FUNDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AS A PUBLIC SAFETY STRATEGY:

Innovations and Lessons Learned from the Manhattan District Attorney’s Criminal Justice Investment Initiative
INTRODUCTION

As state and local governments around the country seek to innovate in systems and communities to improve outcomes in criminal justice and public safety, partnerships between governments and other sectors—including nonprofit, for-profit, and philanthropy—are becoming more prevalent, and present a ripe testing ground for new ideas and solutions. Partnering across sectors is not a new idea; these types of partnerships have been an area of increasing interest and investment, particularly in the social services field, over the past 30 years. New partnerships have helped to build capacity and innovation in social services by pooling knowledge, generating novel ways to blend service approaches and ideas, and sharing resources across organizations. Partnering with organizations located in specific communities, moreover, can be an intentional strategy to strengthen those communities by providing resources, innovative service approaches, and links with for-profit and philanthropic entities that may provide longer-term sustainable support and connections.

Given the potential for innovation in the criminal justice field, and dividends for public safety in communities, the Manhattan District Attorney’s Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) made funding strategic partnerships across New York City’s nonprofit, government, and philanthropic sectors a key focus of its grant-making strategy. CJII sought to support not only cross-sector partnerships (across government and philanthropy), but also partnerships across its grantee community (e.g., criminal justice, social services, physical and mental health care, education, legal services), among agencies of various sizes, capacities, types, geography, and target populations. The aims from the beginning were: innovation in service delivery, closing gaps and reaching populations in need, and planning for sustainability. CJII sought to innovate and test new solutions, bringing together partners that might otherwise never have had the opportunity to work together, but whose combined approach would be new and greater than the sum of its parts. Seeing gaps in services, CJII sought to bring together service approaches that would more comprehensively reach people in need. Developing partnerships between government, nonprofit, and philanthropy, moreover, would build bridges toward sustainability of successful programs and investments. Growing new capacity and approaches through these partnerships served CJII’s ultimate goals of increasing public safety in New York’s communities, and developing progressive and constructive approaches to the administration of justice, for New York and the field more broadly.

This policy brief explores some of the partnership models created and supported by CJII across its grantee community, and early lessons learned about what is needed to ensure that these types of partnerships are successful, sustainable, and achieve maximum impact to serve their clients and promote public safety. While this brief gives a snapshot of the grantee partnerships piloted under CJII, interested readers are invited to reach out to CJII for a more in-depth exploration of this work, through conversations with Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG), the Manhattan DA’s Office, and grantee partners.

GENESIS OF CJII PARTNERSHIP APPROACH AND RATIONALE

In 2015, as an early step in the CJII strategic planning process, ISLG conducted research and an extensive listening tour, soliciting insight from more than 250 experts, including leaders from the nonprofit sector, government, philanthropy, and academia. This research informed CJII’s decision to implement an investment strategy that encouraged—and in some cases required—partnerships across its grantee community. ISLG heard repeatedly in its research that providers often work in isolation from one another and could benefit from strategies to share knowledge and coordinate service delivery. Moreover, New York City is resource rich, but service providers often operate in siloes, disconnected from one another’s work, resulting in some cases in unintended overlaps in services, and, in other cases, gaps that can render services—and people’s experiences of them—fragmented. Given these siloes, groups such as social service organizations, schools, hospitals, academic institutions, and social enterprises may be unaware of one another, and do not often leverage each other’s expertises, capacity, reach, and funding, resulting in fewer coordinated services and significant missed opportunities for innovation in serving the people who need them.

To facilitate purposeful collaboration among its grantees, CJII incentivized the development of thoughtful, innovative partnerships in its funding solicitations, and built structure and ongoing support for these partnerships into its grant requirements and oversight approach, including structured planning and pilot periods, identification of training and technical assistance (TTA) needs, ongoing monitoring, and responsive provision of TTA from multiple, diverse service providers, including key substantive experts and nonprofit management and finance experts. In addition, CJII aimed to be intentional in funding partnerships and connecting the grantee community to philanthropy and government agencies to assist in building a promising path toward sustainable programs once the approaches were tested by CJII and demonstrated promise or success.

