

Title II Grantee Needs Assessment: Summary of Feedback and Recommendations from the Community Investment and System Accountability (CISA) Subcommittee

This report was developed by the CISA Subcommittee Chairs, Carly B. Dierkhising & Andrew Garcia, with input and feedback from the CISA Subcommittee members.

Summary

The Community Investment & System Accountability (CISA) Subcommittee conducted a needs assessment to better understand the experiences and priorities of organizations involved with California's Title II youth justice funding. The preliminary findings are based on survey responses from 11 community-based organizations and two key informant interviews from current and former Title II grantees.

The findings point to a strong desire for greater connection and structured peer learning opportunities with other Title II grantees. Respondents reported moderate familiarity and limited connections with other current Title II grantees. Respondents indicated a preference for regular grantee presentations and an annual summit/convening as a way to engage with fellow grantees and organizations. Although respondents generally reported strong organizational capacity to collect and use data, opportunities to strengthen data collection, particularly with youth and families, are present. Respondents also expressed uneven familiarity with statewide youth justice entities, specifically OYCR and the SAGYJ, suggesting a need for clearer and more consistent communication from the State Advisory Group on Youth Justice and the Office for Youth and Community Restoration with grantees.

Background and Methodology

The needs assessment combined interviews and a survey. Initially the Subcommittee intended to interview all current Title II grantees; however, due to low responses (two interviews) a survey was developed instead, and eleven organizations completed the survey. The interview themes aligned with the patterns identified in the survey. All survey respondents were community-based organizations. Seventy-three percent identified as current Title II grantees, 27% identified as former grantees, and 27% as organizations interested in Title II funding (respondents could select more than one category). Because the sample is small, the results should be understood as exploratory and should not be assumed to represent all Title II grantees or community-based youth justice organizations in California.

Key Findings

1. Grantees value connection, but current interaction is inconsistent

Most respondents had limited familiarity with other Title II grantees in California. Sixty-four percent described themselves as only *slightly familiar* with other grantees, while 18% were *moderately familiar* and 18% were *very familiar*. Engagement during the previous year was also uneven: 36% had connected with another grantee several times, but another 45% had not connected with another grantee at all. Only 9% reported regular interaction.

Despite these relatively limited connections, respondents strongly supported increased engagement. **Seventy-three percent said that being connected with other Title II grantees would “definitely” be helpful**, and another 18% said it would “probably” be helpful. Only one respondent indicated that it would probably not be helpful.

2. Respondents prefer structured and substantive engagement

Organizations expressed the greatest interest in regular grantee presentations, an annual summit or convening, topic-specific working groups, and resource-sharing opportunities each selected by 73% of respondents. Virtual networking alone was less popular, selected by 36%. These results suggest that respondents are seeking engagement organized around shared learning and practical content rather than informal networking alone.

Engagement Opportunity	Responses (N 11)	Percent of Respondents
Regular grantee presentations	8	73%
Annual summit/convening	8	73%
Topic-specific working groups	8	73%
Resource sharing	8	73%
Peer learning communities	7	64%
Site visits	6	55%
Mentorship opportunities	5	45%
Virtual networking	4	36%
Other	1	10%*

***Write-in Response (Other):** "Strengthening capacity-building efforts, expanding learning opportunities to maximize available resources, and establishing a clear referral process to support youth who relocate beyond the city or county we serve."

3. Funding information and shared problem-solving are the most desired benefits

Ninety-one percent of respondents hoped that increased engagement would help them identify funding opportunities. Eighty-two percent wanted opportunities to learn and share best practices and to discuss common challenges and solutions. These findings indicate that grantees view collaboration not simply as relationship-building, but as a strategy for increasing organizational capacity, expanding resources and improving the quality of services available to youth.

