement of juveniles and adults. High quality data systems and processes are essential for implementing structured decision-making, managing appropriate staffing levels and workload distribution, projecting facility population needs, and reducing unnecessary levels of supervision and confinement.

Problem Statement: LA Probation Data/IT Systems and Processes

Numerous studies published regarding the Los Angeles County Probation Department have noted that the systems, processes and use of data are inadequate to meet the standards and practices of a 21st century model department. As early as 2005, there have been recommendations to invest in these systems to increase data integration, analysis, and reporting (see LA Probation Department Assessment, Chapter 1: Organizational Assessment for more information).

The LA Probation Department uses 46 different data systems to manage clients, staff, contracted providers, and a range of other information. There is little integration across data systems. In addition, there is limited data sharing with other County departments. This reduces the ability of the County to understand the overlap of clients between services and systems and prohibits leveraging and coordination of resources and services.

In addition to the lack of extractable and linked data, the LA Probation Department’s outdated data systems and insufficient resources for IT staff, staff training, and systems upgrades impede its ability to make data-driven decisions. In particular, the Department has a limited capacity to track client outcomes, making it difficult to ascertain whether or not programs are working.
RDA experienced significant difficulty analyzing and interpreting data from Probation. In multiple instances, patterns in the data did not reflect how staff described their client service and supervision processes. Whenever a discrepancy emerged, understanding the cause of the discrepancy required a multi-step, multi-person process that often took weeks or even months. RDA staff would talk to program/operations staff, who would meet with IT staff, who would then often spend several weeks reexamining the data before providing new information to the program staff, who would communicate it back to RDA. At times, program staff would have to speak to several other program staff as well as to multiple staff from the Department’s Information Services Bureau (ISB) before finding someone who could answer questions in a way that aligned with what the data showed. Even after all of these conversations, there are notable discrepancies between the findings in RDA’s analyses and those in various LA Probation Department publications, including information as critical as the number of individuals on probation and the number of youth in probation facilities.

These issues are exacerbated by the fact that the Department does not have a unit dedicated to research and evaluation to act as a bridge between ISB and operations staff or between ISB and external researchers. As a consequence, no one has a clear responsibility for aligning the Department’s data collection systems and processes with research and evaluation needs. Similarly, there is no accountability for the quality of data entry, data extraction, or reporting, since there is no centralized entity for overseeing data analysis and interpretation.

**Recommendations**

The LA Probation Department should invest in improved data collection systems and processes, as well as in adequate staffing for a research and evaluation unit that can serve as a bridge between ISB staff and programs/operations staff, in addition to working with contracted researchers/evaluators and an inter-university consortium (IUC) for research.

The first step in this process is to establish an internal Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) that can:

1. Work with operations staff to help define the Department’s research, evaluation and reporting needs;
2. Work with ISB to ensure that data systems and reporting align with these needs;
3. Establish data collection processes and quality assurance (QA) processes; and
4. Work with outside researchers, including contracted researchers and a local IUC to analyze program, unit, and system data based on the Department’s research and evaluation needs.

The REU should be comprised of a minimum of 10-15 staff, who have expertise in IT systems and structure and research methods, data analysis, as well as an understanding of the operations, purpose, and mission of the LA Probation Department.5

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5 The REU would require at least three managers – one for the unit overall and one assigned each to juvenile and adult services. Analysts and administrative staff would be required for each core Department function, including adult field services, juvenile field services, and facilities. Specialized units or divisions, such as AB 109 or pretrial services, likely require dedicated analysts as well.
Once a REU has been establish, this unit should prioritize two key strategies: 1) **aligning the Department’s data collection and reporting processes to research and evaluation needs**, and 2) **establishing a local IUC to support ongoing research efforts**. Both are discussed in greater detail below.

In order to **align the Department’s data collection reporting and processes with research needs**, the newly established REU should start by mapping current data systems and reporting to actual data and research needs. This would require two concurrent steps:

1) **Assess current data collection and analysis systems and processes by:**
   a. Inventorying all data systems, including ISB operated systems, contracted systems, and “offline” data tracking tools developed by staff;
   b. Assessing the quality of data entry in each system; and
   c. Inventorying current reports produced by ISB and by individual units/divisions, including frequency of production, intended audience, and ease of attainment.

2) **Identify unit-specific and Department-wide data and research needs by:**
   a. Working with executive management to establish Department-level evaluation questions and data needs;
   b. Working with each unit and division to establish evaluation questions and data needs; and
   c. Identifying metrics for unit-specific and Department-wide evaluation questions and data needs.

Having completed these steps, the REU can compare both existing data fields and existing data reports to Department needs in order to identify gaps and redundancies and develop a plan to address both. As part of this process, the REU will need to work with ISB, operations staff, and administration staff to develop policies and protocols for data collection, including a universal data dictionary to ensure consistent use of terminology and coding.

The Department should take advantage of LA County’s myriad research universities to **establish an IUC to support the Department’s research and evaluation needs**. To do so, the REU, in partnership with executive management, should begin by identifying funding to support the initial development of an IUC and IUC analyses, and convening representatives from area universities with criminal/juvenile justice research centers. Together, this group can identify a lead university, based on knowledge and capacity; establish a governance structure; and identify projects and research needs for which the IUC can partner with the Department.

The **Department must invest in updated data/IT systems** that can simplify the process of data extraction and provide real-time data via dashboards to assess key performance indicators on an ongoing basis. This will require both investing in upgrading ISB-developed data systems, purchasing new data systems, and engaging in public-private partnerships to develop new data systems. Finally, it would be wise for the County to examine what other counties and State are doing in relationship to partnering with large private sector companies to meet their IT and real time data needs.
Overview of LA Probation Department Governance Study

In September 2016, RDA was retained by LA County to conduct a comprehensive study and analysis of the LA Probation Department that would articulate its strengths and weaknesses and provide recommendations for building the Department into a high-functioning 21st Century agency that models best practices in the field. Included in our scope of work was to review and evaluate the Department’s current organizational structure and practices; identify factors that influence performance and outcomes; study best practices in probation (for both juveniles and adults); and identify model jurisdictions that have implemented best practices. These activities were to culminate in a final set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the Department’s performance to better meet the needs of those involved in the probation system.

The purpose of this final report is to summarize all of the research, activities, and key findings from each of the reports RDA has submitted over the course of the last year. This report describes our methodology, findings, and recommendations from previous reports.

From the beginning of this undertaking, RDA wanted to create a product that would not be another report that sat on a shelf and never became actualized. The County has had numerous reports that have done just that. We adopted several strategies that we address more specifically in our methods section to try and avoid that fate. It is the primary reason that we have issued multiple reports throughout the process of this study and established a broad and representative advisory body. We wanted to ensure ongoing engagement between all of the stakeholder groups involved in this important effort.

Organization of this Report

This report begins with a brief overview of each of the reports submitted to date. This is followed by a description of our methodology, key project team members, our impetus for developing certain work plan activities and processes, and a description of the data collection activities that were necessary to compile the information provided across our reports. Finally, we summarize key findings from our LA Probation Department Assessment, and highlight the extent to which the structure and practices of the Los Angeles County Probation Department align with evidence-based and best practices in probation.
Completed Reports

To date, RDA has issued five reports as part of the Governance Study. These reports, summarized below, are the foundation for all of the attached recommendations:

- **120 Day Status Report (February 2017)**: Provides an interim update on the Governance Study, including a review and analysis of existing reports and documentation, preliminary meetings with project stakeholders, initial findings, and preliminary recommendations.

