



# Justice Counts



Justice  
Center



## STATE TOOLKIT

## BECOME A JUSTICE COUNTS STATE TOOLKIT (DOWNLOAD)

### Introduction

This is your guide to getting your state to make justice count. In this toolkit, you will find an overview of the Justice Counts initiative and metrics, talking points, and templates to reach out to stakeholders and guidance on building a coalition and becoming a Justice Counts state.

Questions or comments on this toolkit? Looking for opportunities to expand Justice Counts in your state? We look forward to hearing from you. Contact us at [justicecounts@csg.org](mailto:justicecounts@csg.org).

Remember that there are five ways to become a Justice Counts State:

1. Your state's governor passes an executive order committing to the Justice Counts metrics.
2. Your state legislature passes a resolution committing to the Justice Counts metrics.
3. Leaders in your state issue a letter of request to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). This letter must be co-signed by one or more leaders (agency leader, association president, elected official, etc.) in each criminal justice sector represented in Justice Counts metrics (law enforcement, defense, prosecution, pretrial/courts, jails, prison, and community supervision).
4. An existing or newly established cross-system criminal justice working group (or similar decision-making entity) issues a letter of request. Such an entity should include practitioners and leaders from across the criminal justice system at the state, county, and local levels.
5. Thirty percent of criminal justice agencies in a state have completed the Justice Counts Self-Assessment.

*In this toolkit, you will find the following resources to help you successfully navigate one of these paths:*

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## Justice Counts 101 – project purpose and history

### What is Justice Counts?

An initiative led by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs’ Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), The Council of State Governments Justice Center and 21 national partners to develop and help implement consensus-driven metrics for criminal justice agencies to provide policymakers with more timely and actionable data.

### How is Justice Counts different from other initiatives?

Justice Counts is distinct from previous efforts to provide criminal justice metrics because of the substantial, first-of-its-kind national coalition of leading criminal justice organizations behind it. The Justice Counts metrics are consensus driven, developed in partnership with a wide range of experts across the criminal justice system.

### Who developed these metrics?

More than 100 people, agencies, and entities worked to balance a complex range of issues to select the Justice Counts metrics. Justice Counts comprises 21 partner organizations representing officials at every corner of our nation’s state, county, and municipal justice systems. Seven subcommittees specializing in each cross section of the criminal justice system provided crucial expertise to develop the Justice Counts metrics. These metrics were then shared to and advanced by the Justice Counts steering committee, made up of active state and local officials—from law enforcement, to corrections, to legislatures, and beyond.

### Why should I participate in Justice Counts?

Policymakers are often forced to make critical decisions about the safety of their constituents using limited or stale criminal justice data. In the face of significant challenges and fiscal pressures, our leaders need up-to-date information from across the justice system, presented in a digestible way. The Justice Counts metrics are designed to be both usable for policymakers and feasible for the agencies providing data. By joining Justice Counts, you are joining a national movement for better data.

### How can I be involved?

You can champion Justice Counts in your state by downloading, sharing, and using the resources and guidance in this toolkit and the Justice Counts website; signing onto and sharing the Justice Counts statement of support; and visiting our website for more information and tools.

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## Executive Order Template

### Executive Order [#] Establishing the Justice Counts Working Group

I, **[Name] Governor of the State of [State]**, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and applicable statutes, issue the following Executive Order:

[In this portion, include relevant statistics and information about criminal justice data in your state, as pertaining to the metrics categories.]

Today we join with [#] states that have committed to better, timelier, and actionable data by establishing a Justice Counts working group. We will do this important work through a bipartisan partnership across the co-equal branches—Legislative, Judicial, and Executive—and with tribal and county-level elected and appointed leaders. [State] policymakers across these levels of government are often forced to make critical decisions about the safety of their constituents using limited or stale criminal justice data. Facing significant challenges and fiscal pressures, our leaders need up-to-date information from across the justice system, presented in a digestible way.

For these reasons, I order as follows:

1. The [Justice Counts Working Group/Council, etc.] is established.
2. [Member Name, Affiliation] will Chair the [Entity Title].
3. In addition to the Chairs, the [Entity Title] will be composed of at least 13 members appointed by the governor that represent a broad cross section of the criminal justice system. These members include:
  1. Law enforcement representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Prosecution representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Defense representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Courts and pretrial representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Jails representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Prisons representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Community supervision representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Reentry representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Behavioral health representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Victim services representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  11. At large representative(s): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Vacancies on [Entity Title] will be filled by the Governor.

