



# **A SELF-ASSESSMENT JOURNEY**

## **An Inside Look at Jefferson County, CO Juvenile Assessment Center's Self-Assessment Process and Method**

The National Assessment Center Association (NAC) created a self-assessment tool in 2021 in conjunction with the release of the Assessment Center Framework. The tool was developed to provide Assessment Centers with the opportunity to examine, review, and reflect on their current operations and to what extent those operations align with the Assessment Center Framework. The tool helps Assessment Centers gauge not only where there is alignment, but also where opportunities exist for improvement and enhancement. It also serves as a goal-setting tool for Centers, helping to inform strategic planning and continuous quality improvement efforts.

Over the past four years, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the NAC has hosted four cohorts involving 17 different Assessment Centers around the country.

This publication highlights the experience of the Jefferson County, Juvenile Assessment Center in the self-assessment process, showcasing their journey and the impactful changes they've implemented.

### **The Self Assessment Process**

The self-assessment process conducted by the National Assessment Center Association spans over seven months and entails a comprehensive examination of each core component of the Assessment Center Framework. Participating centers establish an internal self-assessment team of various types of staff and leadership positions within the organization. Each month, the teams receive an overview of a specific core component along with best practice benchmarks. They spend the weeks





### About Jefferson County Juvenile Assessment Center

**Website:** [www.jeffcojac.org](http://www.jeffcojac.org)

**Area Served:** Urban, Suburban

**Assessment Center Jurisdiction:** County

**Who Operates the Assessment Center:** We are our own Special Purpose Government Entity

**Funding From Your Assessment Center Comes From:** County, City, juvenile justice, child welfare, law enforcement, school districts, community mental health center, State Contracts.

**Is the Assessment Center 24/7/365:** Yes

**Police drop off or transport?** Yes

**Assessment Center Domain(s)**

- Prevention (schools, youth and caregiver self-referral, community, etc.)
- Juvenile Justice (Law enforcement and courts)
- Child Welfare

**Please select the ways in which your Assessment Center facilitates diversion and/or early intervention(s)**

- Early Intervention (no diversion, but service linkage)
- Pre-file diversion screening and referral
- Municipal Court Diversion

**Approximately how many youth does your Assessment Center serve per year:** 1378

**Annual Assessment Center Budget:** \$1.6 million

**Number of Staff dedicated to Assessment Center operations:**

Full-time: 21

Part-time: 4

between cohort meetings evaluating their implementation of these benchmarks, gathering input from various perspectives to ensure a comprehensive assessment. Based on the scores obtained and the focus areas identified during the process, teams devise a localized "change plan" that prioritizes benchmarks for improvement and identifies opportunities for enhancement.

### Assessing Readiness

In an interview with Kira Jukes, the former Executive Director of the Jefferson County JAC, she states that it was important to go through the self-assessment process because "there had never been something to benchmark ourselves off of until the Assessment Center Framework was developed." Jukes explained the necessity for the center, which had operated for over two decades, to evolve and innovate in order to make a more substantial impact on the community.

Prior to Jefferson County's JAC engaging in the self-assessment process, it was critical for them to ensure organizational readiness. Jukes had intentional conversations with both the staff and the First Judicial District Juvenile Services Planning Committee (JSPC), which acts as the governance body for the assessment center. The National Assessment Center Association's (NAC) Executive Director, Molli Cook, attended a JSPC meeting to orient members to the framework and explain the self-assessment process to ensure they knew what to expect in the coming months. These intentional conversations allowed staff and the



board to familiarize themselves and gain trust that this was not a process to uncover flaws, but an opportunity to reach untapped potential. In an interview with Jukes, she explained that at all levels, the center was “primed and ready for growth.”

## Jefferson County’s Journey

The Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) in Jefferson County involved all levels of staff in the self-assessment process to ensure comprehensive insights and feedback on their operations. Kira Jukes emphasized the necessity of involving staff at various levels rather than solely relying on leadership in order to get an accurate picture of what was and was not happening. Staff members at the Juvenile Assessment Center were empowered to select their peers to participate in the self-assessment process, forming a well-rounded implementation team.

