



Sustaining Systems Change

Findings from a Transition from Jail to
Community Initiative Stakeholder Survey

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INTRODUCTION

For the last decade, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has sought to improve public safety by building community capacity to implement effective jail transition strategies through

THE TRANSITION FROM JAIL TO COMMUNITY (TJC) INITIATIVE

In 2007, the National Institute of Corrections partnered with the Urban Institute to launch the Transition from Jail to Community Initiative. The TJC Initiative seeks to improve public safety and to enhance the success of individuals returning to the community from local jails through implementation of an innovative, evidence-informed transition model developed by the NIC and Urban with input from seasoned practitioners and other experts in the field.

Between 2008 and 2015, the NIC/Urban national TJC team, which also included Alternative Solutions Associates, Inc., Corrections Partners, Inc., and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, provided intensive technical assistance to 14 communities to implement the TJC model. During Phase 1 (2008-2011), the national TJC team tested the TJC model in six learning communities: Davidson County, TN; Denver, CO; Douglas County, KS; Kent County, MI; La Crosse County, WI; and Orange County, CA. A process and systems change evaluation in the six Phase 1 sites found that TJC model implementation was associated with significant, positive systems change (Buck Willison et al. 2012).

During Phase 2 (2012-2015), six additional learning sites joined the TJC Initiative in September 2012, along with two California jurisdictions that received TJC technical assistance to assist them with managing the policy changes associated with Public Safety Realignment in that state. Phase 2 learning sites included: Ada County, ID; Franklin County, MA; Fresno County, CA; Hennepin County, MN; Howard County, MD; and Jacksonville, FL. Santa Barbara County and San Diego County comprised the two California realignment sites.

For more information on the TJC initiative and related publications, see

<http://nicic.gov/jailtransition> or <https://nicic.gov/transition-from-jail-to-community>.

the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative (see Box 1). Between 2008 and 2015, two cohorts of learning sites (six in Phase 1, which spanned 2008-2011 and eight in Phase 2, which spanned 2012-2015), comprising geographically diverse communities with different jail system structures and community contexts, received 36 months of intensive, targeted technical assistance (TA) from the Urban Institute (Urban) and its partners to implement the TJC model. Deeply committed to understanding the impact of TJC technical assistance and the sustainability of the TJC model, NIC engaged Urban to survey stakeholders across the eight Phase 2 learning sites about their respective communities' ongoing jail reentry efforts and achievements in the approximately 24 months after TJC TA concluded. The online survey also asked about the role TJC Phase 2 TA played in advancing each community's jail reentry work and solicited recommendations for improving TA provision.

Analyses reinforce earlier evaluation findings that TJC is a viable model for change and suggest there is a strong, positive legacy of NIC's TJC TA provision in these eight learning communities.¹ Specifically, sites report that core TJC practices not only remain in use, but many of these practices have also expanded in scope and scale, indicating a shift in operations and organizational culture.

Additionally, respondents credit TJC TA with helping their communities build highly functional collaborations between their jails, other criminal justice agencies and reentry stakeholders; establish or expand evidence-based practices and interventions; enhance foundational capacity to monitor and measure system performance; and reduce recidivism. This report delves into

¹ Urban, a key member of the TJC national team, administered this survey; what effect, if any, this dual role had on stakeholders' ratings is unclear. Another caveat is that stakeholders may be inclined to rate their own practices positively. However, the variation observed in sites' ratings, particularly around data and measurement practices, suggest that stakeholders answered objectively.

these and other findings from the TJC sustainability survey to examine the legacy and impact of technical assistance provision in these eight TJC learning communities.

THE TJC SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY

The TJC sustainability survey is a confidential, self-administered online survey consisting of three sections (Model Implementation and Operations; Impact of TJC TA; and Recommendations for TJC TA Improvements) and approximately 88 items. Respondents used a forced-choice response format to record their answers for most items; three open-ended questions, located at the end of the survey, allowed respondents to record their community's single, most significant TJC-related accomplishment, comment on the most beneficial aspects of TJC technical assistance, and recommend improvements for future TJC TA provision.

The survey defined sustainability as the extent to which the eight Phase 2 learning communities had retained or expanded core elements of the TJC model, specifically collaborative partnerships and key reentry practices and procedures such as screening and assessment, evidence-based programming and services, transition case planning, and post-release supports. To measure the capacity-building impact of TJC TA, respondents rated the effectiveness of their current reentry partnerships in collaborating on local jail reentry issues and preparing people in the jail for release to the community, and the perceived impact of TJC TA in advancing key elements of their community's reentry work.

Urban conducted the survey in August 2017, targeting 7-8 members of the TJC Phase 2 sites' core teams (i.e., the collaborative body charged with development, oversight and implementation of a site's jail transition work). These individuals were identified by reviewing each sites' TJC core team rosters and in collaboration with the sites' TJC coordinators. Fifty-one individuals² were invited to take the survey, of which 38 did so resulting in a 73 percent response rate. Site-specific response rates ranged from 63 percent to 100 percent. At least three core team members in each site participated in the survey; the largest number of participants from a single site was seven. Most respondents represented criminal justice

agencies, as opposed to community-based human or social service providers, and approximately two-thirds were women.²

FINDINGS

MODEL IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATIONS

Stakeholders were asked to rate their community's ongoing jail transition work in the following four key areas approximately 24 months after TJC technical assistance concluded:

- (1) Collaborative structures
- (2) Evidence-based targeted interventions
- (3) Data and self-evaluation
- (4) Sustainability mechanisms and capacity-building

First, respondents indicated if any of any of 23 core TJC partnerships, practices, and procedures were still operational. Stakeholders who answered “yes” to any of these 23 items were then asked if the specific partnership, practice, or procedure had expanded in scope, narrowed in scope, or remained the same since TJC TA concluded. The percent of stakeholders reporting that a specific partnership or practice expanded in scope is represented by a green arrow and percentage in the figures below.

COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES

Successful jail reentry collaborative structures help local jurisdictions inspire, increase, and maintain support for jail transition among all system stakeholders and use evidence and outcomes to inform the continuous improvement of their jail transition system/practice. The TJC model posits that developing an effective jail transition strategy also requires the active involvement of policy-level leadership from both the jail and the community to articulate a clear vision of success, set expectations, identify important issues, and engage staff and other

² Fifty-five individuals were initially identified and invited to participate but four individuals could not be contacted or were no longer in the area, thus reducing the viable sample to 51 individuals.

stakeholders in the effort. As such, the national TJC team worked with learning sites either to establish an executive-level leadership group and jail transition core workgroup (often called the TJC core team) to advance local reentry work, or to strengthen an existing one. The TJC initiative also required learning communities to designate a TJC coordinator (minimum .5 FTE).

As indicated in figure 1, the initiative's collaborative partnerships continue to have a strong presence in the eight Phase 2 sites. Two years after TJC TA concluded, nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents reported that an executive-level criminal justice leadership group was in place and active in their community with 80 percent reporting the presence of an active jail transition core workgroup. Nearly 40 percent of respondents who reported that their community retained an active executive-level leadership group or jail transition workgroup also perceived that the scope of these two groups had expanded in the last two years: about 38 percent of those respondents indicated the executive-level body had expanded its scope and 44 percent indicated the scope of their community's jail transition workgroup had expanded. Just 7 percent of those reporting an active executive-level leadership group in their community believed its scope had narrowed, compared to 18 percent of respondents who indicated the scope of their site's jail transition working group had narrowed its focus. It is unclear what might account for this narrowed focus in either group.

Additionally, all eight sites still engage an active jail reentry coordinator with 71 percent of respondents reporting that the coordinator's role in their site has expanded over time to reach more clients and partners. This finding is particularly important as the TJC coordinator often plays a critical role in ensuring the system is successfully reintegrating incarcerated people back into the community. Lastly, it is important to note that a small percentage of respondents selected they "did not know" about the status of these important collaborative entities, suggesting a potential shift in their proximity or level of involvement with local transition efforts.

EVIDENCE-BASED TARGETED INTERVENTION PRACTICES

Targeted intervention strategies, such as risk screening and assessment of criminogenic needs, comprise the basic building blocks for effective jail transition. At the start of Phase 2, just one of the eight learning sites routinely assessed incarcerated individuals for risk to reoffend; two had introduced a risk screener prior to TJC TA but were not yet using it to triage the jail population. Recognizing the foundational information that screening and assessment affords practitioners, the national TJC TA team prioritized implementation of these procedures in all eight sites to ensure each site had functional screening and assessment and transition case planning practices in place when TJC TA concluded in June 2015.

Screening and Assessment. Figure 2 indicates the extent to which the eight learning sites retained screening and assessment practices after TJC TA concluded. Notably, stakeholders in all eight sites reported the continued use of actuarial risk tools. Nearly all (93%) reported that their communities routinely screen incarcerated people for risk to reoffend with an objective tool, and 46 percent indicated an expansion of these procedures to reach more individuals. Eighty-five percent reported routinely assessing the criminogenic risks and needs of incarcerated

Figure 1. Retention/Expansion of TJC Collaborative Structures



people at moderate or high risk to re-offend, consistent with best practice and the TJC model. Furthermore, these sites not only continue to use the Risk-Needs-Responsivity screening and assessment tools established during the TA period, but 93 percent of stakeholders also reported that assessment results were being used to inform service and program referral decisions; almost half (46%) believe this practice has expanded in scope.

An area for continued improvement, however, is the use of a pretrial release screener to assess defendants' risk for reoffending and likelihood to appear in court if released before their court date.

Only 63 percent reported that their communities use a pretrial screener, suggesting the use of these tools is less prevalent than other screening and assessment practices. Of this group who affirmed the use of a pretrial risk screener, approximately one-third (36%) perceived that the use of the pretrial screener had expanded over time to reach more individuals. Almost a quarter of stakeholders (22%) selected "don't know" when asked if their jurisdiction used a

