

01  
THINK TANK  
S E R I E S  
WITH LEAD JUDGES

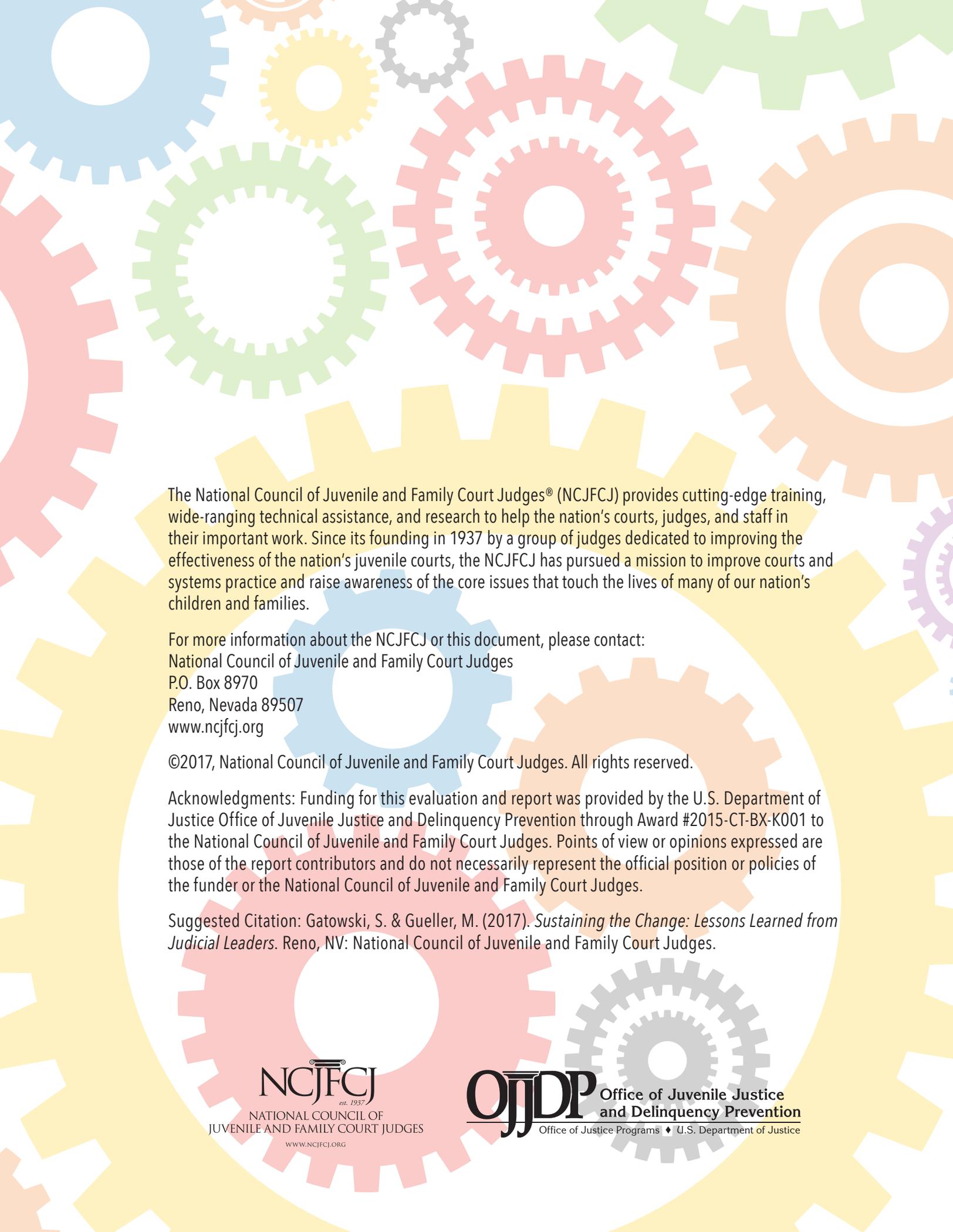
# sustaining the change

lessons learned from  
judicial leaders

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges® (NCJFCJ) provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging technical assistance, and research to help the nation's courts, judges, and staff in their important work. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, the NCJFCJ has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families.

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# sustaining the change

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Child Protection Division

**Hon. Michael Nash (Ret.)**, Former Lead Judge, Los Angeles Superior Court, Juvenile Division

**Hon. Stephen Rubin (Ret.)**, Former Lead Judge, Pima County Juvenile Court

**Hon. Louis Trosch**, Former Lead Judge, Mecklenburg County District Court

**Hon. Bode Uale**, Lead Judge, Family Court of the First Circuit of Hawaii



# the ncjfcj think tank series with lead judges

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' (NCJFCJ) think tank series brings judges together to share knowledge and provide insights on issues of relevance to court improvement and collaborative systems change. The judges invited to participate in think tanks are former and current Model Court Lead Judges. These national judicial leaders have considerable experience leading system-wide collaborative stakeholder teams to design and implement program, practice, and policy changes to improve outcomes for children and families involved in the foster care system. The NCJFCJ think tank series aims to tap into the wealth of the Lead Judges' knowledge base and experience to provide a lessons learned resource to other jurisdictions engaged in collaborative court improvement efforts.

