



## Summary of AB 109 Evaluation Feedback from CCP Leadership

### Introduction

To begin the second year of the Sonoma County AB 109 evaluation, Resource Development Associates (RDA) produced this summary of feedback from the leadership of the Sonoma County Community Corrections Partnership (CCP), regarding their thoughts on the progress of the evaluation to date. This summary served three purposes: 1) to gather CCP leadership's responses to the four reports<sup>1</sup> from the first year of the evaluation; 2) to assess the early impact of RDA's evaluation on AB 109 services in Sonoma County; and 3) to ensure that RDA's future activities address the needs and requests of all CCP members.

RDA conducted phone interviews with eleven CCP members or their designated proxies, between August and September 2018. Interviewees represented the following County agencies and organizations:

- Behavioral Health Division
- California Human Development
- County Administrator's Office
- Human Services Department
- Office of the District Attorney
- Office of the Public Defender
- Petaluma Police Department
- Probation Department
- Sonoma County Office of Education
- Sonoma County Sheriff's Office
- Superior Court of California, County of Sonoma

The RDA evaluation team asked interviewees a standard set of questions and transcribed their responses. Subsequently, RDA utilized thematic analyses to identify patterns in interviewees' feedback and highlight key takeaways. RDA's role conducting interviews is a potential methodological limitation, as interviewees may have been less comfortable sharing criticisms with RDA compared to a neutral interviewer.

### Key Findings

#### Year One Evaluation

##### Strengths

**The evaluation has helped familiarize new CCP members with the AB 109 landscape.** Five interviewees joined the CCP in the previous year or represented a colleague who was a new CCP member. Three of these new members utilized the Year One reports to orient themselves to AB 109 practices and programs in Sonoma County.

*"As someone who is new to the AB 109 world...[the evaluation] is really useful to learn about community corrections."* –CCP Member

<sup>1</sup> Sonoma County AB 109 Implementation Evaluation Report (December 2017), *Reconviction Analysis* (April 2018), *Needs and Cost Analysis* (April 2018), and *Day Reporting Center Process Evaluation* (July 2018)



The evaluation has supported some county agencies in strengthening their data collection and management practices. The Sonoma County Probation Department plans to enact multiple changes to AB 109 programming, such as improvements to interagency data exchange and the department-wide use of evidence-based practices. Another interviewee cited the reports as a factor behind their agency's restructuring of data collection methods to better disaggregate client outcomes across different programs.

**Evaluation recommendations serve as a foundation for agencies to begin internal discussions around improving their AB 109 services.** Two interviewees praised the Year One reports for broaching discussions around changes to agency systems and protocols, even if the agencies had not yet implemented these reforms. The reports have served to stimulate some conversation among CCP members over systems change.

### Opportunities

**Most interviewees could only recall the evaluation findings and recommendations that were relevant to their own agency.** Although the majority of CCP members expressed general satisfaction with the reports, few had a comprehensive understanding of the AB 109 evaluation at the systems level. Some had read the reports a while before the interview and could not recall many specifics. This unevenness in familiarity suggests an opportunity for the evaluation to reinforce CCP members' awareness of AB 109 services as a whole, support of interagency collaboration, and improve CCP members' retention of the key takeaways from each report.

**CCP members indicated a common desire for future evaluation activities to explore more targeted inquiries, based on questions that have emerged from the evaluation.** Several interviewees cited data from the Year One evaluation—such as the low rates of DRC participant enrollment or completion—that could serve as the basis for more pointed evaluation questions in Year Two and beyond. RDA has the opportunity to pursue more fine-tuned research based on the findings from the Year One reports and feedback from CCP leadership, who shared a desire for the AB 109 evaluation to drive systems change and help optimize service delivery.

*"I'm a firm believer in the system adapting itself to the population needs, and not the other way around—and so if...we're not able to provide services to the AB 109 population, we would need to revisit the approach."—CCP Member*

## Upcoming Evaluation Activities

### Stakeholder Recommendations

**Report on outcomes of AB 109 services.** Interviewees expressed a strong interest in evaluations that provide clear takeaways regarding the impacts of programs. Two CCP members suggested investigating participant outcomes could convince skeptical stakeholders that AB 109 services are worth the



investment. Another interviewee similarly wanted the evaluation to explore whether AB 109 services have been effective enough to justify their expense.

**Engage a wide range of stakeholders to capture more perspectives in future reports.** Several interviewees identified specific stakeholders, such as the judicial officers who assign AB 109 sentences, whose experiences should be included in the evaluation. One interviewee recommended a larger sample size of AB 109 individuals in evaluation and another was curious why many probationers leave the DRC prematurely and wondered whether RDA could capture their perspectives through targeted focus groups or standardized exit surveys for DRC participants.

**Provide context on data gaps and limitations to support enhanced practices in data collection, management, and sharing.** One interviewee noted that the Year One reports reflected the uneven availability of data across the county's criminal justice systems, as some agencies collect more exhaustive data than others. This individual requested that RDA's future reports highlight weaknesses in county data capacity and offer concrete recommendations to ameliorate these data gaps for the final years of the AB 109 evaluation.