Figure 2. Retention/Expansion of Screening and Assessment Practices

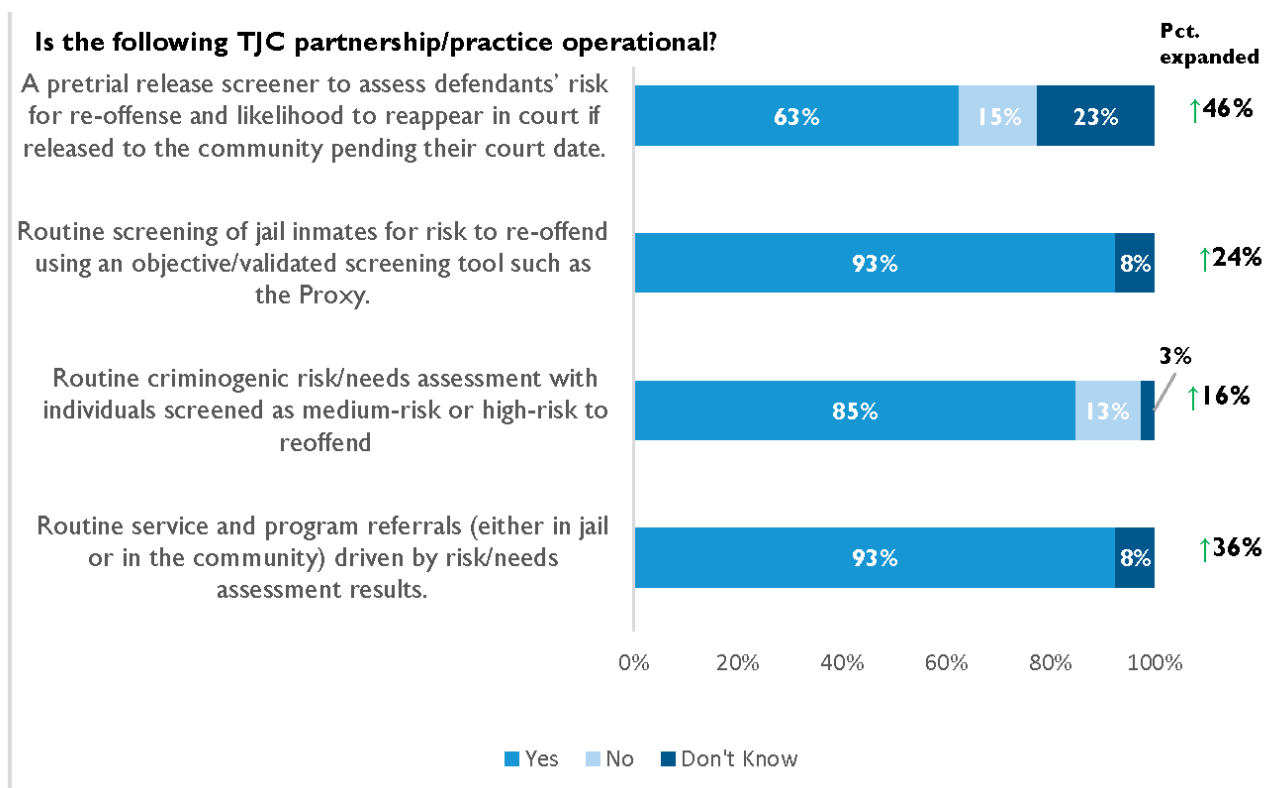
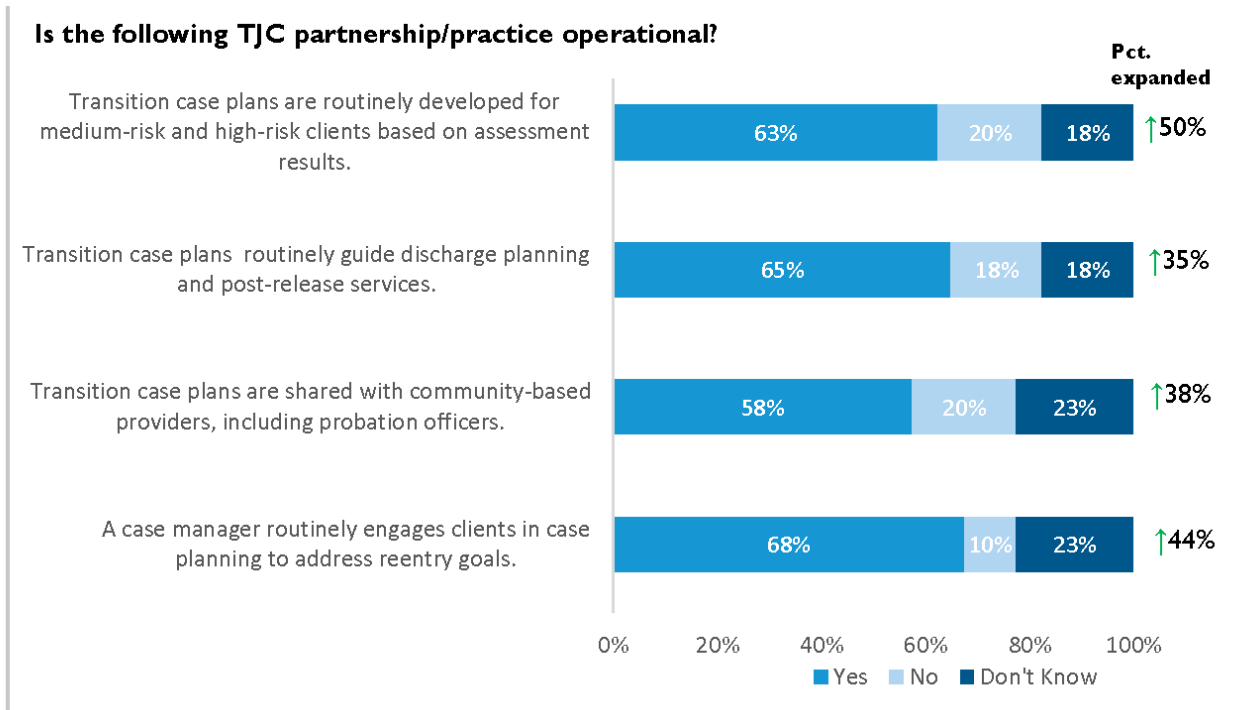