Benefit of Increased Engagement	Responses (n 11)	Percent of Respondents
Identifying funding opportunities	10	91%
Learning & sharing best practices	9	82%
Discussing common challenges & solutions	9	82%
Strengthening referral networks	8	73%
Strategies to address service gaps	9	82%
Building collaborative grant partnerships	8	73%
Improving program evaluation & data collection	7	64%
Reducing duplication of services	5	45%
Learning about policy developments	4	36%

4. Organizations report strong data capacity, with a few notable gaps

Respondents generally described substantial data and evaluation capacity. All organizations reported tracking youth participation, having access to evaluation expertise and assessing youth progress. Ninety-one percent collected information directly from youth, had designated staff responsible for data or evaluation and reported having a program logic model.

However, **only 36% reported collecting information from families**. Twenty-eight percent did not collect family information, while another 36% were unsure. Sixty-four percent reported having an evaluation report, with the remaining 36% unsure. These findings suggest that family engagement in evaluation and the documentation or dissemination of evaluation findings may be less developed than other data functions.

Ninety-one percent of respondents reported using data to inform program design, while **100% of respondents used data to communicate impact to funders and improve services for youth and families**. Ninety-one percent used data for day-to-day decision-making, reporting requirements and program evaluation. Sixty-four percent used data to identify unmet community needs, while 45% used it to advocate for policy change.

5. Grantees define youth success with a strength-based lens

We asked organizations to describe how they defined youth success in their program. The responses emphasize progress and developmental growth rather than relying exclusively on recidivism or system-contact measures. Organizations define youth success through a combination of educational, employment, personal, family and justice-system outcomes. Common themes included engagement and attainment in education, employment and workforce readiness, progress toward individualized goals, self-sufficiency and strong family or community connections.

"Success is determined upon an individual's progress toward the fulfillment of goals... with the ultimate aim of becoming self-sufficient."

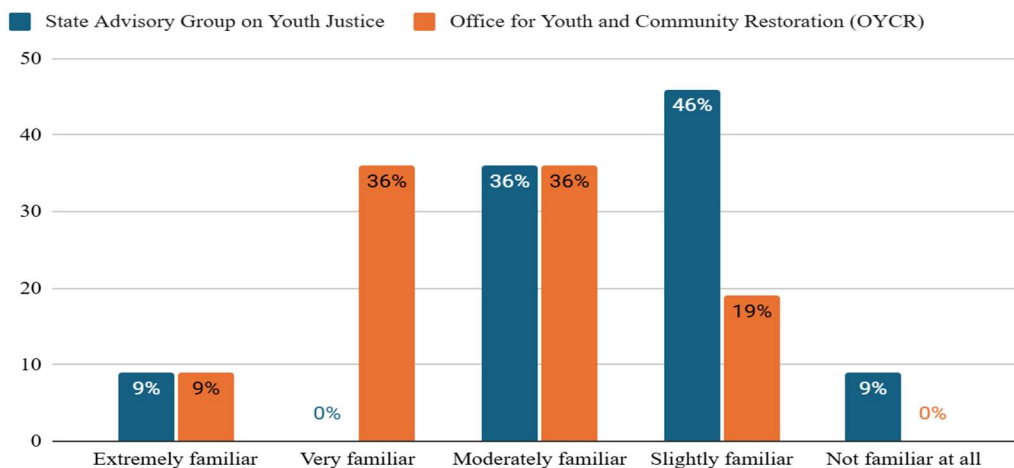
"When we help them achieve each goal, it builds their confidence... leading to employment, college enrollment, family reunification, and avoiding further justice system involvement."

"Youth is engaged in school and/or employment, has a community of support, has a plan for their future, and is confident in their ability to achieve it."

6. Awareness of statewide youth justice organizations is uneven

Familiarity with the State Advisory Group on Youth Justice was relatively limited, though, respondents were somewhat more familiar with OYCR.

Level of Familiarity with Statewide Youth Justice Organizations



7. Organizations want practical assistance from state-level partners via interactive communication methods

Respondents identified a wide range of potentially useful support from state-level committees. The most common responses include; information about funding opportunities, technical assistance with funding applications, youth and family engagement strategies, training on evidence-based or promising practices, program evaluation support, and updates on state youth justice policies. Of note, a write-in response called for state-level guidance to help local probation departments strengthen coordination and support smoother transitions for young people returning to the community from secure settings.