*"As we're getting to Year 4, Year 5 [of the evaluation], it would be nice to be in a place where we have data systems, laying the groundwork to do evaluation work on our own...Ideally we'd have the systems and the tools, understanding the data we're collecting, [and] how we're going to use it." –CCP Member*

**Investigate the broader landscape of interagency collaboration and team case planning for Sonoma County probationers.** Interviewees' specific interests include evaluating how probation collaborates with various stakeholders to align service delivery; how county agencies oversee participants' transition from accessing in-custody case planning to utilizing post-release services; and the impact of improved interagency collaboration on recidivism rates.

**Provide trustworthy data and specific, actionable recommendations upon which their agencies can act.** CCP members expressed a strong commitment to using data-driven decision making to drive AB 109 implementation. One interviewee who expressed a general dissatisfaction with the AB 109 Process Evaluation thought that its findings leaned too much on anecdotal evidence and that the report's recommendations were too vague to support their implementation. Developing qualitative data collection methods that elicit a clear understanding of trends across participants and authoring more pointed recommendations can address these concerns.

**As a point of comparison, share with CCP members some of the successes and challenges that other California counties have faced in implementing AB 109 services.** While the demographic differences between counties prevents any direct comparison of results, RDA might be able to introduce CCP members to best practices evidenced from RDA's AB 109 evaluation projects in other counties.



**Consider additional definitions of “recidivism.”** One interviewee noted that multiple, competing criteria for recidivism makes it difficult for county criminal justice agencies to share data or otherwise communicate with one another. Another interviewee offered that RDA should look at all arrest data, not just arrests that lead to convictions: all arrests require time and resources; and some arrests can result in linkage to supportive services.

*“With respect to recidivism, we haven’t really come to an agreement [on] what ‘recidivism’ means...When things are being reported, they should be reported exactly the same [across different agencies]. But, that doesn’t really happen.” –CCP Member*

### Preferences and Priorities for Program-Level Evaluations

**CCP members’ highest priority for program-level evaluations are behavioral health services,** which include mental health and substance use disorder services in custody and post-release. Eight interviewees mentioned behavioral health, albeit for divergent reasons: one CCP member noted that they had personally witnessed the benefits of Starting Point, while another interviewee expressed concern that Starting Point was underperforming. A majority of interviewees also mentioned the county’s post-release substance abuse programs (Turning Point and California Human Development).

**Interfaith Shelter Network’s (IFSN) transitional housing program is also an evaluation priority.** Six interviewees were interested in evaluating AB 109-funded housing programs. They described housing as one of the most important stabilizers for participants’ reentry into the community. As one CCP member contended, the countywide scarcity in housing meant that it was crucial to investigate IFSN’s efficiency in service delivery.

**CCP members want to know more about the efficacy of JobLink’s employment services.** Two interviewees were curious whether AB 109 participants require professional development training or other supportive services before finding employment, and whether JobLink helps participants meet those needs. Another interviewee alluded to the Statewide Prison to Employment Initiative, noting that these funds will prompt a new service delivery model and thus a new need for performance evaluation.

**The county’s slate of pretrial services was a focal point for several interviewees.** Two CCP members cited the large amount of funding that goes to pretrial services and suggested an evaluation would help the CCP better allocate said funds to maximize the effectiveness of service delivery. Multiple interviewees also alluded to the recent passage of SB 10, noting that the elimination of cash bail would have broad ramifications for pretrial services.



## Next Steps and Best Practices for RDA

### Evaluation Plans

**Focus on the impact and outcomes of programs.** Many interviewees expressed their general desire to see more analysis on the outcomes of AB 109 activities: the impact of AB 109 services on probationers and their chances of recidivism; the impact of AB 109 on county agencies and service providers; and the relationship between financial investments and program outcomes for individual programs. In turn, RDA plans to shift its foci from the implementation of services to the impact of these programs.

**Prioritize behavioral health, employment, pretrial services, and transitional housing for subsequent evaluations.** Feedback from CCP leadership indicates that these service domains are a priority for evaluation. In Year Two, RDA plans to conduct an evaluation of California Human Development's substance abuse treatment program at the DRC. Program evaluations in subsequent years will investigate the other AB 109-funded programs and services emphasized by interviewees.

### Data Collection and Analysis

**Engage stakeholders who were not included in Year One evaluation activities.** RDA will work to incorporate the perspectives of additional county stakeholders, including representatives of CCP member agencies and AB 109 individuals. Capturing a wider range of voices will provide additional insights into the county's network of AB 109 services, as well as addressing some interviewee concerns about the sample size of probationers under investigation.

**Ensure that relevant parties are knowledgeable of extant data gaps and offer concrete recommendations on how to improve County data systems.** RDA will articulate data capacity issues in written reports and in subsequent communications with county stakeholders. Reports will include actionable recommendations for the relevant parties to address data gaps, with an eye towards building data capacity and sustainability beyond the five-year evaluation period.

### Authoring and Sharing Evaluation Reports

**Engage CCP members earlier in the evaluation process to review and nuance report findings.** RDA will work with Probation to circulate drafts of the evaluation reports to the CCP, so that county stakeholders can comment and provide feedback earlier in the evaluation cycle. In doing so, RDA can better address any misinformation or miscommunication that might arise during the evaluation process.

**Author an executive summary or one-page synopsis of each evaluation report for readers to quickly absorb the main talking points.** While interviewees generally praised the style and clarity of the Year One reports, many interviewees were marginally familiar with the details therein. The RDA evaluation team plans to produce abridged executive summaries of each report, so that readers can quickly familiarize themselves with the major takeaways, key findings, and primary recommendations.