Figure 3. Retention/Expansion of Transition Case Planning

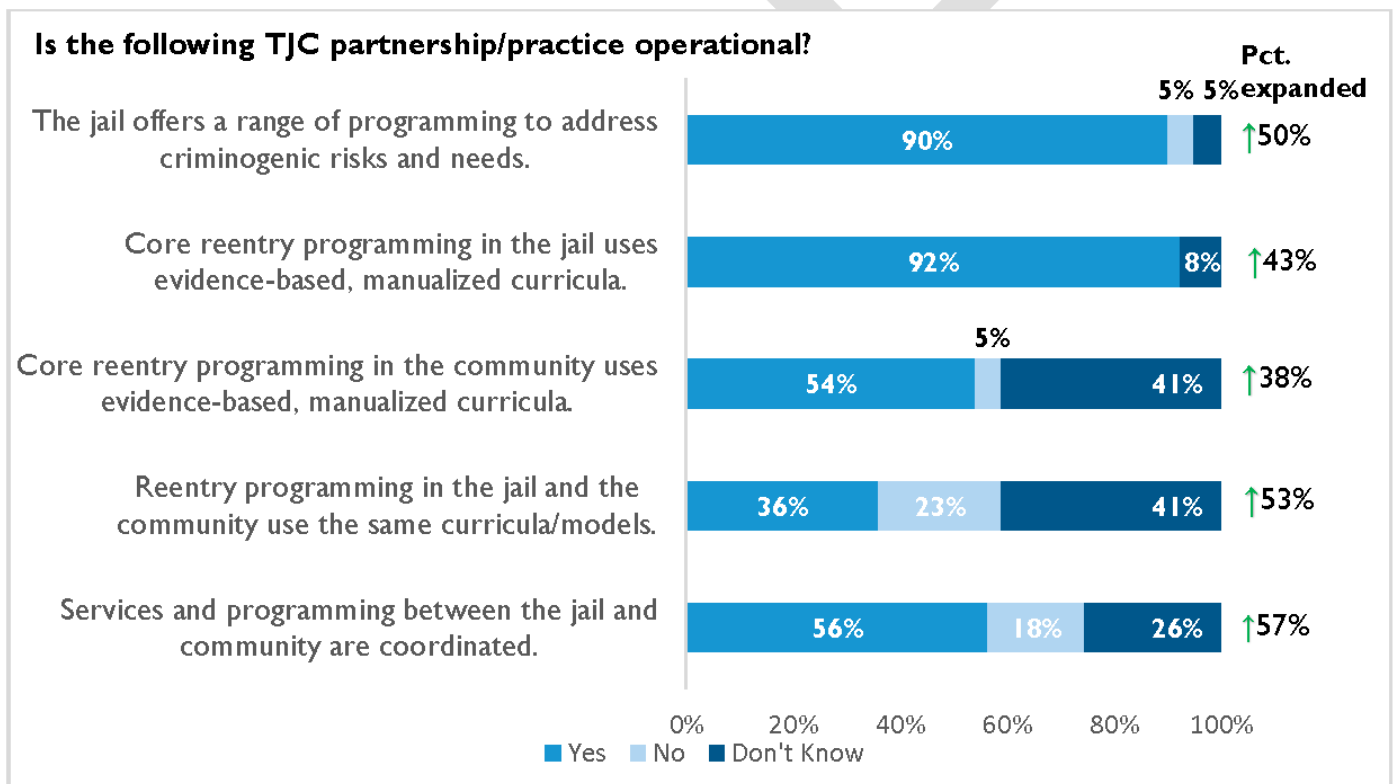


pretrial screener, compared to only 8 percent of those asked about the use of a jail-based risk to reoffend screening tool.

Transition Case Planning. Evidence of continued case planning, while less prominent than previously discussed TJC practices, is apparent. Figure 3 suggests a majority of Phase 2 stakeholders perceive the development (63%), use (65%), and sharing (58%) of transitional case plans with clients and community-based providers is ongoing in their sites. Two-thirds of respondents reported that transitional case plans are used with medium- and high-risk clients to guide discharge planning and post-release services, although another 18 to 23 percent selected “don’t know” depending on the case planning question. A promising result, however, is the share of stakeholders who reported the expansion of these practices: half of those reporting routine transition case planning with medium- and high-risk clients indicate this practice had expanded to reach more clients, and 44 percent indicated more clients had been engaged by case managers in reentry case planning. Nevertheless, these figures suggest there is ample room to increase the use of transition case plans in sites’ local reentry practices.

Evidence-Based Programming (EBP) and Services. Ninety-two percent of survey participants reported the continued use of evidence-based in-jail programming. Ninety percent of respondents also reported that their respective jail offered a range of programming to address criminogenic risk and needs with more than half of those respondents indicating that this practice had grown over time. This is a positive finding that signals an organizational culture shift in understanding the importance of EBPs for jail clients. Additionally, 54 percent of respondents also reported that community-based reentry programs used evidenced-based curricula with 56 percent, indicating these services and programs are coordinated with the jail. Yet, unlike in the jails, only 38 percent of stakeholders reported these evidence-based practices had expanded in the community. Just over one-third (36%) of respondents indicated that the jail and community providers use the same reentry curricula. A sizeable proportion (41%) also selected “don’t know” in response to the type of reentry programming offered in the community. These

Figure 4. Retention/Expansion of Reentry Programming and Services



findings suggest more work needs to be done to promote and support the TJC model with community-based organizations.

DATA AND SELF-EVALUATION

Effective jail transition strategies rely on collaboration and data sharing among jail and reentry partners. Eight items assessed the extent to which the eight Phase 2 sites engaged in quality assurance and performance monitoring consistent with the role of self-evaluation in the TJC model. Figure 5 suggests there has been only a modest uptake of quality assurance and performance monitoring activities across the eight Phase 2 sites: one-third of participants report that reentry partners regularly review data on core processes such as screening and assessment (33%) or service matching (31%), and just slightly more than a quarter (28%) regularly review data on service referrals and program utilization (28%). Yet, nearly half (49%) credit their site's jail transition work group with measuring key outcomes; about half (51%) of all participants indicate that reentry partners use data both to monitor and improve the jail reentry process, and to inform changes in reentry-related policies and practices. Yet, when asked, only 15 percent of respondents reported that reentry partners review data with their community's executive-level leadership.