Over the course of its four years of investments, CJII has prioritized the development of many different forms of partnership across its grantee community to test new social services approaches that would prevent crime, promote safety in communities, and reduce justice system involvement. Indeed, CJII viewed the testing of these partnership models as a distinctly important piece of the Initiative’s innovation and contribution to the field. In the next section, for greater insight into the types of partnerships created and supported by CJII, we describe four of CJII’s promising grantee partnership approaches.
CJII GRANTEE PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLES

CJII deliberately chose to fund partnerships across its initiatives that are diverse in size, scope, and structure, depending on the goals of the initiative and its target population(s). Some smaller- to medium-sized partnerships link two or three large entities across typically siloed industries (for example, health, education, and/or legal). Other, larger initiatives, such as CJII’s signature “Youth Opportunity Hubs” initiative (described below), unite many community-based and grassroots organizations of varying sizes and capacities. The four partnerships illustrated here represent a few of the innovative partnerships supported by CJII to improve social services delivery and public safety in communities impacted by violence.

Youth Opportunity Hubs: Youth Opportunity Hubs (“Hubs”) are the largest single investment under CJII, with $45.9M invested to date, representing the CJII initiative with the most ambitious and far-reaching partnership approach. Through a multi-agency, “hub and spoke” partnership model, each of five neighborhood-based Hubs are directed and coordinated by one “lead” nonprofit organization in the neighborhood—that is, an organization with the capacity to organize and oversee a large partnership—and include a number of “spoke” community-based organization partners (CBOs), including grassroots organizations. Hubs are intended to be “one-stop shops” for young people in their communities, providing holistic, wraparound support and opportunities for youth and young

“OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS ARE THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN/ COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IRVING MEDICAL CENTER’S UPTOWN HUB LOCATED IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND INWOOD. TOGETHER, WE OFFER PROGRAMS TO ENGAGE AND INSPIRE YOUNG PEOPLE TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION; IMPROVE THEIR MENTAL HEALTH; TAP INTO THEIR CREATIVITY; AND FIND JOBS.” —SHARON KIM, LMSW

PROGRAM MANAGER, UPTOWN HUB, NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN DIVISION OF COMMUNITY AND POPULATION HEALTH

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To prevent the involvement of adults in underserved neighborhoods across Manhattan in the criminal justice system, CJII funds more than 50 agencies providing diverse services to youth, including mentoring, education and training, life skills, trauma treatment, mental health and substance use services, and prosocial activities such as sports and arts.

To ensure a wide range of partners and encourage innovation in partnership models, CJII required lead applicants to apply together with a range of identified service partners, explaining the group’s coordinated service approach and how it would meet the specific needs of youth in the community. Although some of the initial partners have changed over time since the Hubs launched in late 2017, each Hub has maintained a core group of diverse agencies that have collaborated to implement and deliver the service model. Since inception, each of the neighborhood-based Hubs has represented a unique partnership model tailored to the resources and needs within its community, with adaptations made over time to further improve service delivery. The visual above depicts one of the five Hubs, the Uptown Hub, which is operated by NewYork-Presbyterian in Washington Heights and Inwood. The other Youth Opportunity Hubs funded by CJII are the East Harlem Youth Opportunity Hub (led by Union Settlement),...
the Living Redemption Youth Opportunity Hub in Central and West Harlem, the Lower East Side Youth Opportunity Hub (led by Henry Street Settlement), and a citywide Hub located at The Door.