- **Review of Best Practices in Probation (April 2017)**: Focuses on the need for guidance around identifying and implementing evidence-based and best practices in probation in order to promote public safety, affect positive behavioral change, reduce unnecessary deprivation of liberty, and minimize the risk of reoffending.

- **Model Jurisdiction Report (August 2017)**: Highlights probation practices that other jurisdictions from across the country have implemented to improve community supervision for youth and adults. The jurisdictions highlighted in the report (Maricopa County, AZ; Multnomah County, OR; New York City; San Francisco County, CA; San Joaquin County, CA; Santa Clara County, CA; Solano County, CA; Washington, D.C.; and Wayne County, MI) are not necessarily model jurisdictions in every way. Rather, they are jurisdictions that have effectively implemented evidence-based and best practices in probation supervision to support improved outcomes for youth in custody and youth and adults under community supervision.

- **LA Probation Department Assessment (August 2017)**: Provides an in-depth, comprehensive study of the LA Probation Department, documenting its structure and practices, and highlighting factors that influence performance and outcomes. The report employs an organizational assessment framework that recognizes the significant role and impact of organizational elements, such as organizational culture, leadership, systems, and infrastructure.

- **Crosswalk Report: Comparing LA Probation Department Practices to Best Practices in the Field (November 2017)**: Synthesizes findings from previous reports to provide recommendations to guide the Department toward greater implementation of best practices. This report is organized in five sections: Organizational Assessment; Staffing, Hiring, and Training; Client Service Delivery; Facilities; and Fiscal Operations.

In this final report we summarize key findings from our assessment of the LA Probation Department and highlight where the organizational structure and practices in the Department do and do not align with best practices in the field.
Project Methodology

Project Team

To ensure our team was equipped with the content expertise, local knowledge, and capacity to successfully complete the LA Probation Governance Study, RDA identified a Project Team comprised of experts in the field from both inside and outside of our organization. Key project team members and their roles on the project are described in greater detail below:

**Patricia Marrone Bennett, Ph.D.**, President and CEO of Resource Development Associates (RDA), served as the Principle Investigator for the LA Probation Governance Study. Dr. Bennett contributed her decades of research, policy and direct service work with criminal and juvenile justice systems as well as the many other government and nonprofit organizations with which they intersect to ensure a collaborative, strengths-based effort that leveraged the experience and resources of all relevant Los Angeles County stakeholders. Dr. Bennett oversaw all aspects of project implementation and ensured the project aligned with Los Angeles County’s goals and objectives, and resulted in actionable recommendations.

**Vincent Schiraldi, Co-Principal Investigator** Co-founder, Co-director, and Senior Research Scientist of the Columbia University Justice Lab, served as the Co-Principal Investigator for this project. Mr. Schiraldi has significant experience reforming large criminal and juvenile justice agencies in locations including Washington D.C. and New York City, as well as researching and advising on criminal justice reforms nationally. As the Co-PI, Mr. Schiraldi worked directly with Dr. Patricia Bennett and the entire team to provide strategic direction, oversight, and quality control for this effort.

**Jorja Leap, Ph.D.**, Executive Director of the Health and Social Justice Partnership at the University of California, Los Angeles, served as a Strategic Advisor for this project, leveraging her experience with gangs, violence, and trauma in Los Angeles to support our community engagement activities and ensure that this effort was grounded in and informed by community and stakeholder needs.

**David Muhammad**, Executive Director of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform and a leader in the fields of criminal justice, violence prevention, and youth development, served as a Strategic Advisor for this project. Mr. Muhammad leveraged his experience as the former Chief of Probation in Alameda County, as well as Deputy Commissioner of New York City’s Department of Probation and Chief of Committed Services for Washington, DC’s Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services to inform the development of all deliverables and ensure that this effort was premised in on the ground experiences informed by evidence-based and best practices in probation.

**Mikaela Rabinowitz, Ph.D.**, the Director RDA’s Justice Practice, a mixed-methods researcher who sits on the Board of Directors for the Association of Criminal Justice Research of California, served as the project manager for the LA Probation Governance Study. In this role, Dr. Rabinowitz drew on her extensive experience in California criminal and juvenile justice policy and research to develop the project research design and oversee implementation of data collection, analysis, and reporting.
Kim Carter, Founder and Executive Director of Time for Change Foundation, brings both her lived and professional experience. She founded and operates a non-profit that provides essential services to re-entry women and their children. Certified in accounting with an emphasis on nonprofits, and motivated by her own experiences as a formerly incarcerated woman, Ms. Carter was critical in reviewing the revenues and expenditures of the Department to understand resource allocations of the Probation Department. Her work is extensive and multi-faceted, integrating considerations of education, health, labor, and economic development into a well-rounded, client-centered approach to working with the reentry population and demonstrating the public benefit and cost savings associated with improved programs and systemic reforms.

Ardavan Davaran, Ph.D., served as the best practices research lead. Dr. Davaran is a trained sociologist with a background in criminology and criminal justice policy research, as well as expertise in advanced research methods, design, and quantitative data analysis techniques. Dr. Davaran’s research centers on identifying the ways in which social institutions, and the organizations that comprise them, reproduce and exacerbate race, class, and gender-based inequalities within the United States. At RDA, Ardavan contributes to the management of justice system projects as well as data collection and analysis, research, evaluation planning, and report writing for a variety of projects working with justice systems and behavioral health.

Debbie Mayer, MPP, led field-based data collection, conducting interviews and focus groups with hundreds of LA Probation staff, clients, and stakeholders. Ms. Mayer is a mixed-methods researcher who is passionate about supporting criminal justice reform through research and evaluation. She strongly believes that an effective and equitable criminal justice system must be informed by the experiences of individuals and communities most impacted by the criminal justice system, and she hopes her work will amplify these voices.

Sarah Garmisa-Calinsky, MBA, MPP, joined the project team to lead the analysis of LA Probation fiscal practices. With a background in both public policy and business, Ms. Garmisa-Calinsky is adept at understanding the intersection between operational process and financial decision-making and she works on a number of projects that assess the fiscal implications of different operational processes, including cost-benefit analyses and workflow assessments.

Moira DeNike, Ph.D., joined the RDA team to support best practices research, providing her considerable expertise with evidence-based and emerging best practices that span juvenile and criminal justice systems, as well as the many other public systems with which they intersect. For over 15 years, Dr. DeNike has provided consulting services to a range of nonprofits, public agencies, foundations, and school districts. She has guided program design and conducted evaluations of juvenile justice diversion programs, gender-specific services for individuals under probation supervision, alternatives to incarceration, case management systems for justice-involved adults and juveniles, trauma-informed programs, and drug court programs.

Ronald Soto joined the RDA team as a best practice specialist, contributing over 35 years of experience in the public and nonprofit sectors, including consultation and direct service leadership with a range of city
and county service systems, large and small nonprofit agencies, and private and public grantmaking organizations. Mr. Soto has designed, supported, and grown both public and nonprofit programs spanning the domains of criminal and juvenile justice, foster care and transitional-aged youth (TAY) services, gang prevention and intervention, school based intervention and crisis response services, community and mental health, early childhood development, youth and family services, employment services, services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and community development efforts.

**Lupe Garcia** supported all aspects of project implementation, including data collection, stakeholder engagement, communication, and more. Ms. Garcia brings her background in public health policy and research to inform a systems-level approach to understanding the implementation and impact of justice systems.

