



Data Sharing and Meeting Federal Reporting Requirements Innovation Lab Final Report



Summary

NCJA's Innovation Labs bring together state administering agency (SAA) staff and stakeholders from across the country to brainstorm solutions to common challenges, discuss promising practices and develop recommendations.

The purpose of the **Data Sharing and Meeting Federal Reporting Requirements Innovation Lab** (Data Lab) was to provide working sessions for discussing resource development, best and promising practices, and program implementation to improve data sharing and increase understanding of and ability to meet federal reporting requirements in participants' states.

Through five monthly collaborative sessions, Data Lab participants identified the following **challenges and areas of interest**:

- Updating data sharing systems and managing poor quality data
- Interest in improving access to and quality of data for grant reporting and project evaluation
- Specific issues—Byrne JAG strategic planning and annual updates, Byrne JAG Performance Management Tool (PMT) and Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA)

Key strategies being pursued by Data Lab participants include:

- Leveraging Byrne JAG funds for technology improvement or fee-for-data
- Engaging Stakeholders and Convening Working Groups to Amplify Efforts
- Engaging non-traditional data sources and gatekeepers
- Exploring access to the national victim notification network, Vine
- Building consortia of agencies to pool resources and consolidate data management

The **main approaches** that emerged from the lab experience were:

- Approach the issue in a linear, step-by-step process that simplifies the complexity.
- Understand who (agencies or individual positions) manages the necessary data and establish and nurture those relationships.
- Learn, clarify or establish responsibilities, polices and guidelines for data sharing.



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Introduction

Creative processes like brainstorming can drive the creation of new ideas and the development of new innovations. NCJA's Innovation Labs bring together state administering agency (SAA) staff and stakeholders from across the country to brainstorm solutions to common challenges, discuss promising practices and develop recommendations. Each lab will cover different topics, but the following goals apply to the Innovation Lab approach in general:

- Peer-to-peer learning among participants
- Identification of best/promising practices on trending and innovative programming in a specific area of focus
- Tangible ideas and implementation planning
- Resource development for innovative implementation
- Development of recommendations for other state administering agencies
- Action planning for future implementation

Process

Through NCJA's Innovation Labs, SAAs engage in peer-to-peer learning in small cohorts focused around an identified area of need. Labs include four to six SAAs, as well as NCJA staff and contracted subject matter experts (when needed), who engage monthly on a topic of mutual interest over roughly six months. Each topic addressed is relevant to the job of the SAA and important for ensuring Byrne JAG funding is used strategically. Given the time commitment of this lab, it is important that members are not only committed, but enthused to be involved. NCJA's recruitment approach reflected this need.

NCJA disseminated a flyer (Appendix A) to its membership announcing the Innovation Lab concept and requesting voluntary participation. The new program was also presented at the Advisory Council meeting through which NCJA has diverse state representation and exposure. From these outreach efforts, NCJA was able to recruit members for both inaugural innovation labs.

After announcing the lab concept, NCJA sent out an online survey to identify lab members and identify priority topic areas for the two pilot labs. Although many topics of need were identified through this process, the first two topics with the most interest were the following:

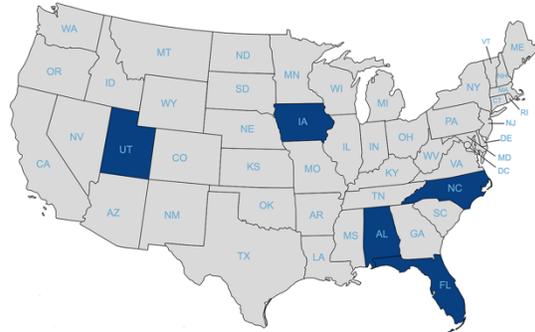
- Data Sharing and Meeting Federal Reporting Requirements
- Strategies for Diversifying Your Funding and Subawards



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Volunteer participants for the Data Lab represented four states of diverse size, demographic makeup, political priorities, and geographic regions, as well as one intergovernmental entity, including:

- Alabama
- Florida Sheriffs Risk Management Fund*
- Iowa
- North Carolina
- Utah



NCJA utilized its Connect2Learning online learning management system (LMS) as a virtual hub for resources and access to the Zoom links for each session.