**Medical-Legal Partnership:** The Medical-Legal Partnership marries two well-established entities that support young people and families but typically do not work together—a hospital and a legal services agency—to support special education students and their families. In this approach, the advocacy of a nonprofit legal services agency (the Legal Aid Society) is united with the trauma-informed, clinical interventions of a child and family-focused institute at a major hospital (Mt. Sinai Child and Family Institute) to support special education students and families in recognizing and advocating for student needs (the legal contribution), and addressing trauma associated with both their child’s disability and the challenges they have experienced as a family navigating the system (the hospital contribution). Families typically come to the program when they are experiencing challenges accessing needed services through the city’s special educational system. The Medical-Legal Partnership gives the hospital a clear path to connect families directly to expert education law attorneys, who provide families with legal screenings and work with social workers to develop educational advocacy plans. Through the legal services agency, parents gain a greater understanding of their children’s education rights, as well as how to navigate the educational system. Through the hospital, parents increase their personal capacity to advocate for their children and reduce feelings of isolation, stigma, and anxiety related to their child’s disability. Together, in the Medical-Legal Partnership, the service providers work together (often in the same building) to improve youth learning environments and educational outcomes, parent/child relationships, and other positive outcomes for families.

**The Family and School Partnership Program:**

The Family and School Partnership Program is a large-scale collaboration between a major hospital (New York-Presbyterian) and 13 New York City public schools in Washington Heights and Harlem to provide trauma-informed and evidence-based interventions to schools, and to families with children affected by mental health and learning disabilities. Under this approach, a full-time mental health clinician is based in each of the schools to provide both preventative and targeted mental health services. These clinicians: 1) train school personnel in interventions related to addressing trauma, mental health, learning disabilities, and classroom behavior; 2) improve identification and assessment of learning disabilities; 3) lead community workshops on parenting, trauma and stress, health, learning disabilities, and mental health; and 4) provide direct, in-home and in-school clinical services to address trauma and other mental health needs among families and children. Through this partnership between a well-resourced health care provider and individual schools, pressing student and family mental health needs that might otherwise have gone overlooked or unaddressed in school are identified and addressed in a targeted, comprehensive way.
Health Justice Network (NYC HJN):
The New York City Health Justice Network is an innovative partnership between seven entities—the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (lead entity), three primary care clinics, and three community-based reentry service providers—to improve the health and wellbeing of people returning home from jail or prison to Northern Manhattan. In an area of the criminal justice process—reentry from incarceration—that is often plagued by unavailable, fragmented services, NYC HJN aims to bring together services known to support successful reentry (including health care, housing, transportation, and employment services), increase people’s access to and engagement in services, and improve the quality of the services delivered. In particular, NYC HJN aims to address the challenge that formerly incarcerated people often struggle to connect with primary health care that is comprehensive and culturally competent; this is particularly problematic because people exiting jail and prison have a disproportionately high rate of chronic health conditions (such as high blood pressure and diabetes).

To engage the hard-to-reach target population of people released from jail or prison, and connect them with much needed primary health care services, the NYC HJN model employs community health workers who are credible messengers with “lived experience” of the justice system—that is, people who were formerly involved with the justice system and have transformed their lives—as patient advocates, to increase engagement among participants, support participants in navigating primary health care and other reentry support services, and retain participants in these services. The program also trains primary health care clinics to approach participants with more sensitivity, and partners with reentry organizations to ensure linkages to culturally competent health care. The innovations of using trauma-informed services, a credible messenger approach to engage participants, and marrying often disconnected, essential services for people reentering the community from jail or prison are direct outgrowths of the partnership model, which brings service providers together in one coordinated and responsive package.
LESSONS LEARNED

Through the partnerships described above, and others being implemented and tested under CJII, the Initiative has learned several lessons that should be useful for funders across sectors (government, philanthropy, and for-profit), non-profit and community-based practitioners, researchers, and others that are interested in developing innovative partnerships that have the potential to create new service approaches and outcomes in the fields of social service delivery, public safety, and criminal justice reform. These lessons learned are described below. We offer these lessons as guidelines to those newer to developing partnerships who are seeking help and direction.

If particular types of partnerships are of interest to a funder, those should be incentivized.