**Methods**

**Evaluation Advisory Committee**

RDA submitted a total of 6 digestible reports over the course of this effort. We did this in order to deliver information in pieces focused on each major deliverable of our work plan and engage stakeholders over the course of the project. In order to be inclusive of numerous cross-system stakeholders with valuable and unique perspectives, as well as to ensure that all partners were invested in the process, RDA convened a project advisory committee comprised of representatives from Probation, the District Attorney’s Office, County Office of Education, Behavioral Health Services, Chief Executive Office, County Counsel, and community-based service providers, as well as judges and individuals with former justice involvement. The advisory committee met every few months to inform our work by reviewing upcoming activities and findings from each report to inform interpretation and next steps.

By convening an advisory committee, RDA was able to vet project activities and findings from each report, and integrate insights from cross system stakeholders into our efforts.

**Site Visit to New York and Washington D.C.**

RDA organized a week-long site visit to New York City and Washington D.C. in order to provide cross-system stakeholders an opportunity to see what transformation looks like on the ground in jurisdictions that have undergone change, and to learn from others who have overseen and managed the change processes. Our goal was for the site visits to provide LA stakeholders an opportunity to remove themselves from how things are done in LA County, and provide a first-hand look at alternative ways of working with justice-involved individuals under community supervision and/or in custody.

During our site visit to New York, we visited NeONs, community-based probation sites, in the Bronx and Harlem, and were exposed to the NeON Arts Program and Arches Transformative Mentoring Program. The NeONs were quintessential examples of probation offices promoting client well-being through community partnership. We also had an opportunity to see how structured decision-making has been implemented in New York City to reduce the size of their probation population, as well as the reliance on placement of adjudicated youth. We visited two facilities, one secure facility and one non-secure facility.
aligned with the Missouri Model (see Attachment E: Site Visit Booklet for a comprehensive list and additional information about each site we visited in New York City).

In Washington, D.C., we observed a juvenile diversion conference meeting, visited the New Beginnings Youth Development Center which is the District’s sole secure facility for adjudicated youth, and also had a guided tour of the MLK Achievement Center which partners with vendors to provide an array of programs that are tailored to at-risk youth and their families. The MLK Achievement Center stimulates and empowers participants by fostering education and career development, life skills, and healthy living (see Attachment E: Site Visit Booklet for a comprehensive list and additional information about each site we visited in Washington, D.C.).

Research Activities

In order to complete all of the evaluation activities necessary to develop each of the reports submitted to date, the RDA Project Team first reviewed more than 100 existing reports and documentation related to the structure and operations of the LA Probation Department. We conducted preliminary meetings with project stakeholders to gain insight into (1) how the Department currently operates; (2) what other research, reports, audits, and assessments have identified as the Department’s strengths and challenges; and (3) the Department’s stated goals and objectives, and plans for achieving those.

For the LA Probation Department Assessment the RDA Project Team took a multi-disciplinary, cross-sectional approach to data collection. We employed mixed-methods research of quantitative and qualitative data to maximize validity and triangulate findings across data sources. This included conducting face-to-face interviews and focus groups with 384 Department stakeholders (approximately 70% of interviews and focus groups were with LA Probation staff and 30% were with agencies that work with Probation, CBOs and advocates, and clients); field observations at more than a dozen Probation field sites and institutions; reviewing documentation related to training, hiring, contracted programs, and fiscal operations; and, assessing adult and juvenile probation data to provide an overview of the probation population from 2012 through 2016.

In order to complete the Review of Best Practices in Probation and Model Jurisdiction Report RDA synthesized research across a number of subject areas, including criminal and juvenile justice as well as organizational development and leadership, developed by government and professional probation agencies; non-profit and private organizations; and, independent researchers published in peer reviewed journals. We also conducted a week-long site visit to New York City and Washington D.C. for over 30 LA County Stakeholders to attend and conducted follow-up interviews with staff and leadership from New York and Washington, D.C., as well as with staff and leadership from other model jurisdictions including Maricopa County, AZ; Multnomah County, OR; San Francisco County, CA; San Joaquin County, CA; Santa Clara County, CA; Solano County, CA; and, Wayne County, MI.
Findings

The following sections compare best practices in the field and model jurisdictions that have implemented these practices with the organizational structure and practices of the LA Probation Department.

Organizational Assessment

An organization’s resources, processes, and capabilities—including its strategic leadership and planning, internal and external communication processes, and data capacity—are foundational to its success. This section describes our findings across organizational culture, external environment, and organizational capacity and structure.

Organizational Culture

RDA’s review of best practices implemented in model jurisdictions demonstrated the importance of fostering a positive organizational culture in order to successfully manage change and drive organizational success. During our site visit to New York City’s Probation Department, staff at the NeONs expressed enthusiasm about the transformation of their culture toward one that is mission driven and explicitly focused on client well-being and partnerships with the communities in which the most probation clients reside.

Developing staff buy-in for change and a fostering a healthy organizational culture has resulted in an engaged workforce that knows what is expected of them and believes their work matters. A healthy organizational culture fosters high staff morale and a greater adoption of evidence-based and best practices, which include, but are not limited to, embracing the implementation of culturally appropriate community-based services, the engagement of community and other public agencies, the use of validated assessment tools, and data-driven decision-making at both the organizational and individual level, as indicated in our Review of Best Practices in Probation. In order to implement these practices, leadership must create a climate for continuous learning and reward staff who participate in change; encourage staff driven innovation that is adaptable; emphasize quality service provision (e.g., supervisors focus more on providing appropriate services than on number of contacts per client); and become more performance-oriented (driven by common, tangible goals and articulated measurable outcomes).

“We have a culture of not communicating, a culture of not telling our story … We’re caught up in ‘it’s criminal record offender history – I can’t tell you.’ And so, we don’t tell the stories.”
- Department Manager

“We spent all this time on the strategic plan. We did focus groups, surveys, met with the unions, held town hall meetings, and then the data was gone. It was just put on the shelf… The staff participated and then we put it away. That sends the message that their voice doesn’t matter and it hurts the culture in the line staff.”
- Probation Manager
RDA’s LA Probation Department Assessment found that a lack of leadership stability and succession planning within LA Probation has had a negative impact on organizational culture and inhibited the development of a shared vision and goals to guide operational practices. This has resulted in the Department not currently operating as a mission-driven organization. Staff is less willing to embrace new approaches because they assume any new idea will have a limited lifespan. This results in low staff morale, a “head’s down” approach among many staff across organizational hierarchy, and staff who do not report being organized around a common mission or purpose. The development of the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan was an opportunity to strengthen the Department’s organizational culture and address issues of low staff morale, but instead this process largely exacerbated these issues. Staff who participated in the development of the strategic plan found the planning process to be inclusive, thoughtful, and collaborative. However, the plan was never implemented. This experience reinforced a sense of disillusionment across staff about the longevity of Department initiatives, as well as the value of participating in strategy-focused workgroups.

External Environment

Probation departments, like all public agencies, are embedded within external environments that impact operations, opportunities, and barriers to success. RDA’s Model Jurisdiction Report highlighted the great lengths to which staff in New York and Washington D.C. went to intentionally develop trusted relationships with advocacy organizations, local government, and media outlets in order to manage pressures that would arise from disparate, often competing, perspectives.

