

Out of a confluence of factors, an opportunity has emerged for Alameda County to reinvent its approach to serving children. Unprecedented and sustained calls to end law enforcement responses to health and social services needs have gripped the Nation as a whole, and Alameda County in particular. Statewide juvenile justice changes require the County to immediately assess and plan for a different model of intervention with respect to the most serious juvenile offenders. Major state and federal reforms to Medicaid, healthcare, child welfare, and children's behavioral health have brought about better models of practice and treatment. The best research in child and adolescent development has confirmed the need to abandon our punishment-based system. And, now, a dire financial crisis demands a reassessment of our unnecessarily costly system. Past efforts and planning make Alameda County well-positioned to take advantage of the current moment, and to build a new, community-based system of care for its children.

Well-regarded research on adolescent brain development, positive youth development and trauma have demonstrated the ways youth are physiologically and fundamentally different from adults and require different interventions. Adolescents are still neurologically and developmentally evolving in ways that are highly relevant to both culpability and capacity for growth and maturity. Acknowledgement of these differences has resulted in the understanding that punitive models of juvenile justice not only result in worsened outcomes, which runs counter to the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system, but also fail to make communities safer. Systems centered on healing and growth are essential for improving the well-being of young people.

Amidst widespread calls to meaningfully address rampant racial injustice, Alameda County has the potential and opportunity to transition away from a deeply flawed system of incarceration that disproportionately locks up young people of color and rebuild a new vision of youth justice and community safety. Research across the social science disciplines has shown time and time again the dangerous effects of incarceration on young people; and community-based alternatives and interventions across the United States and in the Bay Area have demonstrated significant potential as alternative models of accountability. Despite the fact that Alameda County sends few youth to the Division of Juvenile Justice, the state's recent decision to shift responsibility to the counties for this last remaining, state-supervised aspect of the juvenile justice system represents a prime opportunity for the County to reimagine a new model for serving youth based on principles of health, equity and community.

Additionally, the COVID-induced fiscal crisis increases the urgency of moving towards a system that does not fail our youth while simultaneously spending over half a million dollars on incarcerating each youth. Alameda County's DJJ population has fallen substantially in the past decade. Felony arrests fell by more than half from 2008 to 2018, and the Juvenile Hall population dropped by 65% over that same time period. Yet, the County has not meaningfully adapted existing interventions to respond to the changing landscape. Nor has the County realized any cost savings as a result of these major reductions in population as juvenile probation spending has continued to rise. Since the onset of the pandemic, the population in Juvenile Hall and Camp Sweeney has dropped by an additional 50% as a result of various strategies long advocated by the community. While these efforts were made in response to unprecedented circumstances, Alameda County can and should capitalize on this progress to aim for more expansive change that can outlive this moment.

Other counties, such as San Francisco County, Los Angeles County, and King County, WA, have responded in strong ways and can provide valuable blueprints as to how such a transition can occur. One key aspect of that transition process is convening a community-led task force/working group to inform how the County can move to a rehabilitative, health-focused and care-first system for young people. This step is absolutely critical to ensure a participatory process in which those who have been most impacted by the over-incarceration of our youth are able to meaningfully inform the recommendations for what a new system can look like.