Taken together, these figures suggest stakeholders across the Phase 2 TJC learning sites use data primarily to inform decisionmaking and to measure key outcomes as opposed to monitoring the quality or fidelity of the reentry process. Ideally, data would be used for all three purposes. These findings also suggest that data-sharing barriers likely still exist in several Phase 2 communities, underscoring the need for future TA to develop easy-to-use processes that help site partners incorporate client data in decisionmaking among all stakeholders—particularly executive-level leadership. Understanding the extent to which some Phase 2 sites successfully share and use data with their reentry partners may help facilitate this practice in all sites.

Figure 5. Use of Data for Quality Assurance/to Guide Decisionmaking

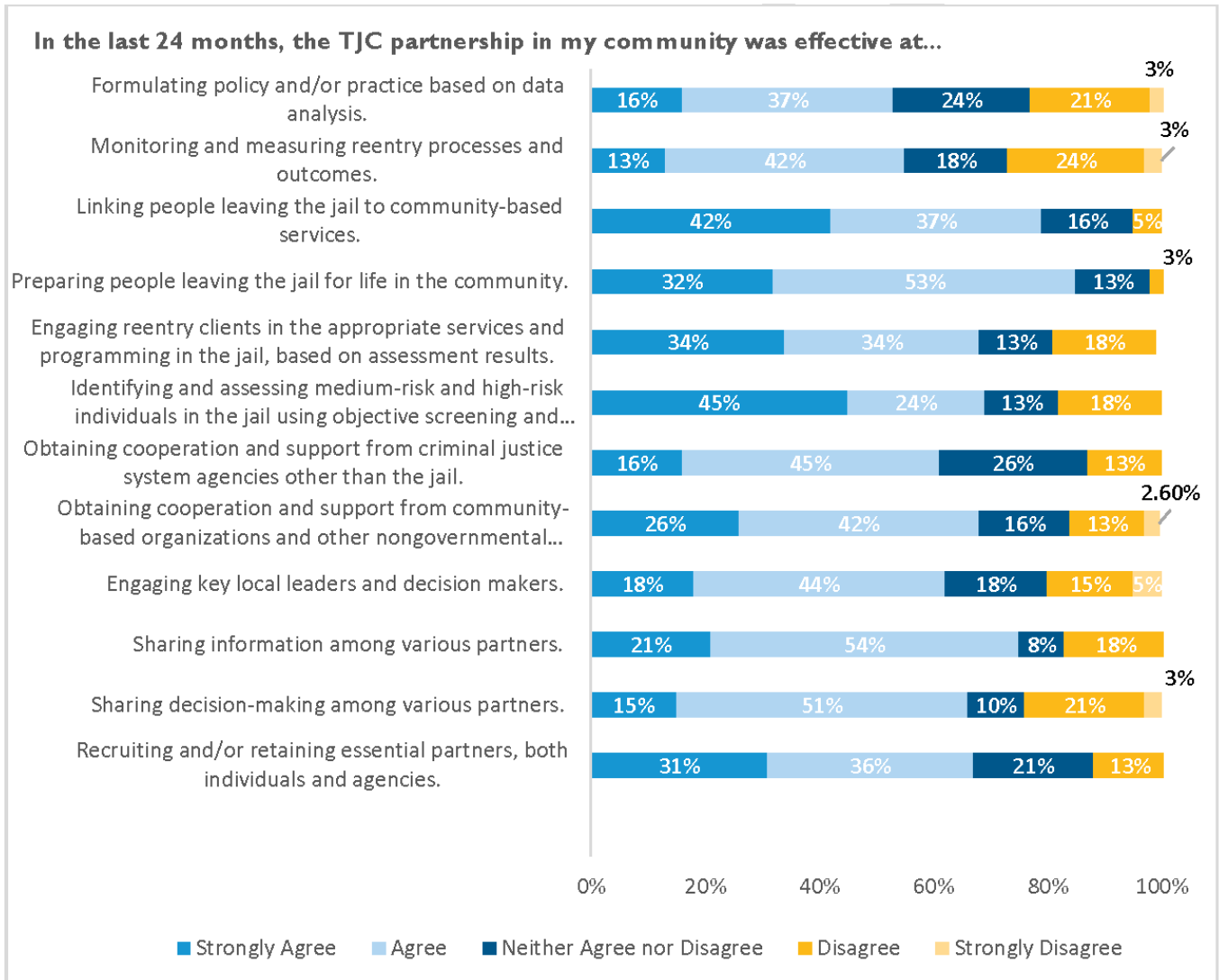


SUSTAINABILITY AND CAPACITY-BUILDING MECHANISMS

There are several indications that enhancements to sites’ reentry capacity have been sustained across the eight TJC Phase 2 learning communities. To gauge the capacity-building effects of TJC TA, participants responded to 12 statements about the effectiveness of their TJC partnership using a five-point Likert scale to indicate if they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed (neutral), disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement. Items ranged from the ability of the sites’ TJC partnership to collaborate and share information to its capacity to engage clients in service and prepare in the jail for release. Responses are presented in figure 6.

As figure 6 indicates, most stakeholders (84%) agree their community is preparing people leaving the jail to return to the community successfully, and that critical links (79%) between the jail and community-based services are in place for this to happen. Slightly more than two-thirds (68%) of stakeholders also report ongoing use of core TJC practices consistent with this observation: Community-based organizations are supportive of jail reentry, objective screening and assessment tools are used to identify medium- and high-risk

Figure 6. Capacity of TJC Partnerships



individuals, and the jails engage reentry clients in programming and services based on their assessment results.