The Data Lab sessions were led by NCJA program managers Spike Bradford and Matt Wade. Additional expertise was provided by Mike Fargen, data analyst with NCJA’s OVC VOCA Center, and Mo West, information sharing specialist with SEARCH.

A questionnaire was sent to participants prior to the introductory session to determine the most pressing needs in this topic area and to inform the development of goals and objectives for the Data Lab.

Data Lab participants indicated the following:

- Equal interest in data sharing and meeting reporting requirements.
- Desire to learn what other states and organizations are doing, how to update data sharing systems, and how to deal with poor quality data.
- Interest in improving access to and quality of data for grant reporting.
- Interest in improving access to and quality of data for project evaluation.
- Most relevant reporting needs involved Byrne JAG strategic planning and annual updates, Byrne JAG Performance Management Tool (PMT) and Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA).
- Most relevant reporting needs for non-SAA participants included addressing the administrative burden pertaining to increased reporting, especially for small, rural and mid-sized local entities that lack personnel and/or fiscal resources to comply with state and federal reporting requirements.

Innovation Labs are lab member-driven and NCJA staff-supported, which means they rely on peer-to-peer engagement and participation. The lab process consists of five unique sessions that culminate in a convening session, during which participants discuss their findings, including identified challenges and proposed solutions and approaches. The sessions are intended to build on one another and help provide a roadmap from obstacle to solution to action.

*While the participant was formerly one of Florida’s SAAs, they are no longer in that role and currently represent a statewide intergovernmental entity of local law enforcement agencies. They mentioned their involvement in this Lab was on behalf of this organization, not the SAA, and they are not involved with the state’s DCRA reporting.



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The five primary Data Lab sessions included:

- *Session 1: Kickoff*
Session 1 provided a general overview of the lab topic and concept. During this session, lab members learned more about their fellow participants through introductions and peer-to-peer discussions, while collectively determining goals and objectives for the remaining lab sessions.
- *Session 2: Best and Promising Practices*
In Session 2, lab members heard from two subject matter experts, **Mo West** from SEARCH and **Mike Fargen** from NCJA's OVC VOCA Center, on their tips for getting started with data sharing and experiences standing up a statewide data dashboard. Representatives from Tennessee, Delaware and Iowa joined the session to share their experiences, strategies, and insights, as well as answer questions from lab members. This discussion was used as the starting point for developing group recommendations in future working sessions.
- *Session 3: Overcoming Challenges*
Session 3 focused on challenges that may arise when attempting to access shared data or sourcing data for required reporting, specifically about gaps and challenges identified in NCJA's Data Sharing Checklist. Participants were coached on continuing the process in NCJA's Overcoming Challenges worksheet. The potential solutions from the session and the worksheet laid the foundation for the formation of the working group recommendations.
- *Session 4: Developing a Future Plan for Data Sharing and Meeting Reporting Requirements*
Session 4 allowed lab members to delve into implementation for data sharing and reporting. Lab members used the promising practices, identified obstacles, and potential solutions from the previous labs, the Overcoming Challenges Worksheet, as well as their own experiences, to discuss specific steps to take when creating a plan for increasing data access. To guide in the creation of an action plan, participants walked through an example of how to complete NCJA's Action Plan template.
- *Session 5: Next Steps and Moving Forward*
In Session 5, lab members closed out this Innovation Lab by discussing their work on action planning, recapping the previous sessions and discussing the lessons learned and recommendations they will share with other states during the Lab Convening.



Observations and Overview of Sessions

Session 1: Kickoff

Participants came together in the first session to learn more about each other and to discuss the goals and objectives of the lab. The results of the pre-session survey were discussed and used as the foundation for exploring participants' interests in data sharing and meeting reporting requirements.



That discussion centered on the following questions:

- What are your biggest challenges and/or concerns around data sharing and reporting requirements?
- What are you hoping to learn from this lab?

Meeting the reporting requirements of the Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA) was identified as a common issue for SAA participants and was used in subsequent sessions as a concrete example of universal strategies and approaches. Non-state/SAA participants highlighted the challenges that local agencies face when trying to meet state and federal reporting requirements. The session one discussion also produced two primary themes that shaped subsequent sessions (discussed below): relationships and responsibilities.