If a funder wants to create partnerships between social service providers (e.g., of different types or sizes), it should require candidates for funding to build those types of partnerships into their requests for funding. Applicants for funding should be required to name partners, and explain the role of each partner, and how the partnership will work together to create a new approach and desired outcomes. Including financial incentives is an effective strategy for motivating organizations to create and present innovative partnerships, and to utilize partners as part of their core service model. While only some CJII initiatives have required partnerships, the Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for all CJII initiatives have encouraged the formation of partnerships among applicants where relevant to the proposed program or service.

To define partner roles and responsibilities clearly, up front, it helps to work with partners to create contracts and sub-contracts with detailed scopes of work. From the beginning of a partnership and proposal development process, it is important that all partners understand the proposed partnership model, each of their roles, and how those roles will work together to serve the goals and objectives of the partnership, as well as how the partnership will function operationally, how and when payments will flow, etc. Once the partnership is funded, it is important to concretize it with a clearly written contract that includes a detailed scope of services for each partner that defines the work to be done, within the understood limits of each contractor and subcontractor’s capacity. The scope of services should describe in detail the services, staffing, number of referrals to be provided or clients served by each partner, and payment structure. It is important for lead entities to craft detailed subcontracts with their subcontracting partner grantees. To this end, CJII negotiated detailed scopes of work with all of its grantees as part of the contracting process, and assisted lead entities in developing subcontracts with all partners, including clear scopes of work and payment structures. This technical assistance from CJII was helpful in filling a common gap associated with the formation of new partnerships among
nonprofit organizations—that is, the absence of in-house legal counsel to assist entities with negotiation and subcontracting. CJII provided a subcontract template to lead entities, which streamlined the process on both ends—making it easier for lead entities to draft their subcontracts, and for the DA’s office to review and approve them. Lead contractors should establish with due diligence the capacity of subcontractors before finalizing scopes of services and executing contracts. Partnerships undertaken without defining clear roles and responsibilities, and without contracts and subcontracts documenting those roles, can result in unreasonable expectations, confusion, poorly executed services and gaps, and, in extreme cases, the end of a partnership. Further, those who will be involved in implementing the program ideally will be involved in defining the scope of work, so that the scope represents and is reflected later in organization and partnership practice.

When investing in partnerships with a lead entity, funders should assess the capacity of lead entities to serve not only their defined programmatic roles, but also their capacity to manage partners. Lead entities must be evaluated and selected both for their capacity to serve the defined programmatic role they have set out for clients, as well as for their experience with and capacity for managing partners. The success of the partnership will hinge not only on the ability of each partner to show up and contribute its role, but also on the capacity of the lead entity to administer and support the whole and its parts—both administratively and programmatically, in reaching a very defined service goal.

At the most basic level, lead grantees must have the capacity to manage money, and specifically, subcontracts to a number of partners. Selecting a lead organization that does not have capacity to manage a substantial influx and distribution of funding can cause catastrophic delayed payments for smaller subcontracted organizations, as well as
programmatic inefficiencies that result from such delays. To avoid fiscal challenges for grantees, funders should assess the administrative capacity of the organizations that will be responsible for administering subcontracts, and address any shortcomings that become evident. CJII supported lead entities when necessary with training and technical assistance (TTA) in fiscal capacity building (discussed further below). In other instances, CJII looked to fiscal sponsors to provide lead entities with financial management support and other administrative services they required.

To improve the effectiveness of partnerships, funders will also want to ensure that lead organizations know how to conceptualize the programmatic roles of all partners, and steer all partners toward reaching the partnership’s designed service goal(s). Regular organization and communications among partners—for example, monthly, structured meetings and ongoing reports—are key tools to ensuring that the partnership and all its contributors are on the same page, doing their parts, and moving forward. In some cases, lead entities may recognize that they need additional assistance or structure to support their partners. For example, one CJII Hub lead entity hired a partnership coordinator over time to manage the Hub’s large number of partners. CJII has also provided TTA to lead organizations in the areas of partnership coordination and management.