Webinars (50%) and regional meetings (40%) were the most frequently selected methods for learning about SAGYJ and OYCR activities. Although the sample is small, the pattern suggests that respondents may prefer communication that offers opportunities for explanation, interaction and regional relevance rather than relying exclusively on written announcements.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, SAGYJ and OYCR could consider the following actions:

1. **Establish a structured Title II grantee learning network.** Combine regular grantee presentations, peer-learning sessions, and/or resource sharing into the CISA Subcommittee or another entity.
2. **Make engagement with the SAGYJ and the CISA Subcommittee an explicit grant requirement.** OYCR should establish clear participation expectations in future Title II NOFOs, grant agreements, and work plans. As part of their funding, each grantee should designate a consistent point of contact, respond to reasonable requests for information and feedback, participate in an initial orientation, and engage in a defined number of SAGYJ or CISA activities during the grant period. Activities may include Subcommittee meetings, grantee presentations, needs assessments, peer-learning sessions, technical-assistance activities, or statewide convenings. These expectations are intended to ensure meaningful engagement and should be communicated before awards are made and monitored as part of grant performance.
3. **Create an annual Title II convening.** Use the event to share promising practices, discuss common implementation challenges, develop partnerships and provide direct access to state-level information and resources. Require grantees to include this in their proposal and budget to support attendance and engagement.
4. **Revisit the type of data collected from grantees.** Organizations indicate that they have strong data capacity which may be an untapped resource. Future reporting requirements could include measures that capture education, employment, personal growth, supportive relationships, future planning and self-sufficiency alongside reductions in justice-system involvement.
5. **Increase SAGYJ visibility and clarify its role.** Use webinars, regional meetings and concise email communications to explain SAGYJ's responsibilities, current priorities and opportunities for community-based organizations to participate. This should include information about the SAGYJ Subcommittees with opportunities for organizations to be involved.
6. **Provide targeted technical assistance.** SAGYJ and OYCR should develop a coordinated technical assistance strategy that responds to the specific needs and requests of Title II grantees and, as appropriate, other youth justice organizations. Assistance could address areas such as grant development, program design and implementation, evaluation and data management, youth and family engagement, evidence-based and promising practices, and cross-county referral coordination.
7. **Create meaningful opportunities for grantee input.** Involve current and former grantees in technical-assistance offerings and future Title II funding strategies.

Conclusion

The findings describe a group of community-based organizations with meaningful programmatic and data capacity, but with limited and inconsistent opportunities to learn from one another. Respondents see value in a more connected Title II network, particularly when collaboration provides access to funding information, practical tools, and shared problem-solving. A coordinated state-level engagement strategy could build on existing organizational strengths while addressing gaps in communication, evaluation, and awareness of statewide youth justice entities.

The Community Investment and System Accountability Subcommittee

Membership	Name	Organization
Chair	Dr. Carly Dierkhising	Professor, Cal State LA & SAGYJ Member
Vice-Chair	Andrew Garcia	Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commissioner, Tulare County
Member	Carol Biondi	Commissioner, LA County Commission for Children & Families (Ret.) & SAGYJ Member
Member	Michelle Guymon	Director, Child Trafficking Unit - LA County Probation (Ret.) & SAGYJ Member
Member	Matt Cervantes	Associate Vice President of Programs, Sierra Health Foundation
Member	Anthony Ortiz	Data Specialist, California Youth Outreach
Member	Dr. Jorja Leap	Professor, UCLA
Member	Johny Diaz	HART Life Coach, Anti-Recidivism Coalition
Member	Lucero Noyola	Program Officer, Carrie Estelle Doheny Foundation
Member	Mike Duncan	Executive Director, Native Dads Network & SAGYJ Member
Member	Lazandra Dial	Executive Director, City of Oakland Workforce Development Board (Ret.)/Principal Consultant LMD Group
Member	Dr. Kristine Chan	Research Scientist, Child Trends
Member	Dr. Maria León	Consultant, Annie E. Casey Foundation & Cal State LA