Session 1 Takeaways:

- States (SAAs) share similar challenges in data sharing and meeting reporting requirements.
- Data sharing and reporting requirements are linked in that one must access data from a variety of sources in order to fulfill required reporting.
- **Relationships** are key to accessing data. It is the people who lead agencies, departments, precincts, etc. that can often help or hinder one's quest for data.
- It is important to understand the **responsibilities** of individuals and agencies for providing data or giving access to it. Many times, these people or agencies may not fully understand those responsibilities themselves.

Resource: Participants were asked to watch a Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)-produced video on Performance Reporting for SAKI, DCRA, and JAG prior to the next lab session. Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jne5bEmeLU8>.

Session 2: Best and Promising Practices

In Session 2, participants were presented with two examples of relevant promising practices and then engaged in a Q&A/discussion.

Mo West from SEARCH presented ways to get started with data sharing or improving the ways agencies/states share data with Data Sharing Checklist (see Appendix). The checklist is useful for identifying and defining problems, needs, requirements, data assets, and gaps through a logical process.

Group discussion highlighted the importance of **relationships** (some data gatekeepers are wary of how data will be used and/or don't see value in meeting reporting requirements), and **responsibilities** (agencies with no obligation to provide data may need to be persuaded of the greater good of sharing/reporting).

These are common issues and good examples for the need for a step-by-step assessment of data needed, data sources and data gaps.



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Mike Fargen (NCJA's OVC VOCA Center) — Success Story: Nebraska Sentencing Data Dashboard and [DCRA Data Collection](#)

Fargen described a sentencing data dashboard he was instrumental in creating during his tenure as Nebraska's director of the state's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC). Fargen emphasized the importance of **director-level involvement, partnerships with key agencies and stakeholders, and a process that makes it easy to participate** and allows all parties to see the benefits.

Session 2 Takeaways:

In Session 2, participants recognized the following:

- Overwhelming tasks such as creating or improving data sharing can be made manageable through thoughtful, step-by-step processes.
- The technological needs of data sharing and improved reporting processes were touched upon, but in many ways, these are secondary to the **2 R's (relationships and responsibilities)** of the work.
- Skilled data scientists are crucial to improved systems, but it's people and relationships, together with articulated responsibilities, that get the data moving into and through systems.
- Cooperative agreements and MOUs can help define and solidify roles and expectations of data sharing.

Resource: Data Sharing Checklist (Appendix B), a tool for identifying and defining problems, needs, requirements, data assets, and gaps.

Session 3: Overcoming Challenges

Session 3 began with a discussion of the challenges and gaps in data and process participants identified through completing the Data Sharing Checklist. Some of the main challenge areas for SAAs included: **establishing relationships with data gatekeepers, identifying incentives or agreements to data provision, navigating data privacy and compatibility issues, breaking down agency/sector silos.**

After the identification of gaps and challenges, a facilitated discussion focused on developing pathways to success that address those challenges. Highlights included:

Exploring partnerships with other agencies or dedicating resources that give SAAs more control over the data sharing process, potentially shifting some data collection duties to agencies better suited to handle and report sensitive data that contains personally identifiable information (PII).



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Exploring statewide data committees, such as criminal justice information system (CJIS) committees that may have insight and leverage regarding data flow.

Session 3 Takeaways:

- It might seem time-consuming, but the step-by-step work is how forward progress in data sharing and meeting reporting requirements can be successful.
- The data gaps identified by the participants are mostly referring to gaps in data *access*. Access is given or blocked by people/agencies (data gatekeepers) and overcome often by establishing and nurturing **relationships**.
- **Iowa** stated that most of their outreach to increase data access was met favorably by individuals and agencies that want to help. Oftentimes, individuals or agencies are unaware of the need for data or their role in providing it.

Resource: Overcoming Challenges Worksheet (Appendix C) for help identifying ways over, under or through obstacles.

Session 4: Developing a Future Data Sharing and Meeting Reporting Requirements

During Session 4, lab participants used their completed Overcoming Challenges Worksheets as the foundation of a discussion on translating strategies for overcoming challenges into future planning.

Four pathways to success have been identified, including

- Resources,
- Relationships,
- Low-hanging Fruit, and
- Enticements.

