




RURAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

2021 Achievements | 2022-2023 Priorities



An aerial photograph of a suburban town, likely in the Midwest, showing a central road, residential houses, green lawns, and a school building. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of late afternoon or early morning. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**There is immense power
when a group of people
with similar interests
gets together to work
toward the same goals.**

“

Idowu Koyenikan

A message from the Co-Directors

On behalf of the Rural Justice Collaborative (RJC), we are pleased to provide you with an update on our 2021 achievements and an overview of our 2022-2023 strategic priorities.

The RJC was formed in February 2021 to support rural justice practitioners and their partners in behavioral health and public health. This effort was born out of the recognition that rural justice stakeholders face many of the same challenges as urban communities (e.g., transportation and housing) but often have fewer resources and larger geographic areas of responsibility. More importantly, rural communities possess unique strengths, and the RJC is well-positioned to showcase these strengths and highlight the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems.

The early work of the RJC focused on developing the organizational structure of the RJC and establishing an Advisory Council composed of 19 rural practitioners who provide the vision and strategic direction for the work. In the summer of 2021, the RJC launched the Online Resource Center housed at www.ruraljusticecollaborative.org, began

distributing the monthly *RJC Digest* newsletter, and released the call for RJC Innovation Site nominations. Through the innovation sites, we highlight effective cross-sector partnerships, distill the key components of successful rural initiatives, and share them with other rural communities.

We look forward to new partnerships in the coming year and expanding the RJC's ability to reach rural justice practitioners throughout the country. We extend our sincere gratitude for the important role the State Justice Institute plays in supporting the RJC. We would also like to acknowledge our new work sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2022.

Best wishes,



Kristina Bryant
Co-Director



Tara Kunkel
Co-Director



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About the RJC

DEFINING RURAL

There are a variety of federal definitions describing "rural." The various definitions encompass key aspects of rurality, including low population density, geographic isolation, small population size, and a way of life that reflects history, economy, or culture fundamentally different from cities. Urban and rural communities face many of the same challenges – economic concerns and a need for expanded behavioral health services – but the uniqueness of rural settings shapes how rural justice initiatives are implemented.

Rural communities face unique challenges that impact their ability to deliver fair and equitable justice. Despite these challenges, rural communities rely on their many strengths to address the needs of their residents. In 2021, the [National Center for State Courts](#), in partnership with [Rulo Strategies](#), launched the Rural Justice Collaborative (RJC) to showcase the strengths of rural communities and highlight the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems. These strengths include strong professional networks, deep ties to the communities they serve, resiliency, and ingenuity.

AREAS OF FOCUS

The RJC focuses on the following seven areas:

- Increasing access to behavioral health treatment
- Reducing victimization
- Facilitating employment and educational opportunities
- Eliminating barriers of access to justice
- Reducing incarceration and recidivism
- Facilitating re-entry
- Reducing the number of children in foster care due to familial substance use



ADVISORY **COUNCIL**



Not pictured above: Judge Blake, Michelle Hart, Judge Mowrer, Judge Rick

RJC Leadership

A cross-sector Advisory Council composed of rural judges and stakeholders in the justice, public safety, child welfare, public health, and behavioral health systems guide the work of the RJC. The current Advisory Council is composed of ten rural judges and nine rural justice stakeholders representing diverse disciplines.

The Advisory Council met virtually on five occasions in 2021 and held an in-person planning session in October 2021.

The Hon. Richard Blake
Judge

The Hon. Alan Blankenship
Judge

Paul Bowen
Court Administrator

Greg Dalton
CASA Program Director

Sarah Ford
Legal Director

Sheriff Scott Hable
Sheriff

Dr. Brandy Harrell
Director of Behavioral Health

Lisa Macon Harrison, MPH
Health Director

Michelle Hart, MPA
*Deputy Chief Probation Officer,
Retired*

Molly Hicken
Attorney

The Hon. Robert Hofmann
Judge

The Hon. Mary Jane Knisely
Judge

James G. McDermott
Chief Public Defender

The Hon. Donna Mowrer
Judge

The Hon. Lakshmi Reddy
Judge

The Hon. Michelle Rick
Judge

The Hon. David W. Ruoff
Judge

The Hon. Jonathan Shamis
Judge

The Hon. Duane Slone
Judge



STRATEGIC **PARTNERSHIPS**



2021 PARTNERS

In 2021, the RJC collaborated with the following organizations to support education and outreach:

- Conference of Chief Justices/Conference of State Court Administrator's Behavioral Health Committee
- National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness – Education, Partnerships, and Implementation Work Group
- Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Rural Responses to the Opioid Epidemic sites
- Housing Assistance Council
- Vera Institute of Justice

RJC FELLOW

The RJC also partnered with the Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center to sponsor a RJC Fellow. In 2021, the RJC Fellow, Kristin Meeks, was central to coordinating the selection of the inaugural RJC Innovation Sites.



INNOVATION **SITES**



About the RJC Innovation Sites

The RJC Innovation Initiative showcases work in rural communities that enhances rural justice systems and celebrates the people who make these efforts possible. Through a rolling nomination process, the RJC's Advisory Council will select approximately 25 rural innovation sites over the course of two years.