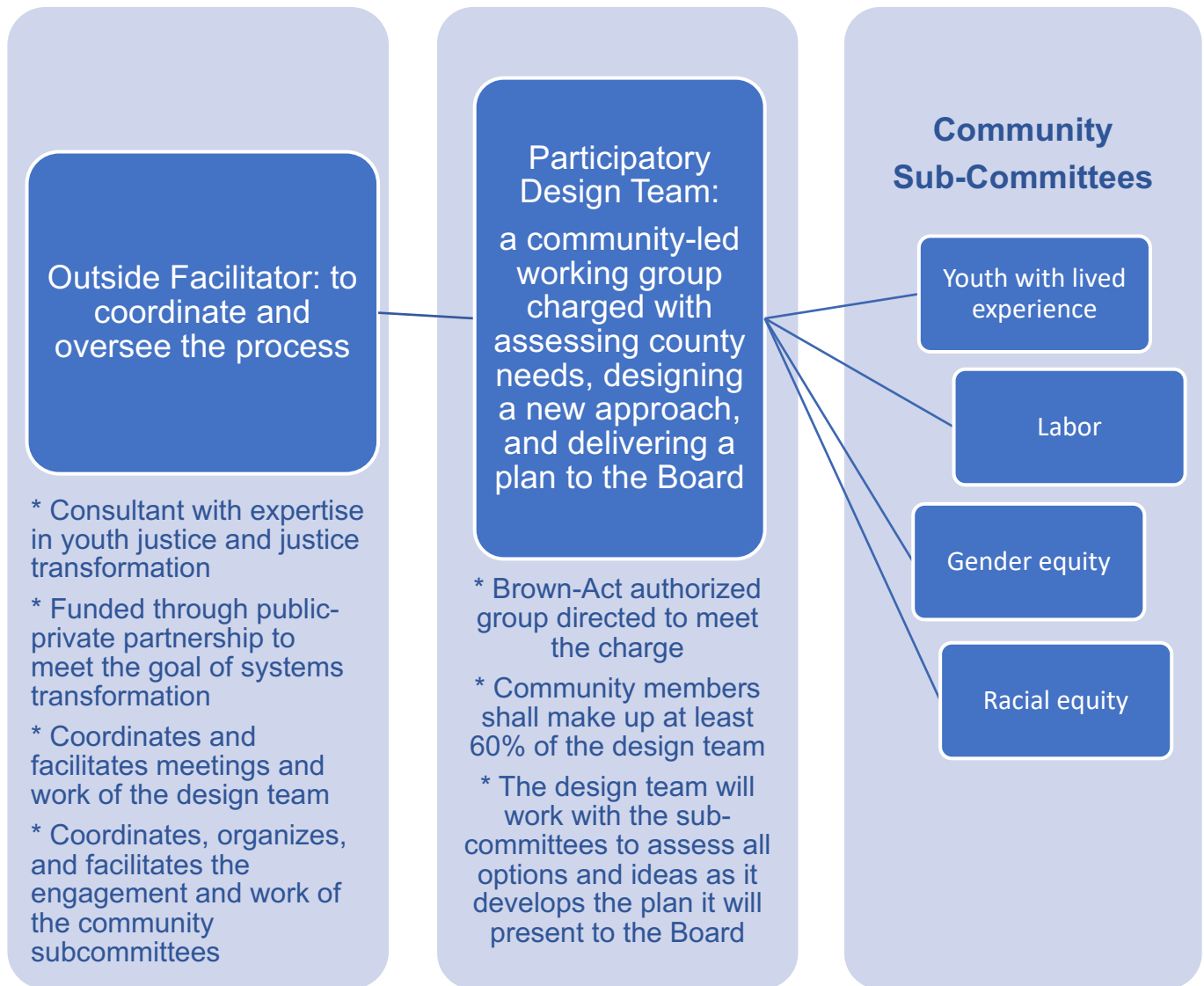
Charge / Scope of Working Group

Alameda County shall partner with directly-impacted youth and youth advocates to design and deliver a fiscally efficient and equitable plan that transitions the County away from a law enforcement response to children and that (1) builds the capacity of community based organizations to serve young people outside the current justice system; (2) results in a significant reduction in the number of young people who are in contact with the justice system; (3) explores a rehabilitative, health-focused, and care-first model of youth justice that is meaningfully different in operations and outcomes from the current system; and (4) prevents the prosecution and incarceration of children in the adult system.

Guiding Principles

- Detention, custody, removal from the home, along with all forms of punitive, institutionalized settings have a devastating impact on youth, their families, and their neighborhoods, and undermine the safety and health of both detained youth and their communities.
- Children, young adults, and the community at large are best served at home, or close to their homes, by community-based organizations they know and trust. Any form of out of home placement should focus on rehabilitation, healing, enhancing public safety, and restorative justice, and staffed with people with lived experience -- Credible Messengers -- trained in holistic, trauma-informed approaches to serving youth.
- Despite incremental reforms seeking to improve practices and facilities in Alameda County, the youth legal system continues to disproportionately harm youth of color at every stage. Analysis and recommendations for transformation must be grounded in historical context, racial and gender equity, and the recognition of intersectional oppressions.
- Community-led transformation is the best path toward a comprehensive system of community health and safety. People directly impacted by the legal system must have opportunities to lead, make decisions, and inform recommendations and policy proposals. At the same time, Alameda County must make intentional capacity building investments in community-based organizations rooted in neighborhoods directly impacted by the justice system to enhance their ability to support youth in and out of custody.
- Evidence and research showing that strategies of citation, arrest, detention, and incarceration decrease wellbeing and do not meet their goals of increasing safety in the long term, especially for young people, must guide understanding and mandates. Likewise, evidence and research showing that upstream investments in educational, mental health, and social service delivery prevent youth from entering the legal system must inform recommendations and planning.
- The harmful nexus of criminal justice involvement for low-income youth and families of color is well documented. The County shall avoid law enforcement responses to youth in crisis including but not limited to youth experiencing homelessness, mental health, and/or substance use disorders. Alameda County must commit to building our continuum of care rather than continue to rely on law enforcement as first responders and decision makers for its most socially marginalized youth and families.