In Washington, D.C., the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) Chief of Staff hired Legislation and Communication Directors whose primary jobs were to establish relationships with political entities such as the D.C. City Council (which functions similarly to the LA County Board of Supervisors) and the media. One strategy they implemented for building these relationships was to plan events around areas of interest to political leaders. For instance, DYRS leadership was aware that the mayor enjoyed triathlons, so they held a mini-triathlon with youth and staff and invited the mayor to join them with an opportunity for pictures and an interview with the press included. There were also a number of City Council members who enjoyed basketball and football, so DYRS coordinated a nine game basketball tournament between youth and city council members, as well as an event for city council members to give youth letterman jackets they earned for being a part of a championship football team. Another strategy DYRS implemented was proactively reaching out to the local media to promote stories about some of their successes. They routinely emailed positive stories to the D.C. City Council and other key stakeholders to keep them up to date about the reform efforts. This was the agency’s way of building goodwill politically around a positive narrative.

“If you were to go around this room and ask us about our mission statement, most of us couldn’t tell you. Why? Because it seems to change minute by minute. It is hard to have focus or a mission because it has become [to] please the Board.”

– Probation Manager
Although the current Department leadership has a strong relationship with the Board and a commitment to working collaboratively with Board Offices, RDA’s *LA Probation Department Assessment* found that many staff across the organizational hierarchy perceive Board motions addressing Department operations as a source of frustration. Both middle management and line staff report feeling disempowered by Board involvement that they perceive as limiting the Department’s ability to oversee its own operations. Staff across role and hierarchy also identified community advocates as an external pressure point that impacts Department practice and employee morale.

Though the relationship between the community and Probation has improved in recent years, distrust remains. Many staff feel misunderstood and overly scrutinized by community advocates, while advocates, in turn, see the community voice as being excluded from the Department’s decision making, particularly regarding programming. The Department’s public image portrayed through the media is also extremely influential in shaping how the LA Probation Department is viewed by staff and outside entities, and media stories generally depict the Department in a negative light, which staff attribute to poor external communication efforts. This affects external pressure, employee morale, and the number and type of applicants who seek employment. In response to outside pressures, managers spend a large proportion of their time participating in meetings and hearings, compiling data, and assembling reports. Managers share that these frequent requests reduce their ability to strategize and plan. This contributes to a sense within the Department that it does not set its own direction.  

**Organizational Capacity and Structure**

*Organizational Structure*

RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation* highlights key behavioral differences between youth and adults suggesting that the treatment and supervision of juveniles should not mimic adult criminal punishment models, because the needs of youth are different from the needs of adults. Our review highlights research that has verified that the brains of adolescents don’t mature until young adulthood or the late twenties, resulting in adolescents preferring to engage in risky behaviors that have a high probability of immediate reward but can have harmful consequences. Despite these differences between youth and adults, our research did not find evidence for splitting the LA Probation Department. In fact, our site visit to New York demonstrated that maintaining a single department with separate adult, juvenile, and administrative operations allows for useful coordination and collaboration between juvenile and adult operations as well as the necessary autonomy and flexibility to serve youth and adults appropriately.

RDA found that the current district model in the LA Probation Department, instituted under a previous Chief of Probation, has resulted in an organizational structure that has many components operating in silos, which hampers information flow. Communication gaps are particularly severe in two areas: between administrative functions and operations and between management and line staff. 

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6 The Probation Department has had the same formal mission in place since 2007; nonetheless, many staff report regular Board motions and leadership turnover fostering constant changes in focus and direction.
Since the beginning of 2017, the LA Probation Department has begun streamlining its executive structure for overseeing client-related functions toward an agency-model. Under this model, responsibilities are divided between Assistant Chief Sheila Mitchell, who oversees juvenile operations, and Assistant Chief Reaver Bingham, who oversees adult operations. Both are overseen by Chief Probation Officer Terri McDonald and supported by a common administrative infrastructure. RDA recommends building out the agency model in LA County. Assistant Chiefs of Juvenile and Adult Services would directly oversee Bureau Chiefs and Directors who are responsible for operations in each of the County’s five districts. Two Bureau Chiefs in each district would directly oversee adult operations and juvenile operations. Under each Bureau Chief there would be Directors who are responsible for specific elements of client service delivery for adult and juvenile services, respectively. This model would streamline processes and provide an organizational structure where there is oversight and alignment of Department operations, as well as the flexibility necessary for developing innovative, geographically specific services, based on identified needs of youth and adults who are under community supervision and living in these areas.

**Data Capacity**

RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation* highlights the importance of probation departments using data to measure staff performance and make decisions about budget allocation, organizational structures, and changes in practices in order to help promote positive organizational- and client-level outcomes. Best practice also suggest that any organization concerned with the quality and impact of its services should have a set of measurable goals to collect data on, and also hold regular meetings to assess the data and decide what practices to change, maintain, and/or amend in order to meet goals. Our *LA Probation Department Assessment* revealed that data is not used in this manner within the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The Department uses 46 different data systems to manage clients, staff, contracted providers, and a range of other information. Of these 46 systems, 25 are operated by the Department and 21 are systems operated by other county departments or vendors but accessed by Probation. Many of these systems are electronic document systems, not databases from which data can be extracted. Across data systems, there is a limited ability to link data and limited data sharing with other county departments, which reduces data utility and creates a number of challenges across all levels of staff. In addition to the lack of extractable data and linked data, the LA Probation Department’s outdated data systems and insufficient resources for IT staff, staff training, and systems upgrades impede its ability to make data-driven decisions. In particular, the Department has a limited capacity to track client outcomes, making it difficult to ascertain whether or not programs are working.

**Staffing, Hiring, and Training**

A well-functioning and productive organization has staff with the skills and experience necessary to further the organization’s objectives. Therefore, job descriptions, hiring practices, accountability and performance management structures, and high-quality training programs for staff development must all align with the organization’s mission, vision, and values.
Staffing

RDA’s *Model Jurisdiction Report* highlighted the fact that staffing decisions should reflect the values, mission, and vision of a probation department (and this mission should emphasize client well-being and partnerships with the communities, as well as principles of social and correctional case work and evidence-based supervision practices), and that data should be used to inform staffing decisions such as workload and performance management, as well as promotion.

In a number of jurisdictions such as New York City and Solano County, RDA found that job requirements are in alignment with the department’s mission, vision, and values. In Solano County, for example, job requirements for senior probation officers include the knowledge of evidence-based practices; principles of social and correctional case and group work; family systems theory; child development; and behavior and motivational theories. Entry-level deputy probation officer requirements include knowledge of principles, practices, and techniques of communication; interviewing, counseling, resistant-defensive behavior, personality theory and self-image, and stress and change theory; and self-awareness-objectivity techniques for understanding others and personality types. All qualifying candidates in Solano County must exhibit specific communication and social skills that allow them to work effectively and fairly with all clients, and job descriptions specifically calls for candidates that are able to learn how to “deal firmly and fairly with offenders of various socio-economic backgrounds and temperaments.”

Both Solano and Multnomah Counties take a data-driven approach to workload distribution, regularly reviewing caseload sizes to ensure that workloads are evenly distributed to the greatest extent possible. Supervisors in Solano County also meet with their staff individually on a quarterly basis, using data to review staff performance. If there are any performance issues, a performance improvement plan is developed and staff meet more frequently with their supervisor, and a member of the quality assurance team observe interactions with clients and provides feedback that aligns with training staff receive on Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) and motivational interviewing.