Florida is exploring the use of a non-SAA statewide entity (or consortium) as the fiscal agent **for** small/rural and medium-sized local agencies that experience a lack of resources. This makes it a challenge for them to apply for or manage grants or handle the technological duties of data sharing. The support of a partner fiscal agent should help level the field on accessibility. This approach was successful in Nebraska where the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Committee provided a platform for integrating operational data. **Alabama** uses a similar process in which larger, regional agencies serve as drug task force grant administrators.

Alabama plans to conduct law enforcement-related death trainings for county coroners as a possible solution to the reluctance or resistance of some agencies to provide data needed for reporting. It is hoped these trainings will help facilitate improved death in custody reporting.



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Iowa has begun outreach and scheduling a meeting with a broad group of stakeholders to explore the VINE solution for improving DCRA reporting. Most stakeholders who have been approached about the challenges of DCRA reporting recognize the need identify a workable solution and the upcoming meeting is chance to educate them and promote buy-in.

Utah is also planning to convene a meeting with leadership-level stakeholders to discuss the DCRA challenges and present a pay-for-data agreement with the state medical examiners office.

Session 4 Takeaways:

In Session 4 it became clear that **engaging agency leadership and system stakeholders**, including existing bodies such as criminal justice coordinating councils or data committees, is a critical part of **creating collaborative partnerships** (relationships) and **promoting buy-in** (responsibilities).

This was exemplified by Florida (working with a statewide consortia to promote greater awareness of and solutions to data and grant-related gaps), Alabama (working with county coroners to improve awareness and, hopefully, reporting), Iowa (convening stakeholders to discuss and build buy-in for the VINE solution), and Utah (engaging agency leadership to push forward the pay-for-data approach with state medical examiners).

Another takeaway from this session was the realization of, and appreciation for, **the results of the thoughtful and ordered process** the participants have engaged in. Each lab member put in the work to assess, brainstorm and strategize solutions to their challenges and is beginning to see the tangible forward progress.

Resource: Action Planning Template (Appendix D) to guide participants in translating strategy into actionable tasks.

Session 5: Next Steps and Moving Forward

During Session 5, lab participants discussed their Action Plans and other ways they will incorporate lessons learned from the Data Lab into their work. The group also discussed the final lab report and the final lab convening.

Session 5 Takeaways:

Data lab participants expressed an **increased awareness of the need to expand their lens when confronting barriers to accessing data**—to think “outside the box”—needed to meet grant reporting requirements. Using the DCRA reporting as an example, possible data sources include:

- Individual law enforcement agencies
- Coroners or medical examiners



- State justice data committees, and more.

Possible methods of increasing data access include:

- Pay-for-data agreements
- Increased education and persuasion
- Incorporating relevant data points in existing data collection efforts.

Participants also each discussed how engaging stakeholder bodies or convening working groups of relevant stakeholders was part of their action planning. These groups can be used to increase buy-in, push forward policy change or sharing agreements, and to increase the understanding of SAAs' need for data.

Recognition of many of these opportunities came directly from the Data Lab sessions.

Lab Convening

After the conclusion of the labs, NCJA will host a lab convening which will allow the Data Lab participants to join with other lab groups to present findings and recommendations to the larger SAA community.



Conclusion

For state administering agencies, data sharing and meeting reporting requirements can be complex issues. The Innovation Lab approach allowed participants to **breakdown this complexity** into its component parts and to **think creatively** about their individual needs and barriers to meeting those needs, and how to **overcome** those barriers.

The Data Lab group recognized the importance of relationships—creating connection, buy-in and engagement with relevant stakeholder—and responsibilities—clarifying the roles and obligations of various agencies in sharing data—to improving data sharing and reporting.

Specific **strategies** identified in the Lab and being pursued by participants include:

Leveraging Byrne JAG funds:

The Byrne JAG program allows for funds to be allocated for “technology improvement” and, specifically, to improve Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA) reporting. As such, one approach to increasing access to data is to leverage Byrne JAG funds in a fee-for-data agreement.

During the Data Lab sessions, a lab participant indicated that the state medical examiner’s (SME) office is willing to provide relevant data to the SAA, but requires a fee to cover certain



costs associated with the data transfer. All deaths in a state typically are reported by the SME, including information that is required by DCRA. As states increasingly look to their SME offices as a DCRA data source, Byrne JAG dollars could be used to cover related fees and costs.