A **think tank** is a body of experts providing advice and ideas on specific problems. The group's knowledge, experience, and energy is brought to bear on an issue. Think tanks identify and define issues, examine challenges and solutions to problems, and make recommendations for future actions.

Think tanks serve as a network or community of experts through which ideas are nurtured and spread and action is catalyzed.

A think tank is a group organized to study a particular subject (such as an issue, need, practice, policy, or a problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice about what should be done.

**Lead Judges** guide the court improvement process, establishing collaborative teams that work to assess court practice, identify challenges, set goals, and improve outcomes for children and families.

## background

### key features of the model court infrastructure

- Strong judicial leader
- Well-established judicially-led collaborative
- Willingness to serve as a laboratory for systems change
- Commitment to taking a hard look at court process, policies, and procedures
- Commitment to facilitating and coordinating change efforts at the state, regional, and national levels
- Ongoing assessment and critical reflection of current practices utilizing a continuous quality improvement process
- Establishing measurable court improvement goals and strategies

In 1992, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) embarked upon a major national initiative to improve court handling of child abuse and neglect cases. The first step in the process was to develop a blueprint for court improvement nationwide. The blueprint publication, *Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases (Resource Guidelines)* was developed during a three-year period by a multi-disciplinary committee composed of judicial leaders, court system professionals, and other experts. In August 1995, the *Resource Guidelines* publication was endorsed by the Conference of Chief Justices, the American Bar Association, and the Board of the NCJFCJ, and released nationwide.

At the same time, the Victims Act Model Court Project (Model Courts) was developed. Using the acclaimed best practices outlined in the *Resource Guidelines*, the Model Courts, led by a Lead Judge in each jurisdiction, developed high performing judicially led collaborative teams that included all partners in the child welfare system. These teams identified impediments to the timeliness and thoroughness of court events and to the overall delivery of services for children in care and their families. They then designed and implemented court and agency-based changes to address those barriers.

Over the years, the Model Court project evolved. In 2007, the Model Courts Next Generation was launched. During this period, the courts expanded their change efforts beyond the local level to include system-wide change efforts on the state and national levels as well. Experienced Model Courts also began to transition to senior and mentor Model Courts status to expand the project statewide in numerous jurisdictions. Model Courts adopted measurable goals locally and joined together with other Model Courts around the country to work on a national court improvement goal.

In 2014, the NCJFCJ restructured the entire Model Court project by designating the more than 80 participating jurisdictions to mentor status in an effort to bring on new jurisdictions willing to implement practices outlined in the upcoming *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* and implement the infrastructure pioneered by the Model Courts.

In recognition of the lessons learned from the Model Courts, emerging issues from the field, and new demands placed on judges as a result of changes in federal law, the NCJFCJ revised the original *Resource Guidelines* document and released the enhanced version in 2016. The *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases* set forth the principles that should guide a judge's work and provide tools to achieve the key principles of case level permanency planning as well as systemic reform.

Currently, the NCJFCJ's *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* Implementation Sites are participating in an initiative to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the key principles and practice recommendations outlined in the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*. These courts have designated Lead Judges who are currently guiding multi-disciplinary stakeholder change teams through a strategic planning process—a process that compares current practice to best practice recommendations of the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*, and designs and implements reforms aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. Mentor Model Courts remain integrally involved in mentoring the NCJFCJ's new Implementation Site courts and serve as cross-site visit hosts to share and showcase their innovations and reforms, allow for teams to observe hearings, and meet with their system counterparts to exchange ideas and approaches related to systems reform initiatives. Mentor Model Courts are tasked with revisiting and enhancing the front-end development of future courts seeking to improve their dependency court practice.



## think tank overview

### think tank objectives

- Increase understanding of systems change and the leadership role of judges in sustaining effective dependency court systems change efforts
- Provide strategies for overcoming challenges and building capacity to sustain systems change

This issue in the judicial think tank series shares the lessons learned from a conversation with judicial leaders about their experiences with, and strategies for, the successful implementation of court improvement efforts – specifically, it summarizes Model Court and Implementation Sites’ Lead Judges’ recommendations for tackling issues related to the sustainability of collaborative systems change efforts to improve the child abuse and neglect case process and, ultimately, improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children.

This issue in the think tank series gathers and summarizes the Lead Judges’ knowledge, experiences, and strategies for sustaining dependency court change efforts.

