
Sponsor: County Attorney's Office

Meeting Date: 6/24/2025

Title: Grant Agreement with the Minnesota Office of Justice
Programs for the Restorative Practices Initiatives Grant Program
2025

File Number: 2025-257

Background and Rationale:

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office (RCAO) has been committed to transforming the county's justice system to be more restorative by sharing power with the most impacted communities in co-designing and (re)imagining justice for youth through collaborative decision-making, and in responding to harmful behavior through community-based accountability that better serves victims, youth, and their families. For nearly 6 years, RCAO has been co-leading, with community restorative practitioners from the most impacted community and system partners - an effort RCAO calls (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth (RJY) - to produce transformative, sustainable systems change. RCAO's goal is to transform responses in the justice system to be restorative, developmentally appropriate; empower the community; acknowledge and address underlying causes of behavior; provide youth meaningful opportunities to repair harm caused; and connect youth to resources and support to reduce racially disparate outcomes, and provide safety, healing, and wellness for all.

As RCAO and its RJY remain focused on continuous improvement, additional resources are needed to expand RJY efforts. To-date, RCAO has relied on stretching and repurposing the existing resources and supplementing with one-time funding to do this work. RCAO has finally reached the point where this strategy is no longer adequate to meet the needs, much less expand RCAO's efforts.

RCAO's initial vision was for all delinquency cases coming into the office, following legal sufficiency screening, to be collaboratively reviewed. Collaborative review consists of an attorney from the RCAO office, a public defender, and a community representative from the most impacted community, who jointly review cases referred from law enforcement, with a county social worker informing the process, to determine whether to send the case back to the parent/caregiver, as no system involvement is necessary; send directly to community-based accountability (CBA - one of the restorative community providers); petition the case to court and then refer it for CBA; or petition it and send it the traditional court route. Cases are then referred to restorative providers for CBA and the youth services coordinator works with them to support the young person's success. As the shift from planning to implementation, it became clear that in-custody cases, with their strict, urgent timelines, precluded collaborative review. Therefore, since July of 2021, RCAO has been reviewing all in-custody cases the traditional way (through one of the county's attorneys).

In order to transform the system to enable RCAO to collaboratively review those cases through a restorative lens, RCAO needs to develop a post-petition collaborative review process. RCAO has already retained the expertise needed to create the legal foundation and data protections necessary to do so. Based on this grant award, RCAO's leadership team will embark on a journey in 2025 to develop the inner workings of a post-petition process, so young people with court cases will also benefit from more restorative approaches which will increase the need for community-based resources to cover youth who also have a court case. In the first three years, 28% of all referred cases were declined, 27% were collaboratively reviewed, and 45% were traditionally reviewed, so

creating a post-petition process will increase the need for collaborative review by about three times and proportionately increase the need for community-based resources. Based on an average of 529 cases referred to court each of the past two years, RCAO anticipates about 280 cases referred for community-based accountability prior to a court petition being filed and upwards of 500 possibly referred following a petition.

The Restorative Practices Initiatives (RPI) grant will be used for the following:

1. **\$240,000 for community investment to expand restorative practices** through and with providers and community representatives participating in the collaborative review, training, and leading circles in the county. This will include funding for community providers to provide restorative services to youth referred; restorative services for youth/parents/victims to meet needs connected to justice involvement; parent/grandparent/caregiver circles to provide peer support; circles in community without a need for system referral (law enforcement or community can refer, including self-referral); and community representatives who engage in collaborative review, leadership team, lead community circles, etc.
2. **\$172,000 to hire a 1.0 Full Time Equivalent Restorative Lead Attorney** - RCAO has heard loud and clear from community restorative practitioners and public defender representatives that in order for the case outcomes to be restorative, the people in the process need to be restorative. RCAO has been rotating staff through the collaborative review process, but in order to ensure consistency and a restorative mindset, dedicated assistant county attorney is needed.
3. **\$20,000 to provide funding for restorative practices training and development for all RJY partners** - This will include quarterly joint development convenings (restorative practitioners, community provider staff, system leaders), a one-time retreat to build relationships and learn from each other, developing an onboarding training for all staff, intensive work with legal and community provider staff to develop their restorative capacity, and circle training to develop more circle facilitators.
4. **\$18,000 for administrative costs.**

RCAO takes the responsibility seriously to always use resources responsibly, use data in transparent, collaborative and impactful ways, and partner with youth development researchers from the University of Minnesota, who work with RCAO's internal data analyst. RCAO will continue this partnership to evaluate its efforts. The results - publicly available at <http://www.ramseycounty.us/rjy> - demonstrate that community accountability consistently outperforms system accountability and expansion of the RJY efforts is warranted.

Recommendation:

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:

1. Ratify the submittal of the grant application to the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs for the Restorative Practices Initiatives Grant Program 2025.
2. Accept a grant award and approve a grant agreement with the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs for the Restorative Practices Initiatives Grant Program 2025 for the period of August 1, 2025 to January 31, 2027 in the amount of \$450,000.
3. Authorize the Chair and Chief Clerk to execute the grant agreement when the State of Minnesota presents a final grant agreement for execution to Ramsey County provided that the terms and conditions of the final grant agreement remain substantially similar to the terms and conditions of the draft grant agreement.
4. Authorize the County Manager to establish the budget for the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs for the Restorative Practices Initiatives Grant Program 2025 in the County Attorney's Office upon the execution of the final grant agreement.
5. Authorize the County Manager to enter into agreements and execute amendments to agreements in accordance with the county's procurement policies and procedures, provided the amounts are within the limits of the grant funding.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Jebens-Singh, seconded by Commissioner McGuire.

Motion passed.

Aye: - 7: Jebens-Singh, McGuire, McMurtrey, Miller, Moran, Ortega, and Xiong

By: 

Jason Yang, Interim Chief Clerk - County
Board