The funds could be applied in most relevant scenarios where access to data requires payment to another agency or investment in technology.

Engaging Stakeholders and Convening Working Groups to Amplify Efforts:

No matter which approach states choose to take to improve data sharing and their ability to meet federal reporting requirements, engaging with and convening groups of stakeholders is an effective way to amplify these efforts. Presenting information and ideas to groups such as criminal justice coordinating councils and data management coalitions can help refine those ideas, connect to other beneficial stakeholders, and cultivate buy-in for getting plans accomplished.

These groups may consist of leadership-level stakeholders or their representatives and can recommend or approve policy changes, data sharing agreements or other actions needed to improve data access and usage. Existing groups often meet regularly and will make space for discussion in their agendas. Convening new or ad hoc groups allows for tailoring the participants for the purposes of the project. Each of the states in the Data Lab worked with, or plans to work with, key groups for these purposes, described in detail in the Session 4 of this report.

Exploring Non-traditional Data Sources and Gatekeepers

Lab participants were encouraged to think “outside the box” for potential data sources. For example, while local law enforcement agencies may be the most direct source of DCRA data, they may also be reluctant to provide those data for several reasons. Alabama has successfully begun exploring their county coroners as a data source. Beginning in 2023 the Alabama SAA will work with the Alabama Coroners Association to support a training program for county coroners, educating them on law enforcement-related deaths, in general. It is hoped that this training will lead to increased DCRA data access as coroners understand SAAs’ reporting requirements and the importance of reporting deaths in custody.

Technology Investment with Vine

The Iowa Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy (IDCP) faced a challenge in garnering local-level DCRA data. During the Data Lab, Mike Fargen (NCJA’s OVC VOCA Center) highlighted the Nebraska Statistical Analysis Center’s work with [VINE](#), the nation’s leading victim notification network. VINE enables survivors, victims of crime and others to access to information about people accused of and convicted of crimes who are held in U.S. jails and prisons. VINE also connects state-approved local and national service providers and could be used to compiled records of deaths in jails and prisons, the bulk of DCRA cases.



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Iowa is currently in the process of meeting with relevant stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of utilizing the VINE solution. This stakeholder group, which includes the Iowa Statistical Analysis Center, will determine the associated costs and data sharing responsibilities before seeking implementation.

Consortia Building

The Florida Sheriffs Risk Management Fund (FSRMF) is a non-profit membership organization that provides liability, automobile and workers' compensation coverages to Florida Sheriff's offices. Through the innovation lab, FSRMF discussed the challenges of managing and accessing data from disparate systems while balancing considerations such as data sharing permissions, data transfer protocols, and more.

The state's small, rural and medium-sized local agencies struggle to manage grants and handle the technological duties of data sharing due to a lack of resources. A recent survey revealed that about 20 percent of sheriff's agencies do not have staff dedicated to grants applications and management.

FSRMF has adopted a consortia approach to address these unique challenges and recently held a meeting where 45 of 67 of Florida Sheriffs agencies were in attendance. It is the hope of FSRMF that the consortia will allow for smaller agencies to access data sharing and grant administration resources to improve their access to funding. Moving forward, the multi-agency collaborative will work together to address challenges and work toward a viable solution for all participating sheriff departments.

NCJA's innovation lab encourages brainstorming and problem solving through peer-to-peer engagement. Through participating in the "Diversifying Your Funding and Subawards" Innovation Lab, lab members were able to discuss their experiences and challenges and develop tangible steps to take to reach their goals. If you would like to be involved in an NCJA innovation lab, please contact strategicplanning@ncja.org.

This document was created with the support of Grant No. 2019-YA-BX-K002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the SMART Office, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



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Appendices

Appendix A: NCJA's Innovation Labs Flyer

Appendix B: Data Sharing Checklist

Appendix C: Overcoming Challenges Worksheet

Appendix D: Action Planning Template

NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION'S

INNOVATION LABS



Brainstorming drives the creation of new ideas and the development of new innovations. With the support of The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), through NCJA's Innovation Labs, State Administering Agencies (SAAs) will engage in peer-to-peer learning in small cohorts over a defined period of time, focused around a certain area of need.