### The Role of the Judge in Implementing Sustainable Change

**Sustainability** means holding onto improvements made and evolving as required.

*“Systems change is a people-driven process. Judicial leadership and vision is critical not only to its forward momentum but also to sustaining that momentum.”*

**-Lead Judge**

*“Judges set the tone for the court, and as leaders they can set the tone for the court and system reforms.”*

**-Lead Judge**

*“The role of the dependency court judge necessarily involves leadership functions.”*

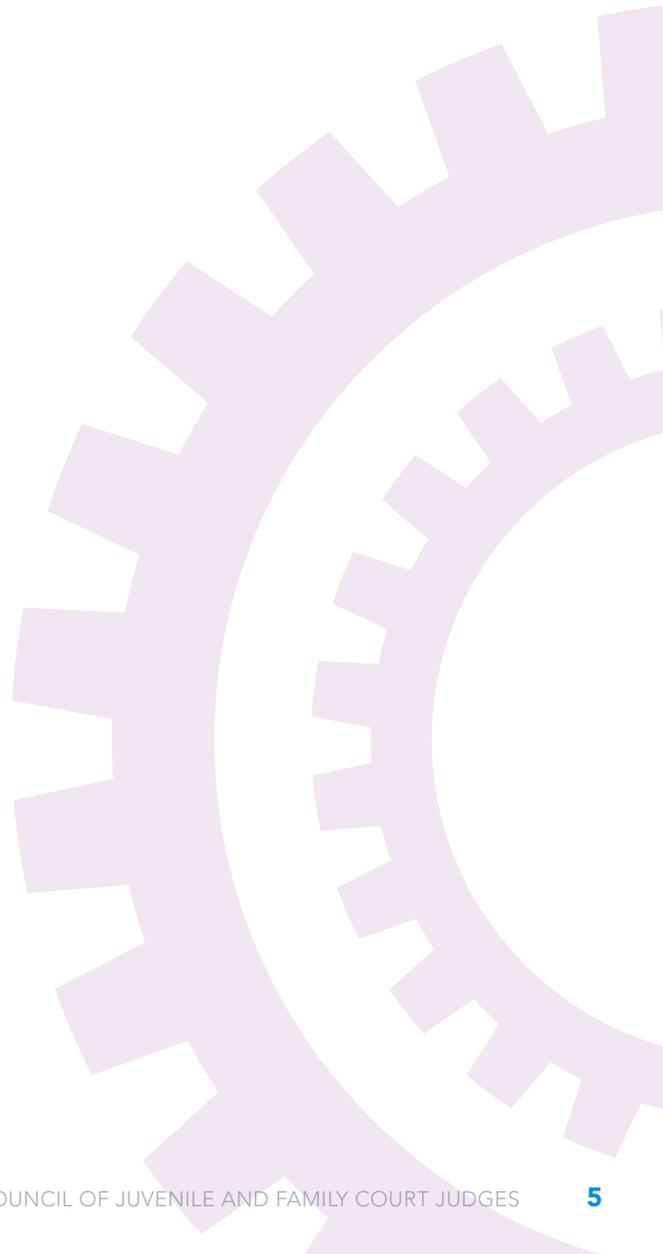
**-Lead Judge**

The judges agreed that while implementing, sustaining, and spreading court improvement is difficult, success in any continued quality improvement (CQI) effort requires **deliberate and intentional** systems change implementation management. When asked to discuss the role of the judge in change management, the judges agreed that without **judicial leadership** and vision, it would be very difficult to develop, implement, and sustain effective systems change in dependency courts.

The judges stressed that the role of the dependency court judge necessarily involves leadership responsibilities – on-the-bench judicial leadership via strong judicial oversight of cases and off-the-bench leadership which involves working with court, system, and community stakeholders to address the needs of the children and families before the court. To achieve significant change, and sustain that change, the judges discussed the need for cross-system boundaries and work with leaders beyond the court and to hold system professionals, including the court and themselves, accountable for outcomes—characteristics of **transformational and adaptive judicial leaders**.

In discussing their leadership role in change efforts, the judges all shared experiences with making sustainability a priority from the very beginning of any court improvement initiative, noting that the sustainability of an initiative is not something that can be easily addressed after it is finished. Although the sustainability and spread of practice, program, and policy improvements may seem to be the natural results of a successful change effort, the judges agreed that they should be actively considered from the beginning of any court improvement effort.

**Transformative Leadership** is focused on creating a system of self-sustaining change. Transformational leaders bring multiple system stakeholders to the table and engage them in a collaborative process that is focused on meaningful and sustainable systems change and improved outcomes for children and families.



