



MEASURES
FOR JUSTICE

THE LOUISIANA CRIMINAL JUSTICE DATA LANDSCAPE



**A DIVIDED
FRONT**



Executive Summary

Measures for Justice (MFJ) is a nonpartisan nonprofit that helps communities, including the institutions that serve them, reshape how the criminal justice system works using high-quality data. In October of 2023, MFJ partnered with the East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office and a local Community Advisory Board to launch Commons, a public data tool that shines a light on criminal case processing in East Baton Rouge Parish. Through this work, we've connected with others interested in understanding the challenges and opportunities related to criminal justice data infrastructure and bringing greater transparency to Louisiana's criminal justice system.

The following report explores questions central to criminal justice data collection, transparency, and usability in Louisiana. Informed by research into state law and in-depth stakeholder interviews, our analysis revealed that the state's criminal justice data landscape is characterized by siloed data practices and access barriers that leave many feeling unequipped to assess policy effectiveness. Yet, even with these challenges, practitioners and advocates are exploring creative and collaborative solutions to improve data infrastructure and sharing practices. We explore these themes and conclude with recommendations for practitioners seeking to advance their agency's data infrastructure and policymakers interested in data standardization and transparency.



The state of Louisiana is known for many things: its vibrant culture, serene bayous, tasty crawfish boils, and a long-standing reputation as the nation's top incarcerator.

That is, until 2018, when, for the first time in years, Louisiana's incarceration rate fell from the first to the second highest in the nation. Reform advocates celebrated this milestone, many crediting the progress to legislation implemented the prior year that aimed to lower incarceration and recidivism rates across the state.

The Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) is considered the most comprehensive criminal justice reform package in the state's history. In addition to focusing prison space on people determined to pose a threat to public safety, JRI aimed to strengthen community supervision and remove barriers to successful reentry.

The legislation was estimated to save Louisiana \$262 million, with 70% of those savings to be reinvested in local programs to reduce reoffending and support crime victims. All 10 bills comprising JRI passed with widespread bipartisan support.

Despite enthusiasm from both sides of the political aisle and early indications of success¹, a sweeping reversal of the legislation has since ensued. Proponents of JRI and efforts to reduce Louisiana's incarceration rate question the rationale behind these rollbacks and fear they will leave communities less safe. On the other side, critics of the reforms argue that reductions in sentencing and incarceration lead to more instances of violent crime. While the debate is characterized by many presumptions and anecdotes about what makes Louisianans safe, largely absent from these discussions are the data that would allow for a shared understanding of actual policy outcomes.

This call for data brought Measures for Justice to Louisiana in 2023 to launch the state's first Commons platform and bring transparency to criminal case processing in East Baton Rouge Parish. As we worked alongside the East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office and a local Community Advisory Board to create Commons, we began to hear from others across the state interested in better understanding the challenges and opportunities related to Louisiana's criminal justice data. Everywhere we went, people wanted to know more about data and how to access it.

This report highlights questions central to criminal justice data collection, transparency, and usability. Drawing on a combination of research into state law and in-depth qualitative interviews, we explore the processes by which criminal justice data are collected and shared across Louisiana. Our analysis uncovered four prominent themes that characterize the

¹ Louisiana Legislative Auditor. (2024). Justice Reinvestment Initiative: Challenges and Impact. Archived [here](#).



overall criminal justice data landscape in the state: data silos, access barriers, policy driven by limited evidence, and the power of creative collaboration. We unpack each of these themes, including examples direct from interview participants, and conclude with a series of considerations for legislators and criminal justice practitioners looking to advance data access and transparency in their community.

The Data Landscape

MFJ set out to better understand Louisiana's criminal justice data landscape from the perspective of the people with direct experience navigating it. We began with a review of state law and departmental policies governing criminal justice data, followed by interviews with criminal justice stakeholders throughout the state. Our goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of people's experiences recording, accessing, and using criminal justice data: What data are being recorded? Who can see the data? How is the data being used by practitioners, researchers, and change advocates? The figure to the right provides an overview of our methodology.

We sought to speak to people representing a variety of professions, including researchers, policy advocates, and practitioners. Ultimately, we talked to 11 people across nine interviews.² Participants' positions included criminal justice researchers and policy advocates working at the state and local level, as well as a former prosecutor and a representative from a state criminal justice entity. Multiple participants requested anonymity in the final report to protect working relationships in what many described as a tumultuous environment.