Currently, job descriptions within the LA Probation Department do not reflect the values, mission, or vision of a Department whose main purpose is to further client well-being and reduce recidivism. Existing job descriptions instead emphasize the enforcement of law and public safety. In addition, the current MOU between the Department and AFSCME Local 685, the bargaining unit that represents DPOs—and the largest of the Department’s four bargaining units—includes a number of agreements that do not reflect best practices or put clients’ needs at the center of the LA Probation Department’s staffing practices. These include the inability to transfer staff to lateral positions that align with appropriate human resource allocation; the 56-hour work schedule for Local 685 staff working at juvenile camps; and, the requirement that all probation officers start their careers as youth correctional workers.

Hiring

RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation* indicated that hiring, promoting, and retaining POs should be based on merit, competitive oral and/or written examinations, and experiences demonstrably related to the skills required to perform the work, and that probation officers with the right education, skills, and experience are most likely to establish clear roles and expectations with clients, model pro-social and
supportive behaviors, and achieve the best client and community outcomes. Our review also highlighted that job descriptions should emphasize client well-being, principles of social and correctional case work, evidence-based supervision practices, and community engagement rather than law enforcement and public safety. Additionally, recruitment practices should target a wide range of qualified candidates, including ex-clients and others with lived experience in the criminal justice system, and background checks should balance liability concerns with the flexibility and timeliness required to successfully hire the most qualified candidates.

RDA’s LA Probation Department Assessment found that the Department faces many challenges with recruitment, starting with a lack of dedicated resources to define whom the Department should hire, clarify and align job descriptions with the mission and vision, and attract appropriately qualified candidates. The LA Probation Department loses qualified candidates due to an unnecessarily extensive background check process and a lengthy hiring process, as well as insufficient communication with job candidates during the process. Additionally, when the LA County Department of Human Resources evaluated the Probation Department’s recruiting and hiring practices, it recommended that the Department include and specifically target recruitment from military organizations as part of its recruiting strategies, since those individuals are more likely to pass the organization’s background investigation. This recommendation begs the question of whether the primary quality for an ideal probation officer is to pass a background test, or to possess certain characteristics that would lend themselves to performing the job well. Interviewees from all levels of the LA Probation Department, intersecting county agencies, and CBOs all voice similar concerns regarding the Department’s failure to identify the qualities of an ideal probation officer. Similarly, there is a shared sense that until the Department identifies who the ideal probation officer is, its recruitment efforts will remain unnecessarily unsuccessful.

Training

During our site visit to New York City, probation staff we spoke with expressed that, in accordance with best practice, all probation officers and clerical staff who interact with clients undergo a full 40-hour week of all-day trainings to meet state requirements, plus additional ongoing training continuing over several months. Probation staff in New York City receive training in motivational interviewing, community engagement, cultural competency, and trauma-informed care, as well as training focused on their key agency drivers that reflect the organization’s mission, vision, and values. While initial trainings that staff receive were described as valuable by probation staff in New York, they described the ongoing coaching they receive upon completion of mandatory training as the most important element of their training model. After officers receive training on developing case plans (called Individual Action Plans), for instance, they also receive subsequent field-based coaching where trainers go to each office for a week, with the first two days comprised of group training followed by three days of individual coaching.

“The hiring process has become so protracted that individuals who are skilled are not going to sit around twiddling their thumbs. They’re only going to wait so long and there are other [agencies] that are interested in them and then we end up losing people.”

- Department Staff
RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation* also highlighted that staff trainings should be formally evaluated to ensure fidelity, relevance, and quality. Moreover, in addition to conducting trainings, probation departments should also identify staff who are proficient in evidence-based practices and subject matter areas listed above; assign these staff to mentor and coach other staff in these methods; and, create an environment of appreciation and recognition of these staff.

Findings from our *LA Probation Department Assessment* indicate that staff achieve required training both when they join the Department and on an ongoing basis in LA County. However, while the LA Probation Department offers a wide range of ongoing training, more training and continuous coaching is needed both in technical functions, such as data systems and writing court reports, as well as in topics related to client wellbeing and supervision, such as mental health, trauma-informed care, and positive youth development. The absence of official transfer training programs (for staff transferred within the Department to different positions) often results in unofficial training from colleagues or supervisors, which takes them away from dedicated workloads and creates inconsistency across different facilities and offices as well.

**Client Service Delivery**

RDA’s *Review of Best Practices in Probation* highlights that probation departments across the country are under transformation and implementing new strategies and processes, including evidence-based practices and community partnerships. Simultaneously, they are placing increased emphasis on client well-being, rehabilitation, and youth development as a means for promoting public safety.

**Structured Decision Making**

One of the most important shifts in the way probation departments are working with individuals under community supervision has been the implementation of SDM—an evidence based, data-driven, research-based approach to inform how individuals are supervised in the justice system. When used across a department, SDM guides supervision intensity, response to compliance and violations, and youth dispositional recommendations. SDM is intended to create a more effective, consistent, and fair justice system, as well as facilitate greater efficiency and smarter resource allocation by directing more resources towards the highest risk clients who pose the greatest risk to public safety while reducing—or eliminating—contact with low risk individuals who do not need it.

Model probation agencies are using SDM to explicitly focus on harm reduction by supervising only those who need to be supervised, for only the amount of time they need to be under supervision, and by relying more on incentives like shortening probation terms for good behavior, rather than sanctions like revocation and incarceration. In New York City, SDM was implemented to guide supervision practices, make placement decisions for adjudicated youth, and reduce the actively supervised population to only those who can benefit from it. Probation officers utilize validated risk and needs assessment tools in order to identify the criminogenic risks and needs of individuals on Probation as well as inform their case planning efforts and supervision intensity. During our site visit we learned that risk scores also play a large role in the City’s SDM process that was rolled out within juvenile operations in 2012 to more effectively and fairly make placement decisions for adjudicated youth. Based on 2016 data provided by New York
City’s Department of Probation, the use of placement has been significantly reduced as a result of implementing SDM. In Maricopa County, low-risk cases do not report in person, and some low-risk cases go unsupervised (with conditions attached that they must successfully complete). Individuals can also earn time credit and early termination from probation. For each month in compliance with their case plan and community service hours, individuals receive twenty days credit (some populations are excluded from this policy, including individuals convicted for sex offenses). Additionally, if an individual is in compliance with the conditions of his/her case plan for a sustained period, the Maricopa County Probation Department will go back to court and seek termination of the case, and the judge grants termination in the vast majority of these cases.

Our Review of Best Practices in Probation highlights research reflecting the shifting juvenile justice paradigm acknowledging that youth should be diverted from formal processing to the greatest extent possible. Wayne County’s Juvenile Services Division is a great example highlighted in our Model Jurisdiction Report of a county relying largely on prevention and diversion programs to provide services for youth. Prevention programs in Wayne County eliminate court contact for at-risk youth altogether, while diversion programs provide court-involved youth an opportunity to stop further penetration into the juvenile system. Each year in Wayne County, thousands of cases that previously resulted in detentions, petition filings, and placements are now handled through referrals to Youth Assistance Programs, and recidivism has dropped from above 50% in 1999 (prior to implementing Youth Assistance Programs) to 16% during the 2013-2014 fiscal year.

Our assessment of the LA Probation Department found that while the Department is shifting its approach to focus more on client well-being and move toward the greater use of structured decision-making based on validated assessments and evidence-based practices, a lot of work is needed to fully implement these processes. Challenges with data systems and insufficient training in structured decision-making, assessments, and case management must be addressed to support a more systematic approach to client services in LA County.