Working Group Structure



Outside Facilitator

The outside facilitator will provide leadership, coordination and facilitation of the working group and process. The chosen facilitator will be responsible for scheduling and convening meetings of the participatory design team and coordinating the communication between the design team and the community sub-committees. The facilitator will also provide research, analysis and support to the design team and sub-committees. They will also be responsible for synthesizing and compiling the work of the design team and sub-committees and delivering the plan to the Board as directed by the design team.

Design Team

This will be a Brown-Act authorized working group convened to provide the Board of Supervisors with a new plan to serve youth in Alameda County. Community members shall make up at least 60% of the design team, where a “community member” is defined as an individual who is not and has not formerly

served as a law enforcement agent and who is not currently a government employee. Strategies and recommendations by the design team shall be informed by, and grounded in, additional feedback and engagement from subcommittees, focus groups, and listening sessions, which themselves shall be made up of constituent groups and/or experts/academics, and formed by the facilitator.

During Phase 1, community members in the design team shall include, at a minimum, the following:

1. System-involved youth (set minimum number proportional to district numbers of system-involved youth)
2. Parents or guardians of current or former justice-involved youth
3. Experts and/or academics with experience and expertise in youth mental health, adolescent brain development, youth justice, child welfare, civil legal services, public welfare programs, youth law, public financing and justice transformation, among other subject matters
4. Community-based advocates, including, for example, advocates in the following areas: education, housing, youth advocacy, mental health/disability rights, and juvenile justice
5. Community-based service providers, including, for example, service providers in the following sectors: housing, mentoring and life coaching, health, mental health, re-entry, employment, legal, case management, and social services
6. One director or representative from the following county agencies: behavioral health, public health, healthcare services, probation, and social services (children and family services)
7. Probation Chief of Research and Evaluation (or equivalent)
8. Public Defender or designee
9. District Attorney or designee
10. If the Court chooses to participate, the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court or the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court's designee

The makeup of the design team shall be re-evaluated before the start of Phase 2, and any changes to the composition of the membership at that time shall be made in light of the design team's findings and recommendations during Phase 1.

Community Sub-Committees

The community-sub committees shall be established to provide input, expertise, information, and other needed support to the design team. It shall include representative community subgroups including some of the examples listed in the above chart. The facilitator shall assist the design team to establish the necessary sub-committees and coordinate the sub-committee meetings and communication with the design team. The design team and facilitator shall consult with the sub-committees with respect to all major aspects of the proposed plan.

Timeline / Phases:



Phase 1
6-9 months

Community and Systems Needs Assessment

- Collection, review, and analysis of data (including but not limited to Alameda County statistics, policies, and budgets)
- High level recommendations to the Board of Supervisors based on the Working Group’s needs assessment



Phase 2
12-15 months

Planning and Design

- Specific recommendations and complete plan to redesign the youth justice system based on the needs assessment and in keeping with the guiding principles



Phase 3
Commencing within 2
years from start of phase 1

Implementation

- Full plan implementation according to recommendations and timelines set out during Planning and Design phase

Phase 1: Community and System Needs Assessment

During phase one the facilitator and the design team will conduct a complete assessment of the County's needs and resources. In conjunction with the sub-committees, the group will review data, policies, case-level needs assessments, community resources, service provider contracts, budgets, and other items it deems necessary. Along with the completed assessment, the working group will deliver a set of high level recommendations to be followed during phase two of the process.

Phase 2: Planning and Design

During phase two, the working group will develop and present a specific plan for a new youth services model to meet the charge. In creating the plan, the working group must remain focused on the guiding principles outline above.

Phase 3: Implementation

Following submission and approval of the plan, full implementation will occur in phase three. The time period and order of implementation will take place according to the recommendations of the working group as laid out in the phase two plan.

Working Group Funding

The Working Group shall be funded through public-private partnership. More specifically, Alameda County shall allocate funds and resources to the Working Group, with assistance from private foundations. The funds are to be used exclusively for the work of the Working Group, including but not limited to, facilitation, research, and community member participation. The County Administrator shall administer the funds and shall report annually to the Board of Supervisors on the current status of the funds, and the amounts approved for disbursement. Specifically, the County Administrator shall oversee payment to the Facilitator, and the Facilitator shall oversee specific disbursements to certain Working Group members.