Measures for Justice Data Landscape Methodology

STEP 01

Built Our Sample

Used a blend of sampling types (including: snow-ball sampling, quota sampling, and purposeful sampling) to gather participants for interviews. We reached out to about 65 individuals of which 11 among them agreed to speak with us.



STEP 02

Conducted Interviews

Held semi-structured interviews with participants. They were given the opportunity to remain anonymous but transcripts and notes were recorded for our internal data collection.



STEP 03

Memos & Open Coding

Researchers independently reread transcripts, applied temporary codes, and wrote memos describing each interview.



STEP 04

Consensus & Thematic Analysis

Researchers finalize codes and identify emergent themes within the data obtained from the interviews.



² One interview included three participants representing separate organizations who regularly collaborate on data projects.



Interviews were roughly an hour long and semi-structured, beginning with a standard set of questions but left open for participants to guide the discussion toward aspects they felt were most pertinent.

Ultimately, four key themes emerged from our analysis: data silos, access barriers, policy driven by limited evidence, and the power of creative collaboration. We explore each below.

Data Silos

One of the most commonly surfaced themes among interviews speaks to the existence of “data silos,” meaning criminal justice agencies collect and house their data separately from each other, with no or limited connection points. Given that the criminal justice system primarily operates at the local level, data silos exist in all states to some extent. However, in Louisiana, the challenges associated with data silos are exacerbated by a lack of trust and a sense of “otherness” that participants felt hindered productive discussions around data improvement and access. When data are recorded differently across a multitude of systems that do not speak to one another, practitioners and researchers find it difficult to understand cross-jurisdictional trends or to identify trends related to individual case processing.

Beyond hindering holistic understandings and jurisdictional comparisons of how cases move through the criminal justice system, data silos pose several challenges for implementing legislative reforms. One example of how data silos have hindered stakeholders in implementing change relates to the passage of Clean Slate legislation in Louisiana³ that sought to streamline the process for individuals eligible for criminal record clearance. As criminal charges make their way through the system, various criminal justice entities create and maintain their own record of events, posing challenges for tracking and ultimately sealing records stored across many systems. As one participant who was familiar with the effort explained:

“...the systems won't talk and the process is not fluid. From when a clerk records a criminal conviction, it goes so many different directions. After conviction, it may go to the [state] Supreme Court, to the state police, to the DA, and every one of those in this circle keep a record. So when it comes to expunging that record or clearing that record, there's like 4 or 5 locations — yeah, there's no easy, central repository.”

³ Enacted in 2023, [Louisiana Act 454 \(Senate Bill 111\)](#), outlined a process by which state agencies, including the Bureau of Criminal Identification and district court clerks, collaborate to identify and remove eligible cases.



Apart from disparate data storage, participants described a sense of individualism that can get in the way of cross-jurisdictional conversations around criminal justice system improvement. As one participant explained, “...there’s New Orleans, and then there’s the rest of Louisiana.” We discuss the efforts underway in the state's largest city later in this section, but this sentiment exemplifies the “otherness” described across the state. Participants discussed how strong local and state identities sometimes foster a resistance to comparison and a sense of territorialism over local data systems, with agency leaders seemingly unwilling to share the data they collect. As one criminal justice policy expert put it:

“They all have their own little systems, and they keep them close to the chest. They only publish what they absolutely have to by state law. Not a single thing more.”

Although participants described a lack of centralization or integration of data, some referenced collaborative transparency efforts underway at the local level. In particular, transparency efforts in Baton Rouge⁴ and New Orleans were referenced as examples of progress. Multiple interview participants nodded to the public safety data dashboards published by the City of New Orleans that reflect data collected by local criminal justice entities, including police and sheriffs. However, those we spoke to described New Orleans as “in its own state of affairs,” referencing the unique political and legal pressures to improve the City’s data infrastructure.⁵

Participants spoke at length about the various factors that impact data collection

Examples of state-level criminal justice entities that collect data in Louisiana include:

- Louisiana Supreme Court
- Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DPS&C)
- Louisiana State Police
- Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Criminal Justice (LCLE)
- Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA)
- Louisiana Statistical Analysis Center (LSAC)

This list is not exhaustive, and the listed entities are not necessarily charged with analyzing data or making it accessible to the public.