## key elements for sustainable systems change

*"One way that I demonstrated my commitment to the change process was to engage my team in strategic planning that linked our vision to practices, policies and resources, and, most importantly, to the outcomes we wanted to achieve."*

### **-Lead Judge**

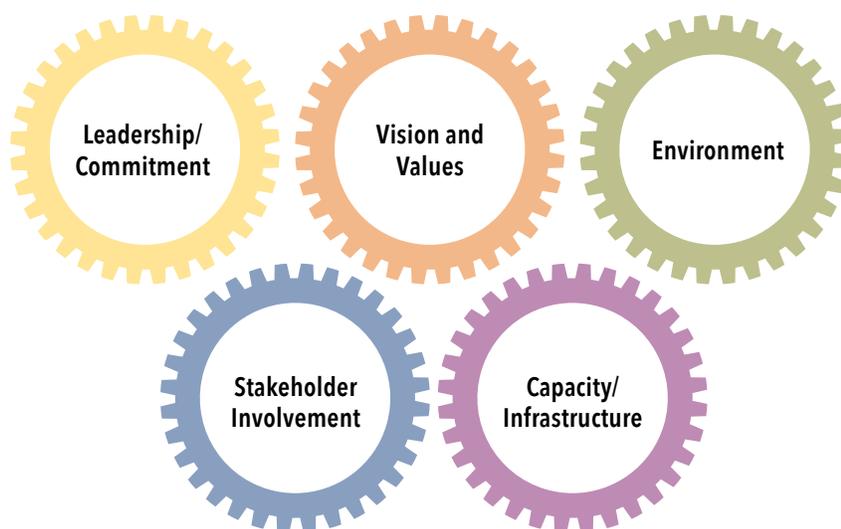
*"To keep court improvement projects alive so they can continue beyond your tenure as leader it's important to identify potential champions for the project in other leaders and system partners... at a minimum, keep them well-informed about what is going on, but ideally get them fully involved."*

### **-Lead Judge**

*"Focusing on the best practice recommendations and key principles outlined in the NCJFCJ's Resource Guidelines document provided our court with a clear framework that helped give direction to our improvement efforts and a benchmark to measure ourselves against along the way."*

### **-Lead Judge**

When asked to reflect on their experiences leading change efforts and to share perspectives on the critical or key elements they believed had to be present to sustain change, the Lead Judges cited the following factors: vision and values; leadership and commitment; stakeholder involvement; the existing environment; and existing capacity or infrastructure.



**Leadership and Commitment:** The Lead Judges stressed the importance of having a visible judicial leader for court improvement who demonstrated a commitment to establishing a shared vision for change and who created a sense of urgency among stakeholders to achieve that change. It was also important, the judges noted, for leadership to authorize or support a core group of stakeholders (or collaborative court improvement team) to carry out the vision. Buy-in from leadership at all levels of the system (court, agency, legal community, and community partners) was also identified as critical to sustaining change efforts.

**Vision and Values:** Another critical element to implementing sustainable change identified by the Lead Judges was consensus among leaders and stakeholders about the specific vision for change. There needs to be consensus about the values or principles that will guide the change process and provide a framework for systems change initiatives.

**Environment:** The judges concurred that it was important to have the political will and court and system readiness and acceptance for the changes you hope to implement. External factors such as negative media attention, competing needs or problems, and a lack of system-wide awareness of or support for the need for court improvement were identified as significant challenges by the judges to sustaining change efforts.

**Stakeholder Involvement:** The judges stressed the need for actively involving diverse stakeholders in change efforts in order to facilitate the sustainability of those efforts. This includes internal court system stakeholders (e.g., leadership, administration, attorneys, clerks and other court staff); stakeholders from system partners (e.g., agency leadership, supervisors, caseworkers, treatment specialists, etc.); and external stakeholders from the community, including a role for the families and young people whose lives are impacted by any proposed change efforts (e.g., actively involving them to ensure the system change effort meets their real needs and is culturally responsive).

**Capacity and Infrastructure:** Important to any sustainable change process are resources to allocate to the training and technical assistance necessary to support implementation efforts. The judges also noted the importance of adequate staffing to carry out goals and access to data to support continuous quality improvement.

## SUMMARY

### General Lessons Learned by Lead Judges about Guiding Sustainable Systems Change:

- Don't underestimate the importance of relationship-building
- Maintain strong communication with your collaborative change team as well as other internal and external court system partners
- Make sure that what you are doing as a leader is consistent with the vision – "you have to walk the walk and talk the talk"
- Clarify roles for stakeholders early and often
- Remember that meaningful change takes longer than you think!