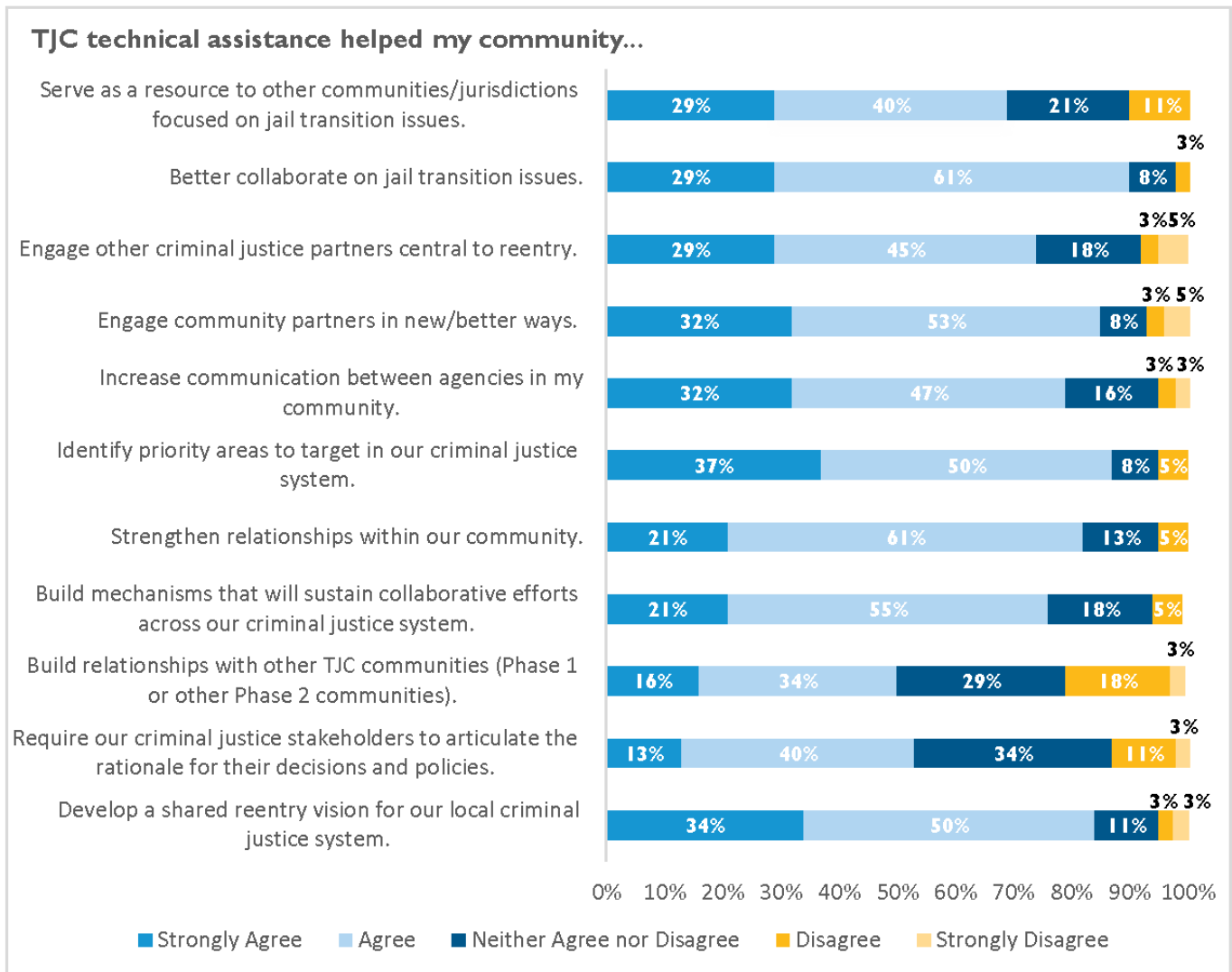
PERCEIVED BENEFIT OF TJC TA

In addition to documenting the scope of continued reentry practices, the survey sought to understand how communities benefited from and were affected by TJC TA. Survey participants credited TJC TA (percent agreeing/strongly agreeing) with building site capacity in myriad ways. Figures 7-10 provide respondent ratings of TJC TA effects on 25 indicators according to one of

four key themes: collaboration and vision; reentry practice; resources; and measurement. Results are summarized below.

Collaboration and vision. Upwards of 80 percent of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed with statements that TJC TA helped them build or strengthen reentry partnerships. For example, 82 percent agreed/strongly agreed that TJC TA strengthened relationships within their respective learning community and improved their ability to engage community partners (85% agree/strongly agree) as well as other criminal justice partners central to reentry (84%) with approximately one-third (32% and 29% respectively) strongly agreeing this was the case. Ninety percent credited TJC TA with helping their communities collaborate better on jail