⁴ [Open Data Baton Rouge](#) includes dozens of datasets, updated daily, designed to give the public access to data relative to local government in Baton Rouge, including crime incident data.

⁵ After a 2013 Department of Justice investigation, New Orleans was issued a consent decree including a number of data collection and reporting requirements for New Orleans Police Department. For more information, see [United States of America v. New Orleans, No. 2:12-cv-01924-SM-JCW, Consent Decree](#) (Eastern District of Louisiana, 2013).



and transparency at the local level. Agencies across the state work with different budgets, capacities, and expertise constraints, leading to a myriad of data-tracking practices. One participant discussed the challenges this variation has posed for gaining a comprehensive understanding of what is happening across the state, comparing analyses to a *Hardy Boys* adventure:

“You're choosing your own adventure and you see different things reported in different formats. Now, from an agency perspective, that's their format. That's the way they do things. But once you zoom out, it very much makes no sense compared to others.”

When the data criminal justice entities collect is kept in silos, the obvious implication is an inability to glean cross-jurisdictional or statewide insights. While participants named a couple of data centralization successes at the local level, when asked during interviews if any statewide criminal justice entities offered publicly available data helpful to their work, participants could not recall examples. Without collecting and sharing reliable data at the state level, Louisianans are unable to have a comprehensive understanding of crime rates and responses, create policies with confidence, or understand the effects of existing ones.

Access Barriers

Beyond data silos, interview participants spoke at length about a multitude of barriers they face in their efforts to collect and analyze criminal justice data from local or state entities where it does exist. MFJ assesses data quality across six dimensions⁶ and inquired about the quality of data collected in Louisiana as part of the present interviews. More often than not, we found that participants could not answer basic questions about the quality of data tracked because they had not been successful in obtaining data in the first place, or a high degree of missingness prevented a holistic assessment of data quality. As one advocate put it:

“It's extremely difficult to obtain any type of information regarding criminal justice here in Louisiana.”

⁶ MFJ has identified 6 “C’s” that represent contributors to high-quality data: complete, correct, consistent, comprehensive, current, and contextualized.



While barriers vary between jurisdictions and agency types, interview participants reflected on challenges collecting data from several different criminal justice entities at the local and state levels, including law enforcement, prosecution, courts, and corrections. The most common barriers referenced involve technology limitations and a lack of person capacity to fulfill data requests.

In their efforts to create their public tool, the Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database (LLEAD)⁷ Innocence Project New Orleans staff submitted hundreds of requests for public data from police departments, sheriff's offices, and other agencies throughout the state. When the team faced challenges obtaining data in a timely manner, agency capacity was the most common contributor. This challenge was particularly present when requesting data from smaller agencies in rural jurisdictions that often have limited technological resources, with some agencies having to scan and redact paper files to fulfill requests. Moreover, agencies that presently maintain records in digital form likely adopted this technology in recent years, making it challenging to access historical data. As Ayyub Ibrahim, Director of Research for LLEAD, explained:

“When you ask for records prior to 2010, they're likely just sitting on a shelf somewhere. And it's very difficult for them. [Police departments] just don't have the capacity to go through those old files individually digitizing for us. And so I would say, on the whole, a lot of the pushback really does come to capacity at some of these agencies.”

In addition to challenges stemming from a lack of capacity, interview participants described what they perceive as a disconnect between justice system decision-makers and their administrative data systems. Depending on the agency's size and resourcing, many local criminal justice entities may not have an in-house data manager or someone with in-depth knowledge of the case or record management system employed. This often leaves agencies and data requestors at the mercy of third-party vendors who can extract and manipulate data to fulfill requests.

For over five years, Christopher Csonka has served as the Executive Director of the East Baton Rouge Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (EBR CJCC), a diverse group of local leaders collaborating to increase public safety and improve the criminal justice process in East Baton Rouge Parish. Members of the EBR CJCC rely on data and community input to inform their approach. In addition to collecting data in their annual Community Safety and Justice survey,

⁷ Launched in 2022, [LLEAD](#) is a public tool that consolidates data from over 600 law enforcement agencies throughout Louisiana in an effort to track patterns related to law enforcement misconduct.