*"People can speak the language but you aren't sure how committed they really are to what you are doing... you, as a leader, need to identify different venues or forums where the vision is regularly communicated and revisited if necessary to ensure there is consensus about the direction from everyone for moving forward."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"It's important to foster an environment that promotes open communication and creative problem-solving among your change team because that makes it easier to identify barriers and resistance to change that exist, anticipate conflicts, and figure out effective ways to work as a team to overcome those barriers, resisters, and conflicts."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"Once you include stakeholders they come to expect it and help to keep you accountable – the more diverse the stakeholder group the better because it brings different perspectives to the table ...the champions for change are out there, you just need to find them."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"To sustain change it's helpful to develop agreements that establish clear roles for system partners in any change initiatives... it helps to guide how we will work together as a system to improve outcomes and builds buy-in and accountability."*

**-Lead Judge**



**While environmental challenges can vary across jurisdictions and evolve over time, the judges identified some general strategies for building capacity to overcome those challenges:**

- ✓ Generate stakeholder buy-in and support by involving them in developing the vision for change and providing opportunities for training on the model for change and specific implementation strategies
- ✓ Solicit support and involvement from other leaders (court, agency, system partners, community)
- ✓ Develop channels for consistent and strategic communication in your team and to the public
- ✓ Connect your change efforts to other projects that are already underway—make linkages

**To ensure stakeholders are involved in ways that support the sustainability of change efforts, the Lead Judges recommended:**

- ✓ Identifying appropriate and meaningful roles for stakeholders, including workgroups or subcommittees
- ✓ Ensure the stakeholders represent the diversity of the system and the community
- ✓ Engage parents and youth through soliciting their input via focus groups, surveys, etc., and including them in the collaborative change team and working groups

## lead judges' strategies for sustaining change

The Lead Judges were asked to share strategies for sustaining change. To implement change effectively and have the change be sustained over the long term, the Lead Judges recommended that the following concepts should be employed.

- ✓ Engage Others
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Formalizing and Standardizing Changes
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Measurement and Evaluation
- ✓ Sustainability Plans that Include Planning for Transition

*"Changing the way people think about change is an important aspect of any court improvement effort. Change should not be daunting to stakeholders."*

**- Lead Judge**



### Recommendations from Lead Judges for overcoming any anxieties about court improvement change efforts:

- ✓ Work toward a co-created common vision
- ✓ Keep the focus on children and improving outcomes
- ✓ Demonstrate a commitment to expand knowledge of what works and why
- ✓ Value and encourage diversity of opinion and perspectives
- ✓ Listen to resisters and offer them opportunities to express their concerns and get involved in solution generation
- ✓ Include leaders on the collaborative team who have decision-making authority in their own organization – make them part of your team's brainstorming or innovation planning
- ✓ Develop working groups or subcommittees that include cross-organizational or cross-system membership
- ✓ Include and heed the voices of parents and children throughout the change effort

## Engage Others

Individuals affected by change efforts are simultaneously the most critical resource and support as well as a barrier and risk factor when managing change. The uncertainties of change can evoke strong emotions in those that are affected. People may feel frustration, anger, or enthusiasm and elation over the course of the improvement initiative as their work processes change. Fear and anxiety can be a response to changes in the level of openness among a group of people who are embarking on new and innovative ways of doing business.

How people feel will be dependent on whether they accept the change willingly or reluctantly, the level of consultation that occurs with them, the effect of the change on their work, and the support provided by organizational and team leadership. Understanding why people feel differently about an improvement initiative may help leaders of change efforts ensure that change is introduced in a manner that anticipates, acknowledges, and responds to the concerns of everyone affected.

**When planning an implementation strategy**, the Lead Judges recommended that the court improvement team and system leaders be aware of and consider the fact that stakeholders may:

- ✓ Not be aware of the reasons change is necessary
- ✓ Believe that there are other, more important issues to be dealt with
- ✓ Disagree with the proposed change, or believe that there is a better way to achieve the outcome
- ✓ Disagree over how the change should be implemented
- ✓ Think there is criticism about the way they do things implied in the change process
- ✓ Believe that they have done this before and nothing changed
- ✓ Feel that there will be extra work for them as a result of changes

If stakeholders are engaged early and supported throughout the development of the program, practice, or policy change, they are likely to become champions of that improvement and embed its processes in their ongoing work.

Judicial and other system leaders who work directly on, or indirectly support, the improvement project must ensure that all barriers to success are removed and project priorities are clearly identified and communicated. The judges emphasized the importance of communicating implementation plans with organizational leadership before rolling out changes to ensure that they are able to support the implementation plans wholeheartedly.

In addition, judicial leaders and the court improvement team should consider who

needs to be on board for changes to happen. Engage those that ultimately influence whether or not something happens – whether these individuals are in leadership or management positions or not.