Potential Lab Topics Include

(Labs will focus on strategically thinking and planning for the implementation of programs within topic areas.)



Data Sharing and Meeting Reporting Requirements



Community Violence Intervention Programs



Effective use of Criminal Justice Data in Planning



Local Planning Board or CJCC Engagement



Crisis Response Related to Behavioral Health and 988



Strategies for Diversifying your Funding and Subawards



COVID-19, State Reopening, & Crisis Management



Braided Funding

Each lab or cohort will focus on a topic that is relevant to the job of the SAA and important for ensuring Byrne JAG funding is used strategically. Each lab will have a series of working sessions over the course of six months with facilitated discussions for peer-to-peer learning, planning and brainstorming.

Working Sessions May Include:

- Resource development for innovation implementation
- Planning time/program development
- Best/promising practices presentation on trending and innovative programming in that area of focus
- Summarized recommendations for other SAAs

Lab participants will be invited to participate in an Annual Innovation Lab Convening (potentially in-person post 2021), hosted by NCJA, where each lab cohort can share their work and learn from their peers.



To learn more please email strategicplanning@ncja.org

To sign up to participate, click [here!](#)



APPENDIX B

NCJA INNOVATION LABS

NCJA Innovation Lab – Data Sharing and Meeting Reporting Requirements

Data Sharing Analysis – Where to begin?

1. Problem Description – What is the issue and context that data sharing will resolve?

2. Needs Identification: What are we trying to accomplish?

- Digitize paper process
- Automate manual processes
- Access to or transformation of existing data
- Capture new type of data
- Perform analysis
- Provide data
- Other _____

3. Requirements Analysis – Establish the What, How, Who, When for data sharing needs

Data elements

- Identified
- Defined
- Standardized
- Codes/enumerations
- Optional and/or conditional (if, then)
- Other _____

Data collection and reporting structure

- Web form
- Word document
- Spreadsheet
- System Interface(s)
- Other _____

Reporting processes identified

- Guidelines/instructions
- Expected frequency
- Responsibilities
- Other _____



4. Review of data assets – Who may have what you need?

Law Enforcement

- CAD/RMS
- JMS
- NIBRS
- Other _____

Courts/Prosecution

- Records Management System
- Other _____

Corrections

- Jail Mgmt System
- Offender Mgmt System
- Other _____

Statistical Analysis Centre

- Uniform Crime Reports
- NIBRS
- Other _____

Criminal History Systems

- Rap Sheets
- Hot Files (stolen items)
- Wants/Warrant Files
- Other _____

Other Stakeholder Systems

- _____

5. Gap analysis – Identify and document what are you missing

- Data
- Policy
- Systems
- Tools
- Infrastructure



APPENDIX B

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Overcoming Challenges Worksheet

Use this worksheet as a resource to help identify barriers and solutions to goal implementation.

Goal: What problem are you looking to solve?

Challenge(s): What barriers might you face as you plan to implement your goal?

Pathways to Success: How will you overcome your challenges?

- Relationship Building: Engaging of partners, stakeholders (new and old), subawardees, policy leaders, etc.
- Low-hanging fruit: What “easy wins” are available to you?
- Resources: Are there financial or human resources you can leverage?
- Enticements: How will you encourage people to help achieve the goal?



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Example

Goal(s)	Challenge(s)	Pathways to Success (relationship building, low-hanging fruit, resources, enticements)
<p>State needs to access education data for youth in juvenile justice system.</p>	<p>The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) sets limitations on what can be shared with entities outside of state's Department of Education (DOE).</p>	<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build common identifier into juvenile justice case management system – student ID number.
		<p>Relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize state data committee to seek aggregate reports from DOE. • Send student ID numbers to DOE for juveniles in custody and have them return educational for those youth.



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	Goal(s)	Challenge(s)	Pathways to Success (relationship building, low-hanging fruit, resources, enticements)
1			
2			



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3			
4			



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5			



APPENDIX D

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Action Plan Template

Goal:						
Solution	Action Step	Lead	Additional Team Members or Partners	Start Date	Anticipated Completion Date	Notes



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Goal:						
Solution	Action Step	Lead	Additional Team Members or Partners	Start Date	Anticipated Completion Date	Notes