EBR CJCC collects aggregate data from local justice entities for reporting purposes. Even when agency leaders desire to share data, without an in-house data expert, they often defer the CJCC directly to their CMS vendor to coordinate a data extraction. While this is one way to obtain data, it comes with a steep price tag, with the CJCC paying one vendor \$32,000 a year in exchange for monthly aggregate statistics, such as average daily jail population broken down by demographics.

While interview participants described obstacles to collecting data from criminal justice agencies and courts at the local level, data maintained by state-level entities were regarded as particularly difficult to obtain. Except for a couple of working collaborations with the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, very few instances of data sharing at the state level were noted across interviews. When participants could obtain bulk data at the state level, it was often incomplete and missing information critical to analyses.

Data marked with a high degree of missingness also posed a challenge for those assessing and implementing the previously mentioned Clean Slate legislation. Reflecting on data received from the state criminal history repository, participants noted that critical information, such as date of offense or disposition, were missing more often than not. Not only does this make it difficult to identify qualified cases within the data and forge pathways to record clearance for those eligible, but it also prevents researchers and policymakers from knowing basic facts about the criminal justice system. For the policy work underway in Louisiana, the consequences are vast:

What is a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)?

CJCCs facilitate collaboration between local criminal justice entities, bringing together elected officials, administrators, and community leaders to share data, promote interagency cooperation, and work together to address challenges.

There are currently CJCCs operating in four Louisiana parishes: East Baton Rouge Parish, Jefferson Parish, Orleans Parish, and Lafayette Parish.

“...it's hard to build policy out when you don't know what the real problem is.”



What is a Criminal History Repository?

Each state designates an agency to collect and maintain criminal history records as reported by local law enforcement agencies. These repositories serve as a funnel for data exchange between local law enforcement and the FBI, and decision-makers often draw on these data sources to inform criminal justice policy.

In Louisiana, the State Police Bureau of Criminal Identification and Information (BCII) serves as the central repository for criminal records. Records are housed in the Louisiana Computerized Criminal History (LACCH) system.

Louisiana is a “closed records state,” meaning BCII data are not public, but available to certain entities as dictated by [La. Rev. Stat. §15:587](#).

Data systems characterized by significant gaps or messy entry practices impede data analysis and the effective implementation of policy. They also have implications for public safety and well-being. For example, a police officer who suspects a person of a crime may not have access to the most recent criminal record to inform their stop, or inaccurate background check results may jeopardize a community member’s housing.

In addition to these concerns, participants called attention to a number of unanswered questions they are left with as they navigate data access and quality challenges. Beyond understanding the overall crime rate for different jurisdictions across the state and the state as a whole, data access barriers leave Louisianans unable to assess a number of fundamental questions about how justice unfolds in their communities, such as:

- Case lengths (e.g., How long do cases take from arrest to final disposition?)
- Charging decisions (e.g., How do the charges filed by the police department compare with the charges accepted by the prosecutor’s office?)
- Bail insights (e.g., What bail amounts are ordered for different offense types across my parish?)
- Fines & fees (e.g., What types of fines and fees are collected? How much money is generated through fines and fees?)
- Programming (e.g., How long are people spending in various corrections programs? What is the outcome of reentry programming?)



With so many lingering questions concerning overall crime rates and the impact of specific reforms, participants often wondered how decisions that seriously affect their criminal legal system can be made confidently.

Policy Driven by Limited Evidence

Across our interviews, participants agreed that even the most foundational crime and justice information in Louisiana is difficult, if not impossible, to access. Given their own struggles collecting and analyzing data, nearly every interview participant raised concerns about the implications this data void has for informed policymaking. Without a trusted source of reliable data to speak to current crime rates and system outcomes, what information has informed recent legislative reforms and rollbacks?

Many of the people we spoke with speculated that anecdotal evidence—stories that do not necessarily reflect reality and are often sensationalized in the media—drives policy decisions in the absence of data:

“We're using rhetoric and headlines to push our decisions rather than the data.”

While this was a general concern for the people we spoke with, participants expressed skepticism around 2024 decisions to roll back JRI reforms in particular. Many of these decisions were driven by what participants felt were misperceptions of the role of these reforms in driving the state's crime rate and a failure to consider the many other factors at play in Louisiana and across the country. Several participants pointed to rollback rationalizations around a 2020 increase in violent crime that they felt was not adequately contextualized with national statistics (as Louisiana was not unique in this pandemic era spike⁸).