Our LA Probation Department Assessment also found that too many low risk clients are currently supervised, including youth who are not court-involved but work with probation officers pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code § 236. This practice is contrary to a shifting juvenile justice paradigm, which recognizes that youth should be diverted from justice involvement to the greatest extent possible. Client relationships with probation officers in LA County also vary greatly based on the individual probation officer, and different probation officers—and different probation units—have very inconsistent approaches to working with clients. Some officers are clearly rooted in a positive development and social work approach, while others are much more concerned with compliance issues. Additionally, there are

“A lot of things are just given to us without quality training, so how can we provide quality work? And that’s probably why the LARRC is not being used the way it should be – people view it as just another thing to get done. [Managers] won’t answer how to explain this to our client or use the scores to inform or analyze the risk of the minor. We don’t use them at all.”

- Department Staff
not enough services funded to meet the needs of the client population, and accessing the services that are funded is challenging due to insufficient information about these services, geographic distribution of services that does not align with clients’ communities, and communication gaps within the LA Probation Department and between the Department and providers.

Community Partnerships

As a result of costs savings that resulted from the implementation of SDM and a decision not to actively supervise low risk cases in New York City, resources have been redistributed to support rehabilitative services, client well-being, and community partnership. During our site visit to New York we were able to visit two NeONs, community-based probation offices located in the communities where the largest numbers of youth and adult probation clients live, which were quintessential examples of a probation offices promoting client well-being and community partnership. To strengthen relationships with local community residents and organizations, a community planning steering committee that included a religious leader, local business owner, law enforcement representative, and formerly incarcerated individuals and their family members, was established to assess local needs across communities, identify the types of programs and services to bring into the community, develop and score RFPs, and assess the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

The NeON we visited in the Bronx looked nothing like a traditional probation office; instead, the physical environment was consistent with what one would expect to see in a community resource center. The Bronx NeON was designed to be physically welcoming, and in order to create the beautiful space, New York City’s Department of Probation had to transform the office by removing bullet proof glass and rows of industrial chairs, painting walls, installing artwork, replacing waiting area chairs with colorfully-painted benches and tables, and building a small stage for performances and presentations, etc. At the Bronx NeON (as well as others) probation clients can check-in on computerized kiosks, meet in-person with their POs, and access services and programs through extensive partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies. The NeON offers a broad suite of on-site services to meet basic needs as well as education, employment, art (NeON Arts), mentoring (Arches Transformative Mentoring), mental health, substance abuse services, and even a food pantry, run by a former client.

Our LA Probation Department Assessment found that the LA Probation Department has strong partnerships with some county departments and public agencies to support client service delivery, including extensive collaboration with the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR), Department of Mental Health, and the LA County Office of Education to support youth in custody and a strong partnership with ODR. However, there is much work ahead to develop a full system of care. While the Department has strong relationships with these departments, this is contrasted by very poor relationships overall with CBOs, and a mutual distrust of one another. Despite wanting more services for their clients, many DPOs express very little confidence in the efficacy or quality of CBO services. Conversely, many CBO staff convey limited confidence that DPOs are committed to client wellbeing. Though recent changes have created improvements, CBO leadership express great frustration with a lengthy contracting process and arduous monitoring process. Until recently the Department did not take advantage of processes used by other departments to expedite funding for services, such as master service agreements or partnerships with
foundations. This contributed to an oft-repeated concern among community members that Probation does not hold the well-being of individuals under community supervision as a priority.

Facilities

To the greatest extent possible, probation departments should minimize the number of youth placed in juvenile facilities, work to divert youth from pre-adjudication detention, and minimize post-adjudication out-of-home placements. If youth are incarcerated, they should remain in the communities where they live (or near where they live) so that they remain close to their prosocial supports and their lives are interrupted to the least extent possible. At a minimum, facilities they are detained/placed in should be clean and safe and offer youth appropriate living conditions. Facilities should not look like jails; instead they should be developmentally-appropriate environments conducive to the rehabilitative goals of the probation department.

Location

RDA’s Review of Best Practices in Probation highlights that juvenile facilities should be located in close proximity to youths’ prosocial supports (parents, other supportive family members, and mentors) in order to ensure ongoing connection to positive social influences during confinement. As described in our Model Jurisdiction Report, this was the key goal of NYC’s Close to Home Initiative. Previously, young people who had been adjudicated as juvenile delinquents were placed in facilities hundreds of miles away, where it was difficult for them to visit with their families, remain connected to their communities, or earn school credits. Under Close to Home, young people are placed in or near the five boroughs, close to an array of resources that can support their rehabilitation and their safe re-integration into local communities in facilities no larger than 20-beds.

RDA’s LA Probation Department Assessment found that while a majority of the County’s juvenile halls are located in the county’s urban core and in the western part near Sylmar, the majority of camps are located on the outer edges in less populated areas. This means that adjudicated youth who are likely to spend longer periods of time in custody than youth in juvenile hall are, contrary to best practice, not likely to be in close proximity to their prosocial supports while they are confined.

Juvenile Detention and Placement Facilities

RDA’s Review of Best Practices in Probation suggests that to the greatest extent possible, all juvenile facilities should be designed after the Missouri model, a model associated with substantially lower recidivism rates compared to conventional juvenile custody practices. Our review of jurisdictions implementing best practices found that New York City’s Leake & Watts Non-Secure Placement Program, Washington D.C.’s New Beginnings Youth Development Center, and Santa Clara County’s Williams F. James Boys’ Enhanced Ranch Program (launched during the tenure of Assistant Chief Sheila Mitchell) each integrated components of the Missouri model to the greatest extent possible.

The Missouri model is characterized by a homelike and non-correctional physical environment with programming and trauma informed staffing inside the facility, as well as parent-family engagement.
bridging the facility and the community. As is the case at New York City’s Leake & Watts Non-Secure Placement Program, and Santa Clara County’s Williams F. James Boys’ Enhanced Ranch Program, the physical environment of juvenile facilities should include carpeted, warmly appointed dorm rooms containing 10-12 beds, with a dresser and closet space for each youth; pods containing living rooms, couches, and coffee tables; and, policies that allow youth to dress in their own clothes rather than uniforms, have time for recreational activities, and keep personal mementos in their rooms. All treatment and developmental programming should be trauma-informed; delivered by well-trained, well-supervised, and well-supported staff; and address prosocial skill development, academic or vocational instruction, work readiness, and work experience.

RDA’s Review of Best Practices in Probation also found that youth should receive continuous case management and a continuum of services to address identified needs, including but not limited to education, medical care, mental health treatment, translation services, and access to religious services, as needed and required by law. Additionally, all institutional staff, including educators, should implement positive behavior supports by establishing 3-5 clear behavior expectations that are positively stated (e.g., “everyone treats everyone else with respect,” or “we all support each other to be our best selves”); consistently teaching and modeling these behavior expectations; formally, regularly, and positively acknowledging youth when they display desired behavioral expectations and engage in established routines; and, forming and sustaining supportive rather than coercive relationships with youth. Finally, institutional staff should create a safe environment by providing sufficient staffing and supervision, as well as safeguarding against triggers that are likely to result in conflicts, violence, and injury.