Throughout the cohort, Jefferson County JAC staff and leadership dedicated time each month to review the core components. To ensure unbiased scoring, implementation team members utilized flashcards with numbers, revealing their scores simultaneously to mitigate influence from leadership and peers. Following discussions on any score discrepancies, the team arrived at a consensus on final ratings for each benchmark and core component, presenting these in a full JAC team meeting to solicit input from all staff.

The governance committee (JSPC) and key stakeholders also played a crucial role in completing the self-assessment tool. They received pertinent questions related to benchmarks within each core component during the process. The input and responses provided by board members and stakeholders were taken under consideration by staff and leadership, guiding any adjustments needed to final ratings.

Using input from staff, board, and stakeholders mentioned above, the Jefferson County JAC developed a change plan focused on areas for improvement or enhancement and prioritizing areas for change. At the completion of the cohort, their change plan mainly focused on the implementation of two main Assessment Center core components: (1) Staff support and development and (2) Case Management

**“PRIMED AND  
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*Kira Jukes, on Jeffco JAC.*



## Using the Self-Assessment Results for Change

Two months after the completion of the self-assessment tool, the governance board went into strategic planning and reviewed the self-assessment results for areas where there was low investment and high impact or high investment and high impact. Staff and the governance board recognized that for every core component where ratings were low, the improvement of those ratings could be addressed by focusing on staff development and capacity and the recruitment of additional staff.

For staff support and development, in order to allow staff to participate in development and training opportunities and to reduce turnover, additional staff needed to be added. Existing staff members were overburdened, with minimal coverage during shifts, leaving little room for training, skill enhancement, or personal wellness activities such as vacation time. In response, during the strategic planning session, governance board members representing system stakeholders committed an additional \$150,000 towards hiring three additional staff. These funds were allocated to alleviate staffing constraints and enhance the center's operational capacity.

Implementation of the case management core component and facilitating warm hand-offs to community-based supports was an additional priority area that came out of the self-assessment process. During strategic planning this area was solidified as a priority and leadership was empowered to pursue funding for more intensive case management, particularly for youth and families being served in a preventive manner. Assessment Center leadership proactively used the self-assessment results and sought funding opportunities with the anticipation of bolstering this core component.

To date, using the results of the self-assessment, they have been awarded \$442,000 from the Colorado Office of Adult and Juvenile Justice Assistance (OAJJA) Delinquency Prevention and Young Offenders Intervention Pilot Grant Program. They also have two pending applications through the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program (JAG) and OAJJA: Multidisciplinary Crime Prevention and Crisis Intervention Grant Program. If awarded, these funds will be used for personnel and operating costs to expand the number of youth served preventatively and boost their case management functions.

Additional priority areas identified in the self-assessment process included the development of a comprehensive staff training curriculum, as well as an overhaul of policies and procedures. These areas underscore the center's commitment to continual improvement and aligning with best practices.





## Advice to Future Cohorts

“The number one benefit of the self-assessment process is that it gave us a roadmap and clear path to make positive changes for the organization,” said Jukes. She elaborated that the process not only highlighted their strengths but also offered clarity on areas ripe for improvement. When asked for advice to other Assessment Centers contemplating the self-assessment process, Jukes emphasized the **indispensable role of the cohort**. She remarked, “We couldn't have navigated it effectively without the cohort.” Being part of a cohort held them accountable and facilitated collaborative problem-solving with peers nationwide.

Jukes also underscored the importance of **committing to a plan for utilizing the results before embarking on the process**. This requires the oversight committee as well as leadership and staff to have a solid understanding of the underlying purpose of the self-assessment process and a shared dedication to fostering improvement.

Another piece of advice from Jukes: “**Engage as many non-leadership staff as possible.**” She stressed that candid feedback from staff regarding the center's operations and its services to youth and families is crucial for crafting a quality change plan. Building trust was identified as a challenging yet pivotal aspect of the self-assessment process, with Jukes noting that over time, staff grew more confident in the process and became increasingly open and honest.

Lastly, Jukes advised against feeling compelled to justify existing practices. Instead, she emphasized **redirecting the focus towards realignment and identifying actionable steps** for moving forward in line with best practices. Ultimately, the goal should be continuous improvement and alignment with the most effective approaches outlined in the Assessment Center Framework.