Importantly, it isn't simply a lack of data but a lack of trusted data that has prevented legislators from coming together around a shared understanding of the state of crime and justice system outcomes across Louisiana. Despite many concerns about uninformed policymaking, several interview participants called attention to a widespread interest in and desire for more data. Participants described feeling as though practitioners and legislators alike

⁸ Grawert & Kim. (2023). *Myths and Realities: Understanding Recent Trends In Violent Crime*. Brennan Center for Justice.



were eager for data. As Dr. Kim Mosby, Associate Director of Research for Vera Institute of Justice's Louisiana office, explained:

"It's not just researchers, it's not just the media. It's our local leaders and our state leaders. They want the information."

The Louisiana team was Vera's first place-based initiative, actively working to shape criminal legal system reform in New Orleans since 2006, with efforts expanded to encompass other parts of the state in 2021. Vera Louisiana collaborates with community and government partners to reduce incarceration rates and promote data-driven reforms. While Dr. Mosby spoke to data improvement initiatives underway in New Orleans, understanding the statewide impact of policy over time has been an ongoing challenge. She underscored the importance of access to reliable data in the context of sweeping legislative rollbacks:

"This year, it feels extremely important that we create a baseline so that we can talk about how destructive these policies are because they're not going to make us safer. That's one of the real needs for data transparency moving forward—not just [seeing] where we are today, but also being able to compare where we were yesterday, where we were at the time that these reforms were made."

While nearly every participant expressed concerns about policy based on insufficient data, a second set of legislative concerns was frequently referenced throughout our discussions. These concerns centered around legislation that participants felt would further hinder government transparency and efforts to access data. While these concerns are not limited to local or state justice systems, participants expressed apprehension over the implications for criminal justice insights. Examples include [House Bill 767](#), which requires proof of Louisiana residency to request records held by the governor's office, and [House Bill 768](#), which limits personal liability for custodians of court records who fail to comply with the Public Records law.



What is a Public Records Law?

In addition to the federal [Freedom of Information Act](#), each state has laws detailing records that are open to the public versus those exempt from public disclosure.

Louisiana's Public Records law ([La. Rev. Stat. § 44:1, et seq.](#)), also known as Louisiana's Sunshine Law, was enacted in 1940, and grants access for the public to request records and requires custodians to respond within three days.

Recent moves to amend the Public Records Law to limit who can request records and remove compliance accountability mechanisms has caused concerns for data and transparency advocates across the state.

While the specific legislative concerns varied across our interviews, the common thread underpinning these perspectives is the potential for these policy changes to inflict or mask harm without making communities safer. With or without data, policy decisions are made daily, which have consequences for communities. "In the absence of an answer," one participant explained, "People make up their own. And if we don't allow people to get to an answer utilizing actual data, they're going to just roll with what they have."

Creative Collaboration

While many of our discussions centered around obstacles, interview participants also discussed strategies they have used to progress in their efforts to collect and use various criminal justice data. Specifically, people described ways they were able to navigate challenges related to silos and access barriers by identifying and building relationships with others that share a vested interest in data use and transparency. Participants described various ways they were able to leverage a shared desire to improve their justice systems and increase data transparency through forging bonds with data holders and being tenacious in reaching out and obtaining data.



When asked about the data-sharing climate in Louisiana, one participant described it as a “hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake and an ice cap, all happening in different places at different times.” From data access barriers to issues with data missingness, our discussions illustrated that many challenges thwart data endeavors. Still, participants found a solution in practicing empathy, maintaining an open mind, and being willing to collaborate.

Building relationships can go a long way in pushing forward positive changes in the system and toward a standard default to open data access. At both the local and state level, those relationships must be built upon trust at both the local and state levels. Dr. Mosby explained the benefit of cultivating authentic relationships with those who are directly involved in data management:

“If you have a personal connection with somebody, it makes things move a little bit easier. When I see that email, I know exactly what the project is. I can call up a face. I can call up a person who, you know, treated me as a human being, not just as a means to an end. So, it's really important to establish those relationships in terms of other data.”