RDA’s visits to LA Probation institutions revealed that there is wide variation in the physical infrastructure of different juvenile facilities as well as in the programs and services available. Juvenile halls, in particular, are run down, and in some cases, beyond repair and a danger to youth, while many halls and camps are organized in barracks styles that are not consistent with best practice. Youth speak of punitive environments characterized by “prison-like” conditions in many county facilities, and staff in many facilities report very low morale, which impedes their ability to work effectively with young people. The recent opening of Campus Kilpatrick is an indicator of the LA Probation Department’s interest in improving the layout, approach, and services in its juvenile facilities, and the camp closure plan also indicates a commitment to shifting resources to community-based services. Nonetheless, the County of Los Angeles has a long way to go if they are to become aligned with best practice across the County.

**Fiscal Operations**

While there are not identified best practices for fiscal operations in probation, there is an emerging body of research identifying participatory management approaches as best practice, as well as other promising
practices that inform how probation departments can circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to establish community partnerships.

**Participatory Management Approaches**

RDA’s *Model Jurisdiction Report* describes a participatory management framework as best practice where staff has more opportunities to partake in decision-making that relates to their own work and working conditions. Reinventing government under a participatory management framework means envisioning new roles for public sector leaders to include:

1. Developing a clear vision;
2. Creating a team environment;
3. Empowering and communicating with employees;
4. Putting clients first;
5. Cutting red tape; and
6. Creating clear accountability.

Our review of participatory management approaches to fiscal management suggests that implementing these practices can transform the culture of probation to be more inclusive of staff in decision-making processes, helping to reduce employee stress, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing turnover.

RDA’s *LA Probation Department Assessment* found that the LA Probation Department does not take a participatory management approach, and that while its budget has grown by $75 million between 2012/13 and 2015/16, several grant-specific fund balances have increased dramatically within that timeframe because money is not making it into the community. The LA Probation Department’s Financial Services Division is comprised of separate teams for Budget, Fiscal, and Procurement, and the Contracts Section is within the separate Contracts and Grants Management Division. The inability to draw down certain funds appears to be at least in part due to limited collaboration between the functions within the Fiscal Service Division, as well as siloes between Fiscal Services functions, program or operational divisions, and the Contracts and Grants Management Division. While each section or team demonstrates ownership and pride over their “piece” in the process, line-level staff express that fiscal operations are “opaque” and inaccessible to them. Fiscal Management and Contracts and Grants Management report directly to the Administrative Deputy, and while these teams’ leaders attend monthly manager meetings to establish clearer lines of communication, this information sharing is not adequately filtering down to mid-level managers or line staff. While there is strong communication within and management of each of these fiscal units, greater collaboration across units would support better integration of their operations. In addition, while fiscal and budget staff offer birds-eye-view reporting across juvenile, adult, and administrative operations, neither one delivers program-specific reporting to individual operations within adult and juvenile services, and staff lack opportunities to partake in decision-making that relates to their work.
Community Partnerships

RDA identified a range of practices employed by various jurisdictions as means of more effectively partnering with the communities they serve and presented them in some depth in our *Model Jurisdiction Report*. These practices demonstrate that solution-oriented strategies help jurisdictions circumvent bureaucratic requirements and realize their goals and objectives. One strategy we identified is to develop agency-to-agency partnerships. Public-private partnerships can also provide an effective means for reducing barriers in contracting and procurement processes, although they are more difficult to approach and take political buy-in and leadership to achieve. Another way to formally partner with the private sector is through master contracting with a CBO that can more easily distribute funds to the community or subcontract to other CBOs. Formal and informal initiatives should be taken before and after an RFP is issued to promote community partnerships and encourage CBOs to participate in the bidding process.

Our assessment of LA County Probation’s fiscal practices demonstrate that the separation of budgeting, procurement, contracting, fiscal management, and other administrative functions inhibit their ability to effectively communicate critical budget information to operational staff or contract for services in the community. Program requests to Budget, Procurement, or Contracts filter up through the chain of command rather than through inclusive and transparent conversations with executive decision-makers. Program directors that are responsible for implementing client-based services, for example, often do not have updated information from the Budget Section, and cannot, therefore, make informed decisions about what services to request through the Contracts Section.

There is a wide communication gap between program operations and Contracts, and no effective processes by which fiscal functions collaborate on the back end to deliver client-oriented administrative services. As a result, significant administrative delays and bottlenecks prevent Probation from getting allocated community funds into service contracts. Firewalls between each fiscal area create an environment of dysfunction and bureaucratic loops for employees from every corner of probation, and the LA Probation Department has significant work ahead to develop authentic community partnerships with CBOs across the County.

While budgeting for a large public agency that draws on net county costs, dedicated revenue streams for specific programs or populations, one-time growth funding, etc. is inherently complicated, this should not preclude efforts for greater communication and transparency about fiscal processes and decision-making. How funds flow throughout the Department should be information that is used as the basis for vertically integrated work sessions surrounding either budget planning, quarterly budget review meetings, or other venue for sharing information about the Department’s use of public funds.

“If they want to work on authentic partnerships, they have to get out of the comfort zone, become visible, and create spaces in the community for conversations with CBOs. These are the CBOs’ and the community’s kids, and they want the best for them. They want a voice in how their youth are being served.”

- Community Partner
Full Set of Recommendations

Organizational Structure

1. Re-organize into an agency model with centralized administrative functions that support separate juvenile and adult client service operations.
   a. Re-organize all client service operations under separate juvenile and adult divisions, allowing for specialized training and approaches within each division.
   b. Organize all juvenile field services and separately all adult services within regions and re-assign human and fiscal resources to regions based on client populations.

2. Centralize and strengthen administrative functions to support service delivery by:
   a. Establishing a data and research unit, creating a recruitment unit within Human Resources, and integrating and centralizing fiscal functions.
   b. Investing in improved data collection systems and processes.

Mission, Vision, and Values

3. Create and publish a client-focused, forward-thinking, mission, vision, and values statement for the LA Probation Department.
   a. Take the interim step of adapting the mission, vision, and values of a model jurisdiction to create a shorter time frame to secondary steps.
   b. Initiate a collaborative process including the Board, staff community, and key stakeholders to develop a new mission, vision, and values statement.
   c. Embed the resulting mission and vision into operations and processes in all documents and communicated messages.

4. Align structures, processes, and protocols with mission and values. In alignment with mission and vision:
   a. Update and/or revise administrative documents and materials such as:
      i. Website
      ii. Job descriptions and recruitment materials
      iii. Performance evaluations
      iv. Data collection plans
      v. Requests for Proposals and evaluation efforts
      vi. Procurement evaluation criteria
      vii. Staff trainings and their supervised results
   b. Assess operations and service delivery to:
      i. Redefine the job of the PO to focus on rehabilitation and referrals
      ii. Ensure least restrictive placements are consistent with public safety and youth development.
      iii. Expand community services and supports for individuals on probation
   c. Revisit administrative and fiscal functions and accountability structures to:
      i. Expedite disbursements of funds into the community
ii. Be responsible stewards of public funds by reinvesting funds saved from reduced Probation populations into community services.

5. Implement accountability plan tied to data-driven performance management structure throughout the Department to reflect the refined mission and vision.
   a. Implement performance measures for department, divisions, and units in alignment with the refined mission and vision
   b. Develop timelines, processes, and structures
   c. Identification of responsible parties for ensuring acceptable attainment of performance measures and accountability
   d. Communicate with frequency and transparency regarding each step. This includes the following:
      i. Hold regular accountability meetings to review measures and outcomes
      ii. Submit key performance metrics to Board of Supervisors at regular intervals
      iii. Develop quality assurance/monitoring policies for all assessment tools and structured decision-making processes including checking overrides and assessing for racial disparities
      iv. Ensure staff use validated tools by integrating into performance measure criteria

Community Partnership

6. Facilitate a planning process that engages residents and institutions in communities with large numbers of probation clients in order to align with local service delivery system with the needs and resources in these communities. This includes site design and service planning.