**During the discussion of strategies to ensure sustainability, factors contributing to poor sustainability were highlighted by the Lead Judges:**

- ✓ Lack of leadership support and commitment
- ✓ Lack of training on new practices
- ✓ Lack of attention to the barriers for accepting new practices (e.g., inadequate resources, resisters, challenges adhering to implementation protocols)
- ✓ Transitions in leadership
- ✓ Failure to plan for implementing and sustaining change



**Lead Judges' strategies for dealing with naysayers and ultimately getting their buy-in and commitment:**

- ✓ Legitimize what they are saying – acknowledge the issues and problems but ask that they be involved in generating the solutions
- ✓ Use data to provide objective evidence of how you are doing and the need for change
- ✓ Bring stakeholders from that role (e.g., public defenders) from outside your jurisdiction or someone representing their constituency group to your trainings to share their perspectives on change
- ✓ Find something you can work on together – identify common interests
- ✓ Give credit – acknowledge the achievements of others
- ✓ Bring naysayers along to trainings and conferences
- ✓ Keep reminding them of the shared goal of improving outcomes for children and families

*"Having a communication strategy that includes messaging not only about how improvements are being achieved but also what's in it for everyone and why they should care (it's all about improving safety, permanency and well-being for children and families) are important to ensuring support for future changes."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"Avoid situations where an initiative or practice is only associated with one judge or one courtroom—it can make it seem as if it's someone's pet project. Pet projects don't survive when you leave. In fact, people may actually resent the attention given to a pet project. While it's perfectly valid to pilot practices or initiatives in one courtroom, if the lessons learned from that pilot effort are that the practices or initiatives are associated with positive outcomes, then they should be taken to scale and diffused across courtrooms."*

**-Lead Judge**

## **Communication**

The Lead Judges stressed that communication was essential to their efforts in implementing and sustaining change. In their discussion, they shared that good communication by leaders in the change management process allows for:

- ✓ Generating emotional connections – building relationships and trust through having an open approach and welcoming feedback from others about the change process
- ✓ Sharing principles and values – explaining the change process and its purpose in a way that aligns it with a strong vision for dependency court improvement
- ✓ Developing commitment to the change effort by demonstrating, through communication, that you are willing to talk with the people you are trying to bring together in the change effort
- ✓ Sharing of knowledge so that people feel empowered to help develop or create the vision and the implementation strategies

The Lead Judges recommended that court improvement teams need to share their improvements continuously and demonstrate how the change has positively impacted processes and outcomes. The change will be more successful, and people will be more committed to the change, if they truly believe it will improve things. Communications should take place regularly and should reach all who are affected by the proposed change – internal and external stakeholders.

Effective, early, and frequent communication will give those affected by the change some ownership of the project and a vested interest in its success.

Engaging stakeholders and demonstrating how improvements are achieved are important to ensuring support for future changes.

## Formalize and Standardize Change

Once a change or new process has been implemented, it must be monitored to ensure it is performing as expected. Failure to link the goals of an improvement project to the overall strategy or vision of an organization can negatively affect its sustainability. Without demonstrating how the change is related to the overall goals of the organization, it can be difficult to change the culture or convey an understanding of why efforts are being expended on the change initiative. An improvement is much more likely to be sustained if it is integrated into the culture and core processes of the court. Standardizing new processes is one of the most effective methods for sustaining change efforts.

The Lead Judges had the following recommendations to help formalize and standardize change:

- ✓ Implement a focus on back to basics to ensure the fundamentals of best practice are present and remain even after transitions (e.g., focus on the practice principles of the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* in addition to other problem-solving court models or initiatives).
- ✓ Involve presiding judges, administrative judges, chief judges and other court leaders in change efforts (e.g., obtaining their support and involvement) builds unity and consistency in approach and can help to institutionalize practice and policy changes.
- ✓ Ensure that practice changes are diffused across courtrooms and not just in pilot or specialized dockets—avoid the one-judge initiative or one courtroom project—plan for the diffusion of lessons learned about what works.
- ✓ Find ways to share lessons learned about effective change initiatives statewide such as through working with state court improvement programs to implement training, share technical assistance materials, and mentoring or coaching other courts.

*“Taking change efforts ‘to scale’ across courtrooms and involving a focus on all system partners’ practices and their impact on outcomes, not just the court’s, is important to ensuring changes will be sustained after you leave. We worked with our state court improvement program (CIP) to help diffuse our Model Court’s change efforts across stakeholder groups and throughout the state. This was done through statewide CIP sponsored multidisciplinary summits and trainings and through the dissemination of technical assistance materials developed by the Model Court. We also mentored or coached other courts in a CIP ‘best practice courts’ initiative.”*

**-Lead Judge**

**Spread** means that the learning which takes place from the implementation of a specific initiative is actively shared, diffused, and acted upon by the court system as a whole.