Another example of success in building trust at the local level can be found in East Baton Rouge, where the EBR CJCC has fostered relationships with criminal justice practitioners and community leaders throughout the parish. Christopher Csonka reflected on the establishment of the CJCC, emphasizing the importance of connecting with key community groups, such as the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and the power of fostering those relationships. Whereas it was once challenging to start conversations, today, community members are in discussion with law enforcement leaders, even when it is uncomfortable. This progress is possible because people are willing to come together and collaborate with an open mind.

Several participants detailed collaborations with smaller agencies and highlighted steps they are taking to foster data quality improvement and transparency with limited resources. Dr. Mosby noted that transparency does not require an advanced data dashboard, suggesting agencies begin with smaller steps and consider the “lower hanging fruit.” For example, agencies can consider what pre-existing aggregate or anonymized reports their office already generates and begin to make that information publicly available.



In their efforts to populate the aforementioned LLEAD dashboard, Innocence Project New Orleans (IPNO) sent public records requests to hundreds of law enforcement agencies across the state to understand the career path of a single police officer. Given that many agencies struggled to find the resources to fill requests, Ayyub and the team at IPNO presented creative solutions to ease the burden, working with agencies to establish feasible timelines for extraction and offering hands-on support to digitize the requested records. These strategies helped to alleviate the stress of filling bulk record requests where agencies faced capacity constraints.

In addition to creativity, interview participants discussed the importance of patience and persistence in their data endeavors. For ACLU of Louisiana staff, data silos and access barriers meant obtaining comprehensive data required subpoenaing documents from each of the state's 64 parish Clerks of Court and 42 District Attorneys to acquire data that could lend state level insights into pretrial incarceration challenges to inform their recent report, [Justice Can't Wait](#). Other participants consistently commented on the time required for meaningful change, noting that building an adequate data infrastructure and culture within a community can take years. However, for participants, this time spent nurturing relationships is critical to foster the trust necessary for collaboration and transparency.

Ultimately, from listening to the experiences of those we interviewed, we found that many people, agencies, and organizations care to improve their data systems. Many of those we spoke to would not have received access to needed data or been able to accomplish their initiatives without being collaborative, creative, and persistent. To break down silos, or pass legislation that opens access points to data and enhances data collection, experts such as these must be at the table.

Moving Forward

This report discusses several challenges in collecting, accessing, and using trusted data to gain a holistic understanding of crime and advocate for legislation promoting public safety in Louisiana. Importantly, though, our conversations also uncovered promising actions for state and local leaders looking to address these challenges and usher in progress. Below, we detail four recommendations for practitioners seeking to advance their agency's data infrastructure and legislators invested in data standardization and transparency.



Start where you are.

Criminal justice entities across Louisiana are all at different points on their data journey, with some feeling they have a long way to go before they can make meaning from the data they collect. Some of the most data-advanced agencies in Louisiana have made strides to publish their data in interactive dashboards and downloadable datasets. In contrast, others continue to grapple with paper records and archaic systems. It's important to remember that data transparency does not necessarily look like a state-of-the-art dashboard. For example, Vera's Louisiana team has collaborated with the New Orleans Sheriff's Department to identify existing reports to share with the public without requiring a heavy lift for the office's IT staff.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to transparency. Regardless of where an agency is on its data journey, there are steps to take to improve data collection and sharing practices.

Establish data collection standards.

Perhaps not surprising given the resounding call for robust statewide insights noted throughout this report, multiple participants suggested a top-down approach to organizing data and establishing well-defined standards for collection and sharing. This consistency can fill missing data gaps and lay a path for cross-jurisdictional insights that are often lacking. One example of progress in this regard is the ongoing development of the state's Integrated Criminal Justice Information System (ICJIS).

Under the guidance of a policy board created in 2018, ICJIS intends to ensure communication and standards across agencies responsible for criminal justice data collection, including the Supreme Court, the District Attorneys' Association, the Sheriff's Association, the Association of Chiefs of Police, the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, and others. We suggest continuing to invest in efforts to bring together disparate data sources. When possible, include the perspectives of impacted groups and community organizations who have long been at the forefront of system transparency initiatives in Louisiana.



At the local level, understand that agencies are in different stages of data development, and many may face challenges adapting to new standards. While not every agency will be immediately ready to implement data collection standards, Louisiana lawmakers should aim to provide a shared roadmap to guide these efforts. Importantly, agencies need resources to be successful in improving their data infrastructure. Given the digital divide referenced by participants, some agencies, especially those in urban areas, may have more advanced data infrastructures. Others will need the resources and support to update data collection systems and build their capacity for adequate data management.