**Partnerships take time to build.** It is important for funders to be aware ahead of time that it takes time to plan, organize, and build effective partnerships. If an organization has no history or culture of partnerships, they will need a longer lead-time to learn how to build partners into their model, how to work with partners, and how to navigate hiccups to create a cohesive partnership.

To account for the need for planning, CJII
designed a 3-part rollout for many of its initiatives, including a planning phase (typically 3–6 months) and pilot period (typically 9 months), followed by implementation (typically 3 years). At each phase, CJII built in regular check-in meetings at key intervals, to track planning, pilot, and implementation objectives and to review key benchmarks of the partnership, such as hiring/staffing, subcontracting, referrals, development and rollout of programmatic elements, and regular, ongoing meetings of the partnership.

**Flexibility and adaptability are important when implementing new partnerships.** As partnerships move from planning into pilot and/or implementation, and have an opportunity to test their planned approach in practice, it is important both for partnership entities themselves and for funders to be flexible and adaptable to circumstances and needs as they arise. Thorough, careful planning and laying out a detailed scope of work are important to set everyone out on the same page in terms of the partnership’s plan, roles, and goals, but once a partnership becomes operational and begins serving clients, lessons will be learned about what works both in terms of how the partnership is structured, and how agencies work together with one another, and inherently, there will be needs to adapt the model for greatest efficiency and effectiveness.

Among partners, regular communications will be critical to understanding where the partnership is working and where adjustments may need to be made. This may relate to staffing changes at one or another agency, hours, referral processes, client services, and other areas of partner collaboration in service of clients. Funders, likewise, do well to stay in regular communication with grantees, understand needs as they come up, and meet their partnerships with an understanding of each partner’s posture and circumstances, offering flexibility in terms of staffing changes needed, budget modifications, timeline shifts, etc. This flexibility allows partner organizations and funders to learn from their work, and to incorporate lessons learned from implementation into the partnership approach in real time, all with the goal of improving service delivery and effectiveness of the partnership in practice.
Funders should invest in training and technical assistance (TTA), and plan early for sustainability to build strong, effective, and enduring partnerships. Through the experience of creating and working with innovative grantee partnerships over time, CJII has learned the great value of offering support to individual organizations and partnerships, as needs arise, to build their capacity and promote success in achieving their goals.

To set its new partnerships up for success, CJII planned from the beginning to provide ongoing support to its grantees, and set funding aside to establish a TTA Consortium, a body of TTA providers to assist grantees in all aspects of work required for successful partnership and social services programming. Types of TTA available include assistance with issues related to basic organization and fiscal management, client referrals, and various areas of program theory and practice. From the proposal phase, CJII inquired of all of its applicants and grantees about their individual technical assistance needs—that is, where they would need support to ensure the success of their proposed work. Further, through ongoing grant oversight, performance measurement, and reporting, CJII monitored technical assistance needs over time, then worked with grantees to apply assistance from the TTA Consortium to meet needs as they arose. CJII also considered the sustainability of partnerships from the inception of each project, considering what public and/or private partners should be brought to the table early on or later in development. CJII developed individual sustainability plans for each partnership, connecting partner organizations with public and private funders, and (in some cases) funded external evaluations of grantee work. Taken together, this TTA, funder outreach, and evaluation work has put CJII’s many successful partnerships on a greater path to sustainability.

Data-driven partnership models must be supported by agreements to govern data sharing, and investment in data collection and management infrastructure among partners. Funders often want their partnerships to be data-driven—that is, supported by the collection and measurement of data to understand processes of implementation and impact. To create data-driven partnerships, CJII has learned that it is wise to invest time and resources up front in two ways—to develop integrated data
infrastructure among partners and to craft
detailed data-use agreements.