*"Important to sustaining our change effort was a commitment to continuous learning at all levels of the collaborative, including formal and informal training opportunities."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"I made sure I actively shared anything that I had learned in conferences, trainings with my team. I regularly brought back information about how other sites were tackling the same issues, and encouraged team members to do the same when they attended conferences."*

**-Lead Judge**

*"Make interim assessments along the way towards achieving your long-term goals (assess the small steps and short-term impacts) ... this will help prevent burn out because results can take time to attain."*

**-Lead Judge**

## Training

Training in a new practice or process often occurs while changes are being implemented. All too often training is too brief and too infrequent. Training should be an ongoing process that provides direct support to those affected by the changes being made. Effective training sessions not only inform participants about how to complete a process, they are also opportunities for gauging the comfort level of those being trained on the new skills and knowledge they are learning. Project teams often underestimate the amount of training required to implement a new initiative, policy, or practice.

Suggestions offered by the judges about training aimed at learning about court improvement practices and initiatives and their implementation included:

- ✓ All stakeholders should understand how to work within a change process, and expectations regarding compliance should be established during the introduction of the new process
- ✓ Identify stakeholders who can be trained to be trainers themselves. These individuals should hold different roles within the organization (e.g., attorneys, caseworkers, etc.)
- ✓ Training should be evaluated regularly to make sure that it is useful and relevant and can be adapted to evolving needs

When training sessions are informative and effective, stakeholders will grow confident in working with new processes. They will also be able to assist in the education and training of others. They will be able to improve, maintain, or re-establish the changed process, even if there are factors that threaten to disrupt it.

## Measurement

Measurement is crucial at every stage of change implementation. During the development phase, it is critically important to engage the entire team in the selection of measures that will indicate the effectiveness of the initiative. Ensuring that the team has confidence in the data to be reported is also a crucial step in building buy-in and celebrating success.

During the implementation phase, frequently monitoring indicators/measures will allow the team to evaluate the effectiveness of the change and its effect on process and outcomes.

The judges noted that establishing a baseline for measuring and communicating improvements can be an exciting and motivational process for court improvement teams. According to the judges, regular measurement of the court's performance and achievement of improved goals helped their collaborative change teams to identify priority action areas (e.g., areas where performance was weak), make mid-course implementation corrections as needed, and facilitate accountability. Providing feedback on the progress achieved (or not achieved) allowed their teams to celebrate success or take action to resolve any issues.

Recommendations the judges shared about using data to help sustain change efforts included:

- ✓ Make sure you are using the right data – does it tell you something meaningful about your change goals? If not, put in place plans to examine your data capacity and methods to collect the right data. Implement a process of regular check-ins with your team that use data on performance to demonstrate progress or lack thereof so action can be taken
- ✓ Develop clear and measurable outcomes
- ✓ Have the courage to course correct if the desired outcomes are not being achieved

*“Share data at collaborative team meetings and in newsletters and formal reports. Graphs that depict data gathered over time are particularly good for conveying success and communicating progress.”*

**-Lead Judge**

*“Be aware that people may have different comfort levels with the sharing of data. Some may initially be uncomfortable with examining data about practice (seeing it as an indictment of their performance or as blaming). Make sure that you establish, up front, the spirit within which data will be shared and discussed – that it will be used to determine how best to ensure change efforts are having the outcomes everyone intends, namely improving safety, permanency and well-being of children and families.”*

**-Lead Judge**

*“Don’t wait to think about how to manage transitions until they are upon you; you have to think about it from day one. Strategically look for other leaders and key stakeholders and recruit them early and often. Invite them to observe, participate and get involved.”*

**-Lead Judge**

*“How to sustain change efforts is not something to consider after change has happened. You have to strategically plan for sustainable change with your team from the moment you begin the court improvement change process.”*

**-Lead Judge**

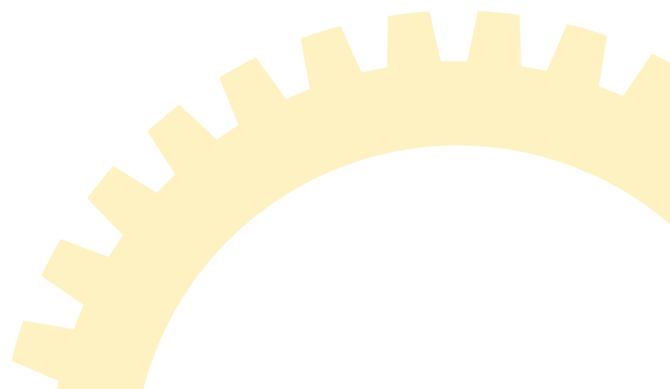
*“Celebrate and communicate periodically the fact that improvement goals have been maintained or have stayed at an improved level ... share in team meetings, reports and trainings for example, that the team is celebrating six months of meeting all time standards for case processing.”*

**-Lead Judge**

## **Sustainability Plans, Including Planning for Transitions**

Sustainability is achieved when the new ways of working and the resulting improved outcomes become the norm. Not only have the processes and outcomes changed, but the thinking and attitudes behind them are fundamentally altered. In other words, the change has been integrated into the day-to-day, rather than something added on. Sustainability means holding the gains and evolving as required, without reverting to the old ways of doing things.