Foster and protect avenues for data transparency.

Each person we spoke with had a professional vested interest in data, and many of the participants spent their days trying to obtain information, mostly unsuccessfully. Given these challenges, Louisiana lawmakers should be mindful of the power of data transparency in shaping the public's perception of and trust in the criminal justice system. As interview participants shared their hopes for a future where reliable data is easily accessible, they also described an overarching fear for the public's right to understand criminal justice operations. Beyond unifying data, legislative efforts should ensure the data reported are shareable with researchers, advocates, and the general public. Legislation should clearly define the data the public can access and consider ways to make this information accessible (e.g., downloadable bulk datasets). In doing so, safeguards should be established to protect personally identifiable information from unauthorized disclosure. While system transparency is key to understanding opportunities for improvement, lawmakers should be cautious to avoid misapplications of transparency that expose sensitive information and leave community members at risk.



Build data culture & connections.

Across our discussions, it was clear that a key factor influencing data progress is buy-in, not only leadership but buy-in from the people on the ground, recording data as part of their daily duties. When entered consistently and correctly, administrative criminal justice data has the potential to benefit agencies as well as the broader community. However, data is not always top-of-mind for criminal justice practitioners juggling a wide array of responsibilities.

To encourage better data practices, local and state leaders should help those tasked with data collection to see the benefits of their work. In addition to demonstrating the advantages of prioritizing data, criminal justice entities should invest in training staff to understand the workings and capabilities of their records management system. Our conversations highlighted a single data advocate's influential role within a large organization. As agencies begin or refine the process of building and assessing data culture, identifying and empowering data advocates will be key to improving processes.

Importantly, agencies shouldn't set out on their data journey alone. The current report illustrates how a lack of cross-jurisdictional and cross-agency communication sustains data silos and prevents us from examining fundamental questions about criminal justice operations across Louisiana. People invested in data improvement efforts should connect

Looking for a way to connect?

Join MFJ's **All In Network**, a space for agencies, community partners, and others to convene to advance data transparency and accessibility, leading to greater accountability in criminal justice systems across the country.

MFJ has identified ***Fourteen Hallmarks of Good Data Culture*** that can be used to guide resourcing as criminal justice agencies working to improve data practices.

with others in their community, whether within a parish or profession, who are interested in leveraging the power of data to gain insights and make change. Agencies may consider working with local community groups or exploring what it might take to establish a CJCC in their parish. Many practitioners and advocates are grappling with similar data challenges, and establishing collaborative spaces to share solutions is key to moving forward.



Conclusion

Despite a strong and widespread desire for reliable data to serve as common ground for policy decisions, the Louisiana criminal justice data landscape is plagued by numerous challenges that hinder collection, accessibility, and use. From siloed systems and a sense of territorialism to access barriers and issues with data missingness, these challenges deepen divides between criminal justice entities and ultimately obscure the complete picture of how justice unfolds within and across Louisiana's 64 parishes. Despite these setbacks, through creative collaboration and persistent relationship building, proponents of evidence-based change have advanced discussions around data improvement.

Although the current challenges characterizing Louisiana's criminal justice data practices leave practitioners and policymakers unable to assess accurately the impact of reforms, the themes identified here point to countless opportunities for improvement. In considering ways to move beyond these obstacles, decision-makers should continue to focus on statewide data reporting efforts that can serve as a common source of comprehensive data. In doing so, research and policy analysis pathways should be clearly outlined while ensuring safeguards to protect personally identifiable information from disclosure. At the local level, agency leaders should start where they are and not be discouraged by the challenges plaguing office data systems or practices.

Even jurisdictions with minimal resources can take steps to improve their data protocol and create windows of transparency for the community. Importantly, any improvement effort should be rooted in patience and open-minded collaboration. Researchers and community advocates at the helm of criminal justice transparency efforts hold valuable expertise. Ensuring these voices are in the room is critical to fostering trust and success. Without collaborative data transparency, skepticism and distrust around criminal justice will continue to fester throughout the state. Until Louisianans can access reliable, trusted data, stakeholders cannot ensure that policies are fair and effective in their intended impact.



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