In collaboration with The Council of State Governments Justice Center and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance, the [Entity Title] will work with criminal justice agencies to develop a process of sharing actionable data in accordance with the Justice Counts metrics on a consistent and ongoing basis. [Entity Title] will work with the CSG Justice Center as technical assistance providers to accomplish this.

This Executive Order is effective [date] and will remain in effect until rescinded [or date].

[Your state may have specific clauses or provisions that must be addressed here and vary from state to state.]

Signed on [Date].

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## Legislative Resolution Template

### RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF JUSTICE COUNTS

WHEREAS, Justice Counts is an initiative led by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance, The Council of State Governments Justice Center and over 21 partners to develop and help implement consensus-driven metrics for criminal justice agencies; and

WHEREAS, the Justice Counts metrics are consensus-driven, developed in partnership with a wide range of experts across the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, [State] policymakers are often forced to make critical decisions about the safety of their constituents using limited or stale criminal justice data; and

WHEREAS, [state a specific criminal justice issue in your state]; and

WHEREAS, [state a specific criminal justice issue in your state]; and

*Example: WHEREAS, [Example criminal justice statement] Georgia has the highest probation rate in the country, with 1 in 17 adults on probation. Between 2016 and 2017, probation revocations in Georgia had nearly doubled; and*

*Example: WHEREAS, [Example criminal justice statement] At the end of FY2019, Kansas Department of Corrections was operating at 101 percent of capacity, creating overcrowded prison conditions and persistent staffing challenges; and*

*Example: WHEREAS, [Example criminal justice statement] Oregon has one of the highest rates in the nation of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders, and death rates from drug overdoses and suicides are growing and;*

WHEREAS; Justice Counts would remedy this by ensuring decision-makers have access to consistent, timely, and accurate data across the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, states such as [states] have committed to implementing the Justice Counts metrics.

Therefore Be It Resolved that the State of [insert state here] supports the Justice Counts Metrics and urges policymakers throughout state and local government entities to implement and utilize them and commit to making the latest criminal justice data available.

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## Letter of Request Template – Founding States Program

A letter of request is one way a state can demonstrate broad commitment from criminal justice agencies for participating in Justice Counts. When a state submits a letter with the required signatures, the CSG Justice Center will follow up to discuss 1. If a spot as a founding Justice Counts state is currently available and what technical assistance might be available as part of that opportunity, or 2. If the state will be placed on the waiting list for Justice Counts technical assistance and what support may be available during the waiting period or if all Founding States Program slots are taken.

*Please send the completed letter to the Justice Counts team at [justicecounts@csg.org](mailto:justicecounts@csg.org)*

Heather Tubman-Carbone, PhD  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
810 Seventh Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20531

Dear Dr. Tubman-Carbone,

As state and local leaders, we share the priorities of safety and justice for all [state] residents. Like many states across the country, the lack of access to timely and accurate criminal justice data is an issue for [State]. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us that it is possible for government agencies to publish ongoing, recent data to meet clear and present public needs. [State specific CJ issue examples].

Now more than ever, it is clear that [State] must commit to making this kind of accessible data a permanent reality across the criminal justice system from law enforcement and prosecutors to courts and prisons. Smarter criminal justice policy requires better data: data that are up to date, consistently available, and easy to understand and utilize. To accomplish this, we need metrics that are feasible for agencies while being useful for policymakers, committed agency leaders to input data accordingly, and digital infrastructure that is easy to use for agencies and visual displays that are easy to understand for policymakers.

We aim to ensure that we and our fellow state leaders have accurate, accessible, and actionable data to drive decisions about our criminal justice system. We write to request the technical assistance support of The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the support of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to participate in the Justice Counts Initiative's Founding States Program. This support will provide the hands-on help that will benefit our agencies in sharing Justice Counts metrics, will steward the publication of those metrics, and help [State] policymakers effectively use Justice Counts data in their decision-making going forward.

The co-signers of this letter recognize that cross-system implementation of Justice Counts is critical to its success and impact. We each pledge to make our individual agencies a Justice Counts agency and will work in as a coalition to encourage other agencies to join our charge.