The Lead Judges discussed periods of leadership transitions as particular challenges to sustainability of court improvement efforts. Periods of leadership transition are fraught with risk – they bring uncertainty, and there are challenges inherent in identifying and supporting a successor. But, the judges also shared how transitions in leadership can be seized upon as opportunities to strengthen change efforts. **Properly managed, leadership transitions provide a pivotal moment - a time when the court’s current practices, vision and direction can all be re-examined.** A successful change in leadership preserves the change effort and the trust of its stakeholders, and allows it to grow and adapt to meet new challenges with enthusiasm. Planning for leadership transition puts in place the necessary systems and structures that will ensure an effective process when the time comes for a leadership change.



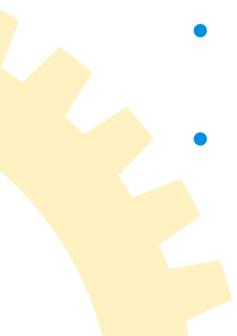
## SUMMARY

### Overall Recommendations from Lead Judges for Sustaining Change

The judges emphasized the need to focus on sustaining change efforts now, at the implementation stage of court improvement - strategies to sustain the momentum of change, to institutionalize and sustain specific reform efforts, and to generally support ongoing system improvements, must be embedded in the ongoing activities of your court.

When leading change efforts with an eye to sustainability, the judges recommended that leaders:

- Facilitate the development of a shared vision that unites and guides change efforts
- Be aware of individual and organizational forces that may influence the ability of your change team to achieve its goals
- Recognize the value of including a diverse range of opinions, experiences, and perspectives in your change team
- Involve stakeholders from all levels to help ensure changes are implemented from the top down and the bottom up
- Create a climate for change – inspire others to want to be part of the change effort by developing a sense of importance and urgency and include them in the development of a shared vision for change
- Consider sharing leadership to help establish buy-in and leaders who will support continuation of change efforts in times of transition
- Implement a strategic planning process that is informed by reliable and valid data with clearly articulated goals and outcomes – ensure your strategic plan also includes strategies for ensuring smooth transitions
- Demonstrate a concern for measurement and using evaluation data to determine success – a focus on defining outcomes, data collection and periodic analysis of these data is critical for gauging progress, helping to re-focus efforts, and for guiding the change strategies used by the change team
- Make sure you have built in opportunities for short-term wins along the way
- Include the voice of children and families in change efforts – this will keep you grounded in reality and make sure your efforts are responsive to their needs
- Communicate your successes and communicate them widely





**Some tips Lead Judges offered for preparing for and managing transitions and/or rotations in leadership and key system stakeholders:**

- ✓ **Delegate** - identify key support persons (staff) or other key system stakeholders who can assist day-to-day tracking of change efforts and communication tasks – when you leave they provide consistency, historical knowledge – get a team in place and use them!
- ✓ **Recruit champions for change** – look for them in kindred divisions or courts or recruit from new judge training; serve as a mentor or coach to the judicial leadership role and collaborative systems change
- ✓ **Market the change** - Develop a marketing campaign that shares memorialized documents describing the change process and includes data about what that change process has accomplished
- ✓ **Share leadership** – identify leaders who have an interest in a topic or issue and delegate the leadership of change related to that issue to them; cultivate a co-leader in another judge and from the child welfare agency
- ✓ **Educate higher ups** – educate the presiding judge, chief judge and others about ongoing improvement efforts; invite and bring them to multi-disciplinary trainings and national conferences

*“Typically, the completion of an improvement effort is celebrated, but little is done to celebrate the maintenance of that improvement. You need to make plans to celebrate continued success such as the maintenance of improvement benchmarks and continued achievement of goals ... and to reflect on the team’s progress. Set a new aim or goal and try to improve even more because you have demonstrated that the team can do it!”*

**-Lead Judge**

## additional resources

Dobbin, S.A., Gatowski, S.I., & Maxwell, D. (2004). *Building a Better Collaboration: Facilitating Change in the Court and Child Welfare System*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.

Gatowski, S.I., Miller, N.B., Rubin, S.M., Escher, P., & Maze, C. (2016). *The ENHANCED RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.

Gueller, M., Bolin, Z., Cisneros, J., Korthase, A. & Ray, S. (2017). *A Snapshot of the Implementation Sites Project*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

*The Model Court Effect: Proven Strategies in Systems Change*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.

Portune, L., Gatowski, S.I., & Dobbin, S.A. (2009). *The RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Supporting Best Practices and Building Foundations for Innovation in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.



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