

Messaging For Making (Or Restoring) The Initial Connection



Interviews with law enforcement leaders and JDAI stakeholders around the nation suggest that successful engagement depends on: tactical outreach, effective messaging, and close attention to law enforcement concerns.

Tactical Outreach

JDAI stakeholders will be most effective in forging (or reinvigorating) connections with law enforcement if they employ a deliberate approach. Specifically, success will be more likely if stakeholders:

- **Make the first contact** count by having the presiding juvenile court judge or other leader of high standing who has the respect of his or her peers in law enforcement initiate the conversation
- **Involve the leader(s) of the major law enforcement agency (or agencies) on the JDAI steering committee**, and seek their input on:
 - The detention screening instrument;
 - The process to transfer custody of youth from officers to court officials following an arrest; and
 - The protocols for handling cases where youth are involved in domestic disputes or face serious social or human service needs.
- **Identify a capable and well-positioned point person**, preferably a respected leader in the patrol division, to represent law enforcement in JDAI work groups and interagency discussions.
- **Build relationships with other officers and commanders throughout the agency**, especially officers with a track record of working with other public and private agencies who might serve as champions for JDAI over the long haul.
- **Seek opportunities to meet with patrol officers** in roll-call meetings, training sessions and other gatherings both to explain JDAI and to listen to officers' feedback and concerns about its implementation.

Effective messages

Law enforcement agency leaders will not embrace JDAI unless they believe it is consistent with public safety, good for youth and the community and beneficial for their agencies. Patrol officers and commanders will support JDAI and participate constructively only if they understand JDAI and accept the underlying principles behind it.

Therefore, JDAI stakeholders should prepare and deliver organized, succinct fact-packed presentations that provide convincing evidence of the following:

- **Youth are different from adults and require a different approach to policing and court processing.** A wealth of research finds that arrest, prosecution and detention actually *increase* young people's odds of subsequent offending and impede their long-term success.
- **Absent JDAI, detention practices are frequently problematic.** Despite the dangers of detention to worsen youth outcomes and the high cost of confinement, detention is often used for youth who pose minimal risk to public safety. Also, detention decisions are often inconsistent, subjective and inequitable in terms of race and ethnicity.
- **JDAI is consistent with public safety.** JDAI sites have demonstrated that using objective risk screening, detention alternatives and limited secure detention has been consistent with detention's two functions: ensuring youth appear for their court dates and keeping the public safe while a youth is awaiting his or her court date.
- **JDAI works — and is good for the community's long-term health.**
 - Participating sites have reduced their average detention populations by more than 43 % since entering JDAI, resulting in more than one million fewer days of detention each year.

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- Fifty-six JDAI sites have closed detention units or whole facilities, realizing an estimated cumulative savings of roughly \$143.5 million per year.
- JDAI sites have also cut the number of youths committed to state custody by 57%, while keeping youth in school and connecting them to needed services and supports in the community.
- **JDAI offers a positive forum for law enforcement agencies to improve community relations and address racial and ethnic disparities.** Because JDAI steering committees typically include multiple community stakeholders, and most sites have active subcommittees dedicated to combating disparities, JDAI can offer a ready-made forum for law enforcement leaders seeking to reduce tensions with community residents and foster closer connections, respectful discussion and concerted action.
- **JDAI benefits law enforcement**
 - Partnerships with JDAI often help ease officers' frustration by reducing their time out of service in juvenile cases and decrease LEAs' need for and cost of overtime.
 - JDAI-law enforcement partnerships can also improve the handling of so-called "frequent flyer" youth who pose minimal threat to public safety but generate repeated calls for service due to unmet psychological or human service needs, or to problems in their families.

Attention to law enforcement concerns

While making the case for JDAI is important, stakeholders' ultimate success in *building strong and sustainable partnerships with law enforcement depend as much on listening as on delivering effective arguments.*

- Asking law enforcement personnel about their concerns with current juvenile justice procedures and soliciting input on issues that directly affect officers can provide a starting point for fruitful dialogue.
- Especially in existing sites where leaders of the largest local departments are not currently active on the JDAI steering committee, or where they never joined, JDAI stakeholders' best strategy may be to start discussions about a specific issue of interest to law enforcement.