We hope to work with the CSG Justice Center and BJA to take this monumental step forward toward better criminal justice data and policy and to make justice count in [State].

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Law enforcement signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prosecution signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Defense signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pretrial/Courts signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jails signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prisons signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Community Supervision signatory

\_\_\_\_\_  
Additional signatories as desired

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## Guide to Building an Effective Justice Counts Coalition/Working Group

Having a working group or coalition is an integral step toward becoming a Justice Counts state.

These entities can develop and steward effective, collaborative cross-system partnerships, which are the foundation of Justice Counts. The metrics depend on consensus and buy-in across the criminal justice system to provide accurate and actionable insight to policymakers. Use the following tips to build a Justice Counts coalition or form a working group in your state.

1. **Define and publicly state the coalition/working group's purpose.** For example, *our mission is to leverage the resources and infrastructure of Justice Counts to make criminal justice data more available and more usable to policymakers and the public.*
2. **Define the coalition/working group's structure for decision-making:** To establish a formal working group, you need your governor or state legislator to issue legislation. A statewide network of leaders can also establish decision-making structures such as an advisory council.
3. **Set your expectations:** Will you be meeting formally? How often? What will be the purpose and outcomes of your meetings? What are the expectations of agencies that sign on?
4. **Define your outcomes:** What will the result of the coalition's work be? For example, how many agencies are you aiming to sign on to the Justice Counts statement of support and commit to taking the self-assessment and by when?
5. **Make connections:**
  - a. What does the justice system look like in your state? Every state has a unique criminal justice make-up. Section by section, identify the key stakeholders for each group of metrics in your community.
  - b. Are the various sectors of the criminal justice system represented?
  - c. Do you have state leadership from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches?
  - d. Are there already key committees or commissions that do this work? Are they represented?



<b>Governor's Office</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Governor or First Lady/Gentleman</li><li>• Senior policy advisor</li><li>• Legal counsel</li></ul>	<b>Local Law Enforcement and Jail Administration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sheriff</li><li>• Chief of police</li><li>• Deputies or police officers</li><li>• Jail administrators</li></ul>	<b>Local Community Supervision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Probation director</li><li>• Chief probation officer</li><li>• Supervision officers</li></ul>	<b>Prosecutors and Defense Attorneys</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attorney General</li><li>• District/state attorney</li><li>• Chief public defender</li></ul>
<b>Courts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief justice</li><li>• Court administrator</li><li>• Chief criminal judge</li><li>• Pretrial manager</li><li>• Magistrate judge</li><li>• Court clerk</li><li>• Criminal justice or sentencing commission director</li></ul>	<b>Health and Human Service Providers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medicaid and behavioral health directors</li><li>• Human and behavioral health service providers</li><li>• Hospital administrators</li><li>• Housing providers</li></ul>	<b>Criminal Justice Researchers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Statistical analysis center</li><li>• Local college or university research center staff</li></ul>	<b>Local Administrators</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• County/city executive, commissioner, or board member</li><li>• County/city manager, planners, or analysts</li><li>• Local criminal justice coordination council director or chair</li></ul>
<b>Legislature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elected officials from both parties</li><li>• Legislative leadership</li><li>• Chairs or members of key committees such as the public safety, judiciary, appropriations, or health and human services committee</li></ul>	<b>Community Members</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community leaders</li><li>• Victims and their advocates</li><li>• Formerly incarcerated people</li><li>• People with criminal histories</li><li>• People who have been on community supervision</li><li>• Family of incarcerated people</li></ul>	<b>State Agencies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commissioners, directors, and/or deputy directors from executive agencies, such as, American Indian Affairs, Community Supervision, Corrections, Health, Public Safety, Workforce</li><li>• State Administering Agency</li><li>• Chair or executive director of the parole board</li></ul>	<b>Native American Tribal Leaders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tribal law enforcement and judicial officers</li><li>• American Indian health service</li><li>• Tribal council member</li><li>• Elders and other community members</li></ul>

## Justice Counts Talking Points

**Objective:** The Justice Counts metrics are straightforward and already commonly shared they work as a whole to provide a big picture and do not obscure important factors. Participating states are encouraged to provide additional context for the metrics based on how their state's system is organized so that it's clear to policymakers and the public what the data mean.