Where services are delivered through multi-
agency partnerships, systematic collection and
analysis of data can be complex, requiring
coordination and standardized practices across
agencies. This can be especially difficult for
smaller or newer grassroots organizations, which
often lack sophisticated data collection
technology, established data systems, and sound
data collection practices at the onset of funding.
Across CJII initiatives, especially among the Hubs,
lead grantees have found innovative ways to
support coordinated data collection among
partners, including by allowing subcontractors to
share access to their larger or more established
data systems, creating integrated case
management data systems among partners,
investing in data systems and infrastructure for
smaller, grassroots partners, and providing
training and other support to partners with limited
data capacity. CJII also provided funding for a
data manager at each lead entity and provided
TTA to partnerships to support performance
measurement. These investments allow for
smoother, more thorough data collection and
integration to support the partnership, measure
its work, and assess impact, which in turn can
improve partnership service delivery, and support
the partnership with sustainability planning.

In any partnership where client data is being
shared, concerns will emerge between partners
around what data will be shared, for what
purpose, and at what level of detail and client
anonymity, to ensure that any regulations
governing data sharing are met and clients’ data
are protected from unwarranted/impermissible
disclosure. Regulations governing the sharing of
data vary among organizations, and grantee
partnerships will benefit from addressing these
regulations by developing rules to govern data
sharing, to take into account protections for

DEVELOPING CLEAR AND SPECIFIC
DATA USE AGREEMENTS (DUAS)
AT THE START OF A PARTNERSHIP
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various categories of data. Partners may also
raise concerns about how data sharing may
negatively impact participants, particularly in
collaborations between community-based
organizations and system partners (government
agencies, large nonprofits, etc.). Organizations
may also be reluctant to share participants’
data even if regulations would allow it, for
instance, if they feel that clients should always
consent to the disclosure of their data,
regardless of its sensitivity.

Developing clear and specific data use
agreements (DUAs) at the start of a
partnership can ensure that all parties agree on
the reason for the disclosure, provide for
the necessary confidentiality of data, and lead to
more efficient data sharing among partners.
These agreements should commit to sharing only
the information necessary for the purposes laid
out in the DUA, such as to monitor the provision of
services (for ongoing performance measurement
and program improvement); and/or to evaluate
the program. Partners should be aware that
creating a thorough data-sharing agreement takes
some time, and legal counsel should be engaged
in the process as early as possible. As with the
subcontracting process among lead entities and
partners, CJII provided considerable TTA to
partners lacking in-house legal counsel by
creating DUA templates, and assisting partners in
drafting and finalizing these agreements.
NEXT STEPS

CJII has experienced success and gained a wealth of knowledge through its experience implementing diverse and innovative partnership models in the social services arena, which has helped it to strengthen its existing portfolio of investments and craft its most recent phase of grant-making, which includes support for the West Harlem Restoration and Reentry Project and the Center for Trauma Innovation, both of which involve lead entities subcontracting with several partners in a coordinated service delivery model. Over the next few years, several evaluations of CJII-funded programs will be released, and these evaluations will provide further rich and detailed information about the partnership structures and support systems piloted under CJII, lessons learned from this work, and how public and private funders, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community-based organizations can best leverage each others’ knowledge, skills, and partnership to together improve the administration of justice, provision of social services, and public safety in communities.

ABOUT CJII

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. established the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) in 2014 to invest $250 million seized in international financial crime prosecutions to strengthen and support communities in New York City. Guided by the principle of prevention as a cornerstone of a 21st century crime-fighting strategy, CJII invests in efforts that cut across systems to increase public safety and promote a fair and efficient justice system. CJII has invested in projects that address the overlapping identities of individuals, families, and communities impacted by poverty, trauma, and the criminal justice system. To date, CJII funds have supported more than 25,000 people across New York City and New York State through the initiative’s 50+ grantee programs. The Manhattan District Attorney’s Office selected the City University of New York Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) through a competitive process to serve as the technical assistance consultant on CJII. ISLG provides recommendations on investment strategies to the District Attorney's Office, manages the solicitation and contracting process, provides guidance and oversight to award recipients, and conducts performance measurement throughout the initiative. For more information about the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative, visit cjii.org.