7. Increase Department’s ability to contract with local organizations by providing training and technical assistance to CBOs who serve the client population and establish a community capacity-building fund.

8. Expand and improve community services via a planning process that works with residents and institutions in areas with large numbers of probation clients. This includes:
   a. Expand AB 109 service access so that these services are available to all adults on probation
   b. Continue and expand efforts to disburse funds via master service agreements and partnerships with foundations
   c. Redefine the job of both juvenile and adult probation officers so that their main responsibility is to directly connect clients to needed services, supports, and opportunities supporting positive change

9. Develop community-oriented probation field offices akin to NeON by:
   a. Identifying the best geographic locations within each region based on
      i. Probation population density
      ii. Transportation opportunities
      iii. Consultation with community stakeholders
   b. Renovating existing field offices to create community-orientated probation offices that reflect input of the communities and the Department’s commitment to rehabilitation.
c. Identifying opportunities to co-locate neighborhood-based probation sites at other CBOs, non-profits, or community centers and train staff to work alongside community partners.

Structured Decision Making

10. Implement structured decision-making throughout the LA probation Department beginning with the implementation of the juvenile dispositional matrix.
   a. This will require elimination of the pre-plea report and implementation of a post-adjudication risk assessment.

11. Adopt risk-based supervision based on validated risk assessment tools, and graduated responses to compliance and violations.

12. Incorporate tools into electronic client data management systems and their use should be built into DPO training and job descriptions.
   a. Incorporate risk tools and SDMs into Department’s improved data system to create a dashboard that managers can easily view to assure staff are adhering to the tools and not over-supervising or over-incarcerating.
   b. Limit DPO’s ability to override the recommendations of tools.
   c. Require supervisors to review and approve most overrides and all recommendations for returns to custody for supervision violations.

13. Reduce contact with low risk clients and clients who are demonstrating success in complying with their supervision terms.
   a. End probation services to at risk youth currently serviced via WIC §236
   b. Do not actively supervise any juvenile or adult clients assessed as low risk

14. Reduce supervision terms for successful youth and adult clients by:
   a. Stepping down supervision active to banked caseloads after a year of compliance and achievement of case plan goals
   b. Working with the Court to establish criteria for early termination

Juvenile Facilities

15. Continue making progress towards aligning the Department’s approach to juvenile facilities with established best practices by shutting down older facilities and replacing them with small home-like locations within communities where most of the population lives.

16. Continue to reduce the number of youth that are placed in facilities and develop alternatives set in communities including smaller rehabilitation-based home models.

17. Work with the CEO’s Master Planning Unit to completely overhaul Central Juvenile Hall (CJH) by:
   a. Shutting down sections unfit for housing young people or temporarily close CJH
   b. Temporarily transfer youth to another facility such as Barry J. Nidorf and Los Padrinos Juvenile Halls while CJH is completely renovated.
   c. Renovating the facility to create a humane and therapeutic environment.
   d. Consideration of the other two juvenile halls after completion of renovation.

18. Improve juvenile programming, services, and education inside juvenile halls by:
a. Transitioning each remaining camp into a small, home-like campus that has education and rehabilitation as its focus, modeling after Missouri’s successful juvenile system.
b. Strengthening incentive-based behavior management systems for youth and reward facility managers and unit supervisors who can reduce critical incidents and increase school attendance.

Staffing, Hiring, Training

19. Align staffing, hiring, and training with revised mission, organizational structure, and approach.

20. Improve recruitment and hiring practices necessary to attract and hire high quality candidates by:
   a. Establishing a recruitment unit to lead recruitment efforts and coordinate with HR and background investigations to ensure consistent communication
   b. Revising job descriptions to focus more explicitly on client services and evidence-based practices, as well as to highlight the importance of skills such as communication and use of data
   c. Establishing MOUs with local colleges and universities that allow social work, human services, and/or criminal justice programs to create probation field placements for students that will create a pipeline of candidates
   d. Reevaluate the background check process, including eliminating credit checks and revising policies prohibiting prior justice system involvement

21. Renegotiate agreement with AFSCME 685 to address staffing, hiring, and training issues including:
   a. Restoring the Department’s ability to transfer staff to lateral positions to meet the needs of the Department and its clients
   b. Eliminating the 56-hour work schedule at juvenile camps
   c. Making changes to the DSP/DPO hierarchy and process so that staff who excel in working in juvenile facilities can be promoted in that role while staff who are better suited to community-based work do not have to start in juvenile halls
   d. Allowing the Department to promote the most qualified candidate within a Civil Service band instead of mandating the promotion of the most senior person

22. Establish a more robust performance management system that evaluates and promotes staff based on clearly defined metrics tied to its mission.

23. Commission a workload study to determine staffing needs and support the most appropriate distribution of staff across units and divisions.

24. Make additional changes in its approach to and provision of training. These includes:
   a. Establishing policies that require staff to receive training in new functions prior to starting a new position
   b. Developing a training institute similar to the Inter-University Consortium at the LA County Department of Children and Family Services
   c. Establishing a leadership institute to continue to develop senior and middle management
   d. Increasing the number of trainings in client well-being topics such as trauma informed care and positive youth development and in technical functions such as data entry and interpretation
Data/IT

25. Prioritize investments in IT and data systems that can simplify the process of data extraction and provide real-time data via dashboards to assess key performance indicators on an ongoing process by:
   a. Investing in upgrading ISB-developed data systems, purchasing new data systems, and engaging in public-private partnerships to develop new data systems
   b. Examining what other counties and states are doing in relationship to partnering with large private sector companies to meet their IT and real time data needs

26. Establish a Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) with a minimum of 10-15 staff that can serve as a bridge between ISB staff and programs/operations staff. The REU can:
   a. Work with operations staff to help define the Department’s research, evaluation and reporting needs
   b. Work with ISB to ensure that data systems and reporting align with these needs
   c. Establish data collection processes and quality assurance (QA) processes
   d. Work with outside researchers, including contracted researchers and a local inter-university research consortium (IUC) to analyze program, unit, and system data based on the Department’s research and evaluation needs

27. Align REU unit with the Department’s data collection and reporting processes to research and evaluation needs. To do so, the REU should start by mapping current data systems and reporting to actual data and research needs. This would require two concurrent steps:
   a. Assess current data collection and analysis systems and processes by:
      i. Inventorying all data systems, including ISB operated systems, contracted systems, and “offline” data tracking tools developed by staff;
      ii. Assessing the quality of data entry in each system; and
      iii. Inventorying current reports produced by ISB and by individual units/divisions, including frequency of production, intended audience, and ease of attainment
   b. Identify unit-specific and Department-wide data and research needs by:
      i. Working with executive management to establish Department-level evaluation questions and data needs;
      ii. Working with each unit and division to establish evaluation questions and data needs; and
      iii. Identifying metrics for unit-specific and Department-wide evaluation questions and data needs

28. Establish an IUC to support the Department’s research and evaluation needs. To do so, the REU, in partnership with executive management should:
   c. Identify funding to support the initial development of an IUC and IUC analyses, and convening representatives from area universities with criminal/juvenile justice research centers.
   d. Identify a lead university, based on knowledge and capacity; establish a governance structure; and identify projects and research needs for which the IUC can partner with the Department.