The RJC Innovation Sites are the foundation of the RJC's peer-to-peer training and technical assistance program designed to build rural justice systems' capacity. Rural communities can access the resources and information needed to replicate components of these initiatives through case studies, webinars, and podcasts hosted on RJC's Online Resource Center. The *RJC Digest* is also an important source for information about resources and training opportunities. Subscribe to the monthly newsletter [here](#).

INAUGURAL RJC INNOVATION SITES

The first nine RJC Innovation Sites were announced in October 2021.

- South Carolina Victim Assistance Network: Reaching Rural Initiative *South Carolina*
- Lazarus Recovery Services *North Carolina*
- The Center for Empowering Victims of Gender-based Violence *Kansas*
- The Rural Attorney Recruitment Program *South Dakota*
- The Rural Incubator Project for Lawyers *Montana*
- Texas Dispute Resolution System: Rural Mediation *Texas*
- Public Defender Corporation Recovery Coach Project *West Virginia*
- Scott County Coordinated Community Response (CCR) Team *Tennessee*
- Family Accountability and Recovery Court *North Carolina*



2022-2023 **PRIORITIES**



2022-2023 Priorities

In the fall of 2021, the RJC's Advisory Council embarked on identifying its 2022-2023 priorities. Over 1.5 days, the Advisory Council proposed 97 initiatives for consideration. The initiatives were then organized by the RJC's areas of focus as well as a separate category for those that cut across multiple focus areas. The Advisory Council then prioritized the initiatives based on the anticipated level of impact for rural communities, timeline of implementation (short, medium, long term), and whether resources were available to pursue them.

The following 2022-2023 priorities were identified by the Advisory Council members.

ADVANCE INNOVATION

Promote innovation, solutions, and progress in rural justice systems.

PROMOTE COLLABORATION

Support cross-sector collaboration and understanding among and between rural justice practitioners and other stakeholders and partners, including public health and behavioral health.

RAISE AWARENESS

Advance the exchange of ideas and information between rural justice practitioners and increase the understanding of the unique needs of rural justice systems.



ADVANCE **INNOVATION**

Promote innovation, solutions, and progress in rural justice systems.



OBJECTIVES

Select additional RJC Innovation Sites.

Develop structured opportunities for rural justice practitioners to engage with the RJC Innovation Sites and learn from their experiences.

INITIATIVES


Advertise the innovation site nomination process and learning opportunities through strategic partners, the *RJC Digest*, the RJC Online Resource Center, and social media.

Produce videos about the RJC and select innovation sites.

Support peer-to-peer exchanges between rural communities and select RJC Innovation Sites.

Host up to four lunch and learn opportunities featuring select innovation sites.

Produce webinars and/or podcasts featuring the RJC Innovation Sites or select speakers.



PROMOTE **COLLABORATION**

Support cross-sector collaboration and understanding among and between rural justice practitioners and primary stakeholders and partners, including public health and behavioral health.



OBJECTIVES

Develop strategic partnerships to support the RJC's areas of focus.

Identify opportunities to collaborate with existing federal training and technical assistance providers and other national organizations supporting rural work to coordinate and integrate training and technical assistance services, co-author publications, and co-sponsor workshops, seminars, and conferences.

Establish a RJC Leadership Institute.

INITIATIVES

Build a robust network of diverse, knowledgeable, skilled, and connected local leaders.

Develop co-branded publications between the RJC and relevant training and technical assistance providers.

Co-sponsor regional or national training for rural justice practitioners.

Teach the skills necessary to support collaborations between justice stakeholders and their behavioral health, public health, and public safety partners.

A blurred, warm-toned background image showing several people in a meeting or collaborative setting. The focus is on the text overlay.

RAISE **AWARENESS**

Advance the exchange of ideas and information between rural justice practitioners and increase the understanding of the unique needs of rural justice systems.



OBJECTIVES

Identify needs and gaps to enhance rural justice systems.

Develop a research agenda specific to rural justice systems centered on rural justice practitioners' priorities.

Seek out opportunities for the RJC to be represented on regional or national workgroups relevant to the RJC's areas of focus.

INITIATIVES

Convene rural justice practitioners to identify training and technical assistance needs and funding gaps.

Convene rural justice practitioners and researchers to develop priorities for rural justice research.

Identify opportunities to connect researchers and rural justice practitioners interested in being evaluated.

Provide scholarships to support rural justice practitioner attendance at national conferences relevant to the RJC's focus areas.

Communicate RJC priorities to federal funders and other stakeholders.

About the National Center for State Courts

The National Center for State Courts, headquartered in Williamsburg, Virginia, is a non-profit court organization dedicated to improving the administration of justice by providing leadership and service to the state courts. Founded in 1971 by the Conference of Chief Justices and Chief Justice of the United States Warren E. Burger, NCSC provides education, training, technology, management, and research services to state courts. Learn more at ncsc.org.

About Rulo Strategies

Rulo Strategies is a woman-owned business focused on supporting and evaluating initiatives to foster collaboration between diverse stakeholders with distinct but complementary missions. Founder Tara Kunkel served as a Senior Policy Advisor to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), where she advised on the policy direction of all opioid-related and overdose prevention initiatives. Learn more at rulostrategies.com.

About the State Justice Institute

The State Justice Institute (SJI) was established by federal law in 1984 to award grants to improve the quality of justice in state courts and foster innovative, efficient solutions to common issues faced by all courts. SJI is a non-profit corporation governed by an 11-member Board of Directors appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Learn more at sji.gov.

JANUARY 2022



State Justice Institute

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