**Consensus-driven:** Justice Counts is a consensus-driven project that brings together stakeholders from across the system to use data in a way that is clear, effective, and meaningful for policymakers. The initiative comprises 21 partner organizations representing officials at every corner of our nation's state, county, and municipal justice systems; more than 100 people, agencies, and entities worked to balance a complex range of issues to select the Justice Counts metrics.

**Actionable:** Justice Counts primarily aims to get real-time data into the hands of people who need it to drive critical policy and budget decisions. The Justice Counts metrics provide policymakers, stakeholders, and the public with timely, wide-ranging information on their criminal justice system that they have never had or had in one place before. These metrics relay summary-level information from agencies that show trends and dynamics at key points in the system, which provides policymakers and others with vital context for making policy and budget decisions.

**Feasible:** Justice Counts strives to “meet agencies where they are” by focusing its efforts on data that are already collected by the vast majority of, if not all, agencies in a given sector of the criminal justice system. The Justice Counts metrics provide a foundation for policymakers and others to dig deeper and work with the agencies in their state/jurisdiction to use data to develop and implement effective policy. The Tier 1 metrics also take into account the significant variation in agencies' capacity to collect, analyze, and share data.

**Timely:** One of the most pressing challenges with criminal justice data is how delayed they often are. National data on things like prison and supervision populations, for example, are often released years after the fact. In a world in which things change frequently and quickly, policymakers are using yesterday's data to solve today's problems. COVID-19 showed that agencies—including criminal justice agencies—can produce key data in a timely way, and policymakers used those data to navigate pressing public health and safety challenges in real time. Justice Counts envisions a future for criminal justice data where they are shared in a way that is accurate, accessible and actionable. It is understandable and reasonable to give agencies some time to check their data and enter them into the Justice Counts platform, but policy makers cannot wait for months or even years for data that can help them make smart and educated decisions about the criminal justice system.

**Technical Assistance:** Every case—and every person—is important so people partnering on Justice Counts at the national, state, or local levels will work with agencies to streamline the process of sharing data to better follow cases through each stage of the system. Justice Counts metrics are designed to make this complex task as simple and feasible as possible for the agencies tasked with sharing the data, and as useful as possible for the people who need to use that data to make decisions about the criminal justice system and its impacts. However, none of those outcomes will happen in a vacuum. Justice Counts will provide training, consensus building, capacity building, public education, and more to participating states to help make this vision a reality.

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## Stakeholder Outreach Email or Letter Template

Dear [Title] [Last Name]:

My name is [Your Name], [Optional: Your Affiliation] and I am based in [Your Locality] and I want to ask you to support an exciting new initiative to ensure access to more timely and actionable criminal justice data: Justice Counts. When it comes to issues like jobs and public health, Americans can generally trust that their elected leaders are operating with up-to-date information. Criminal justice is a different story. Policymakers are often forced to make critical decisions about the safety of their constituents using limited or stale criminal justice data.

By the time it reaches the desks of policymakers, data related to jails, probation, trials and crime are often outdated—months or sometimes years old. Even when criminal justice agencies can gather data promptly, they lack the time, ability, or mandate to paint a complete picture. Information is scattered across multiple offices and departments, rarely consolidated in a way that is useful for the people working to improve how the system functions. Facing significant challenges and fiscal pressures, our leaders need up-to-date information from across the justice system, presented in a digestible way.

Justice Counts is distinct from previous efforts to provide criminal justice metrics because of the first-of-its-kind national coalition of leading criminal justice organizations behind it. First and foremost, the Justice Counts metrics are consensus-driven, developed in partnership with a wide range of experts across the criminal justice system with an emphasis on usability for policymakers and feasibility for agencies inputting data.

You can support Justice Counts today by signing the statement of support, requesting a policy briefing, or [taking the self-assessment on behalf of your agency OR circulating the self-assessment to state and local agency leaders].

Here is a link to the Justice Counts website for more information:  
<https://justicecounts.csgjusticecenter.org/>

[Your State] deserves better data. I hope you will support these common-sense, consensus-driven metrics to help make it happen.

Thanks again for your support.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Tip: Include your [Address] or at minimum [CITY, STATE, ZIP]