

Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program Framework

Why a Framework Matters: The purpose of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) is to improve the dependency court system's ability to support families and children. For this work to be effective, a well-structured framework is required. This framework provides a consistent approach to implementation, ensuring that participating courts across the state follow the same guiding principles, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to the unique needs of each community.

The mission of the Statewide FJCIP Team is to expand the capacity of local FJCIP court communities to transform systems and produce better outcomes for children and families.

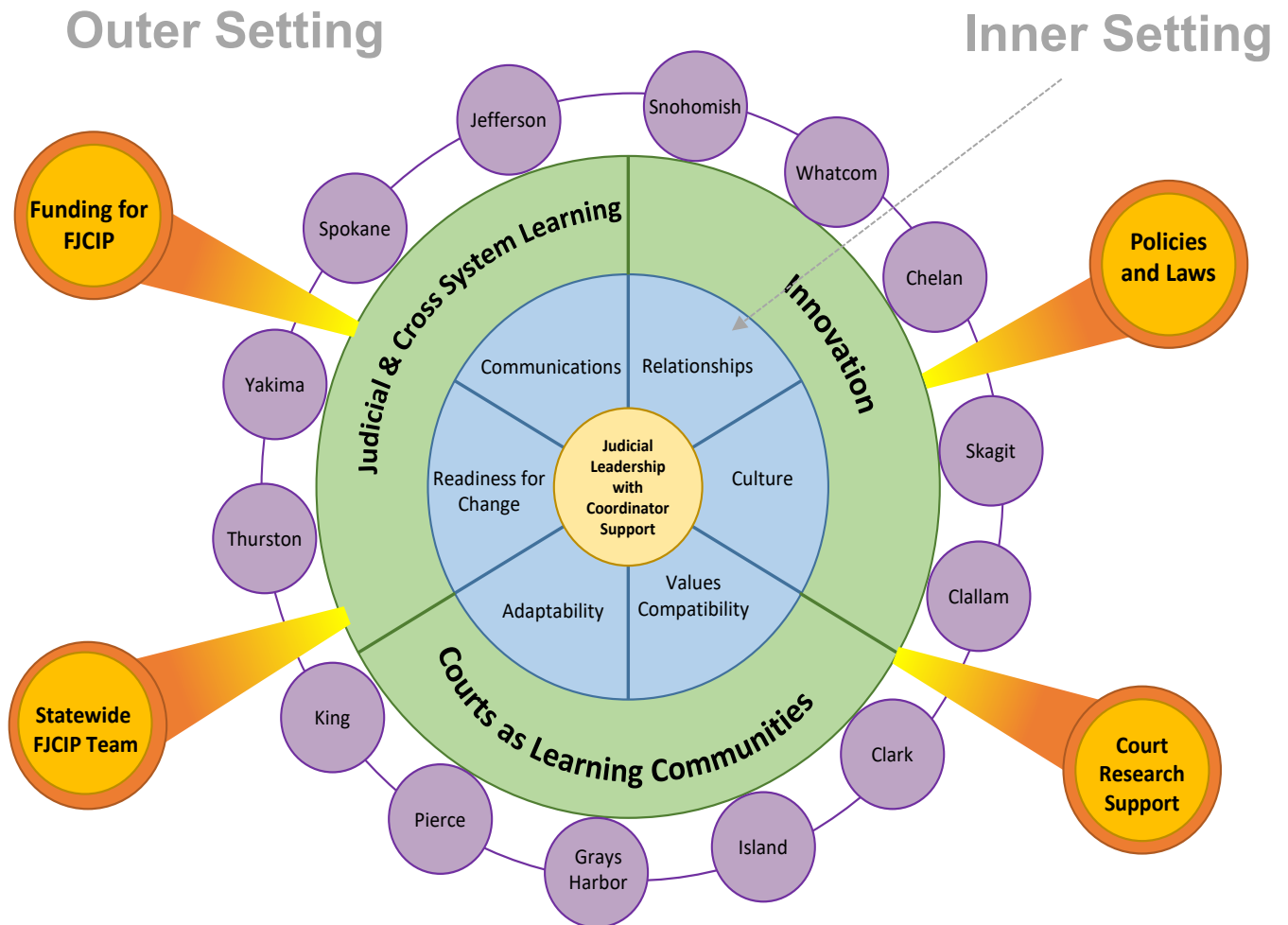
Why a New Framework is Required: The 2008 legislation that established the FJCIP was based on principles of Unified Family Courts (UFC), a model that was not universally adopted in Washington State. The new FJCIP framework retains key aspects of UFC principles and incorporates dependency court best practices and lessons learned from the last 16 years of FJCIP operation. This updated framework focuses on continuous quality improvement and ensures that successful local innovations can be scaled up across the state, with the goal of providing a more responsive and supportive child welfare court system for all children and families.