Figure 7. TJC TA Effects: Vision and Collaboration

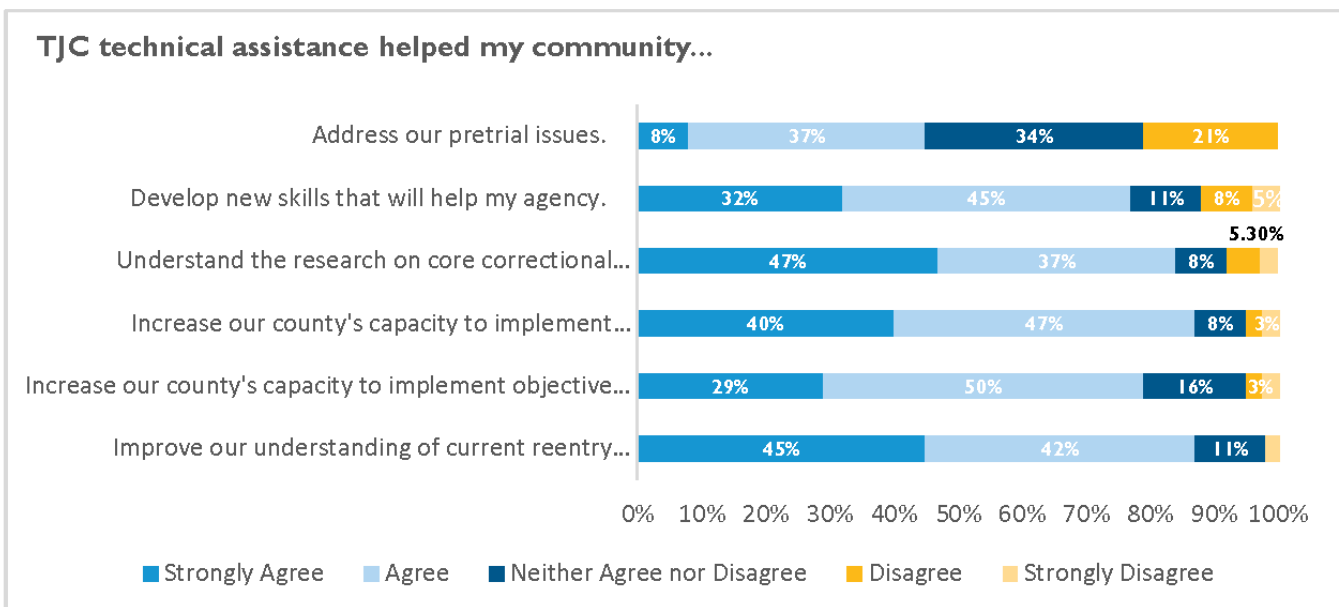


transition issues, increasing communication between agencies (79%) and building mechanisms that will help sustain their collaborative efforts (76%). Importantly, 84 percent of survey participants also agreed that TJC TA had helped their local criminal justice system arrive at a vision for reentry in their community.

Only half of all respondents (52%), however, credited TJC TA with helping their community build relationships with other TJC learning sites. This suggests future TA efforts could do more to strengthen peer learning opportunities among the TJC network. Doing so would likely advance the reach of the TJC initiative while allowing NIC to leverage the expertise and experience of current TJC learning communities. Indeed, the Phase 2 learning sites stand ready to serve as a peer resource: Approximately 68 percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that TJC TA had equipped them to be resources to their peers in the corrections field. For figure 7, roughly three percent of respondents selected “strongly disagree” to most of these items.

Reentry practice. A substantial share of respondents credited TJC TA with improving their

Figure 8. TJC Impact: Reentry Practice



reentry practices and knowledge/application of relevant research findings. Eighty-seven percent agreed/strongly agreed that TJC TA expanded their community’s understanding of current reentry practices and improved their system’s understanding of the research on core correctional practices (84%) although only 71 percent credited TJC TA with helping them better

use research findings in their day-to-day work. This result extended to the implementation of core practices: More than three quarters of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that TJC TA increased their community’s capacity both to implement objective screening and assessment (79%) and evidence-based reentry programming and services (87%).

Resources. To a more limited extent TJC TA provided support in helping communities leverage external resources (networks of criminal justice leaders, outside consultants or experts), including additional financial assistance. Although 73 percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that TJC TA connected them to criminal justice network and experts in the corrections and reentry fields, less than half of all respondents reported that TJC TA enhanced access to financial resources: 21 percent agreed/strongly agreed TJC TA or TJC participation helped them leverage resources from private foundations, while 42 percent reported leveraging TJC to access federal resources and 50 percent were able to leverage additional assistance from the state and local government. Many respondents (21% to 45%) were neutral regarding TJC TA’s help in leveraging additional resources from private foundations and the federal, state, and local levels.

