

Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation: Executive Summary

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WHAT DOES THIS FACT SHEET COVER?

A [history and introduction](#) of the Bridge Project.

An overview of the Bridge Project [methodology](#).

A summary of the Bridge Project's [planned products](#), including the two-track approach to product development.

An overview of the [Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation](#) report, which includes more information about the Bridge Project and citations for the research summarized here.

Over the past several decades, the knowledge base on how to improve public safety and outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system has expanded substantially, yet probation officers that work with these young people lack guidance on how this research can inform their work. [Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation: Rethinking Strategies to Promote Long-Term Change](#) offers practical tips for frontline juvenile probation officers to align their practice with research on successful strategies for reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth, their families, and the communities in which they live.

THE BRIDGE PROJECT: HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION

Few resources exist that provide concrete guidance on how juvenile probation officers, specifically, can integrate lessons from research on adolescent development and effective interventions in their daily practices. To fill this gap, the Urban Institute is working to translate this information into actionable policy and practice recommendations through the [Bridging Research and Practice to Advance Juvenile Justice and Safety project](#), funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 2015.

In the *first phase* of the Bridge Project, Urban's multidisciplinary researchers focused on identifying areas where research is not fully informing policy and practice. The Urban team systematically identified a need for practical guidance on how juvenile justice practitioners can change daily practices to respond to the unique needs and strengths of youth. The *second phase* of the project focuses on bridging research and practice in youth probation and aims to develop tools to help probation officers and agencies align their practices with research on adolescent development and what works to reduce recidivism and improve youth, agency, and community outcomes.

The juvenile probation strategies report—the first of several Bridge Project probation products—provides concrete strategies for frontline probation staff to align their work with our best knowledge of the unique needs and strengths of youth and successful strategies to promote positive youth development, maximize the efficient use of limited supervision resources, reduce recidivism, and improve public safety. Future Bridge Project products are planned in two tracks: [practitioner-oriented, hands-on materials](#) that summarize key lessons from the report in more accessible formats; and [implementation products](#) that address key considerations for probation administrators and supervisors interested in establishing a research-informed approach at the agency level.

BRIDGE PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Bridge Project uses key findings from a large body of multidisciplinary research to develop detailed, practical recommendations for the field. For this report, the Urban team combined findings from research syntheses published by the National Research Council (2013's *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach* and 2014's *Implementing Juvenile Justice Reform: The Federal Role*) with targeted, supplemental literature reviews on additional topics relevant to effective practices in youth probation. With input from external research and practice partners, Urban identified five core probation practices necessary to align supervision with research on adolescent development and what works to improve outcomes for youth, and two to four specific practice recommendations within each core practice. For each practice recommendation, Urban summarizes

- **what** research suggests is best practice,
- a brief justification for **why** it is important to effective practice, and
- multiple strategies for **how** it could be operationalized.

OVERVIEW OF BRIDGING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN JUVENILE PROBATION

Bridging research and practice in juvenile probation draws from what we know about youths' development and effective interventions to identify strategies that motivate short- and long-term behavioral change; promote healthy development; and decrease the likelihood of future misbehavior. Developmentally appropriate screening and assessment are the foundation of the approach, but the core of developmentally appropriate youth probation is based in developing a dynamic case plan—in partnership with youth and caregiver(s)—to guide supervision goals. A research-informed approach empowers probation officers to act as an intervention in and of themselves, using each interaction with youth to review progress toward goals, reassess supervision priorities, and promote long-term behavior change. It also provides an alternative framework for accountability—consistent with the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model—that focuses on taking responsibility for one's behavior, understanding how delinquent behaviors impact others, and making changes to avoid similar choices or actions in the future.

Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation highlights relevant research findings and provides tips for probation officers in five core practice areas:

1. **screening, assessment, and structured decisionmaking**
2. **case planning**
3. **matching services and promoting positive youth development**
4. **structuring supervision to promote long-term behavior change**
5. **incentivizing success and implementing graduated responses**

Within each practice area, the report includes concrete strategies for operationalizing these concepts in practice.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OJJDP Bridge Project page: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/bridge-project.html>

Urban Institute Bridge Project page: <https://www.urban.org/bridgeproject>