Figure 9. TJC Impact: Resources

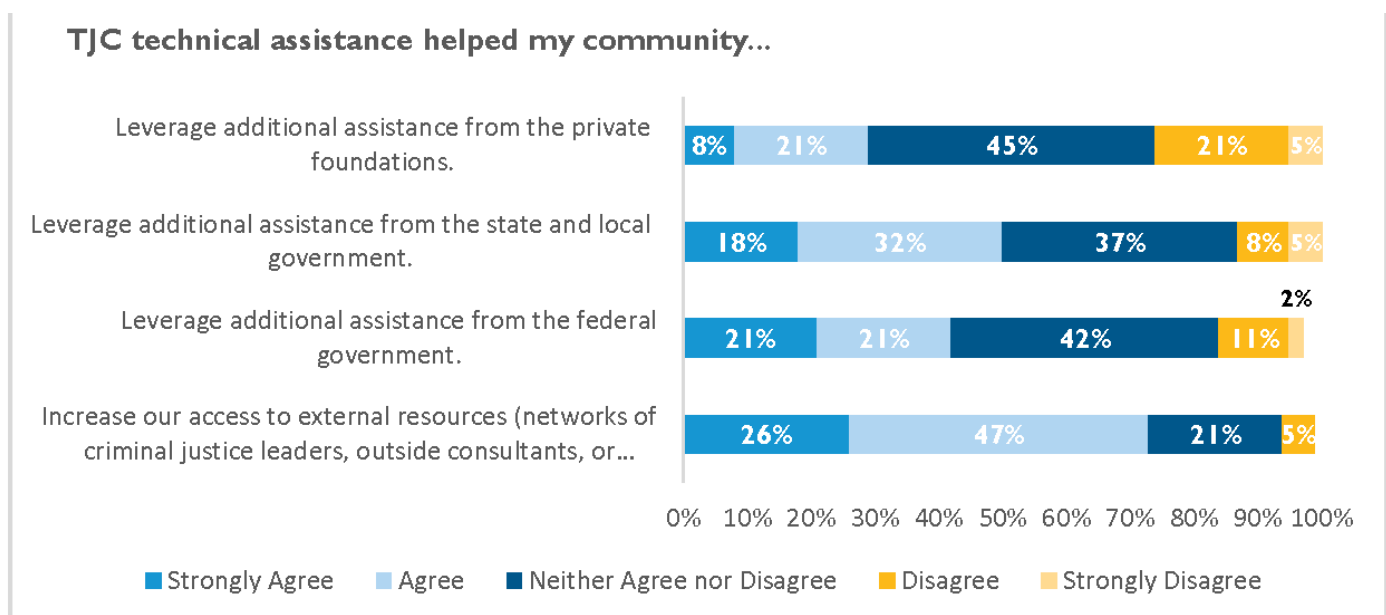
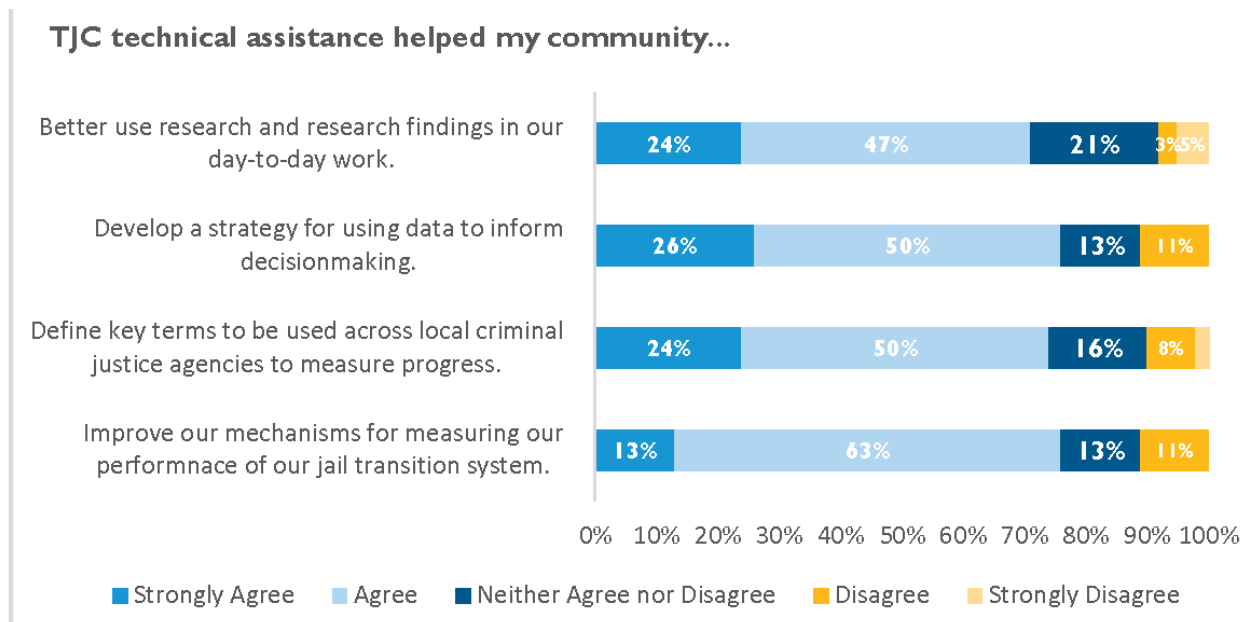


Figure 10. TJC TA Impact: Measurement



Measurement. Approximately 76 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that TJC TA improved or strengthened their community’s ability to measure the performance of their jail transition system, while three-quarters (76%) credited TJC TA with helping them create a strategy to implement data-driven decisionmaking and define key terms to measure progress (74%).

PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF TJC

An open-ended item at the end of the stakeholder survey permitted respondents to register their impressions of the most beneficial aspects of TJC TA. Four themes emerged. Stakeholders identified the onsite time with TJC TA providers as among the most valuable elements of the TJC experience, citing their practical experience, guidance, and support. Stakeholders were particularly appreciative of TA around implementation of risk/need assessment and evidence-based programming; indeed, implementing screening and assessment procedures and evidence-based interventions, such as Thinking for a Change, were consistently cited by stakeholders as among their sites’ greatest accomplishments during TJC. Stakeholders also identified the assistance TJC provided in helping their sites develop functional collaborations and the receipt of data/evaluation-related technical assistance as some of the most beneficial

aspects of TJC TA. Three respondents credited TJC TA with reducing recidivism in their communities, but none quantified this effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE TJC TA

Nearly one-third of respondents declined to recommend improvements, expressing full satisfaction with TJC TA provision. Three recommendations emerged from those that did offer input:

- (1) Expand TA provision to include a longer period of direct assistance followed by a period of light-touch support in the months after intensive TA concludes.
- (2) Increase site interaction by providing more structured peer learning opportunities such as site visits to other, more established TJC sites and cross-site workshops or convenings.
- (3) Help sites identify funding opportunities.

CONCLUSION

As a systems-change initiative, TJC was intended to not only guide participating jurisdictions in improving their transition practices, but to enhance collaborative capacity to sustain and expand the reach of those practices. The results of this stakeholder survey offer heartening evidence of success in that regard: stakeholders report that most practices implemented under TJC not only persist two years after TJC TA concluded, but many have also expanded in scope suggesting a tangible and sustained shift in the way these communities operated. These findings indicate the TJC model created a positive legacy across the Phase 2 learning communities. Furthermore, these conclusions reinforce earlier evaluation findings from Phase 1, namely that TJC is a not only a viable model for systems change, but also an effective capacity-building vehicle for local reentry.

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