Development of the New Framework: The new FJCIP framework was developed through a rigorous process that combined lessons learned, emerging best practices, and expert insights. It utilized the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) to identify key factors affecting the program's implementation and sustainability, including its evaluation aspects. Additionally, the framework includes eight Core Components integrated into its design allowing it to adapt to various needs and contexts.

Essential Elements of the Framework: Figure 1 that follows visually represents the FJCIP implementation framework, highlighting its key elements and their interconnectedness.

- *At the heart of the model*, shown by the yellow circle in Figure 1, is a strong partnership between judicial leadership and the FJCIP Coordinator. This partnership, built on the coordinator's expertise and the shared commitment to system change, is essential for implementing successful initiatives that benefit children, families, and professionals in the dependency court system.
- *The Internal Capacity (or Inner Setting)*, depicted by the blue circle in Figure 1, refers to the in-house environment within FJCIP courts. This environment includes several key factors that affect the program's implementation and long-term sustainability, such as court culture, compatibility with existing practices, readiness for change, communication channels, relationships, and adaptability.

Figure 1: Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program Framework



- *The Learning and Innovation Section*, shown in green in Figure 1, fosters a culture of learning and innovation. These elements are briefly explained below:
 - **Judicial and Cross System Learning:** FJCIP courts require supportive leadership that encourages and advocates for learning opportunities. This model includes specially-trained judicial officers and professionals within the system, as well as annual cross-system retreats designed to foster learning and collaboration across different systems.
 - **Courts as Learning Communities:** FJCIP courts are encouraged to become learning communities by using local data and information from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to continuously improve decision-making in the child welfare court system. This approach helps reduce racial disparities and better meet the needs of families and children.

- **Innovation:** FJCIP encourages creativity and innovation, encouraging courts to try out new processes and programs with the support of FJCIP Coordinators. The AOC provides technical support for evaluating progress, tracking implementation, and adjusting approaches as needed.
- *The Interconnected Court Community*, depicted in purple in Figure 1, is a network of FJCIP courts that collaborates, shares resources via a community of practice, and learns from each other. This interconnectedness supports FJCIP courts to innovate, discover new training opportunities, and gain valuable insights from data to understand local as well as sitewide trends and developments.
- *The Outer Setting*, shown in orange in Figure 1, are the external factors that impact FJCIP implementation. These include adequate funding for FJCIP initiatives, advocacy for new policies and laws impacting the dependency court system, organizational support from the Statewide FJCIP Team, and research support from the Washington State Center for Court Research.

FJCIP's Core Components

The FJCIP model relies on eight Core Components that must work together for local court programs to achieve their full potential. Monitoring and evaluating all Core Components is essential to ensure the program's success. By integrating these elements, the FJCIP remains adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of families and children, promoting a dynamic approach to implementation.

1. Dedicated Judicial Leadership
2. Judicial and Cross System Learning
3. FJCIP Local Coordinator
4. Court Commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement
5. Community of Practice and Peer Learning
6. Cross System Collaboration
7. Create a Culture of System Change
8. Trauma-Responsive Support

Core Components Adoption and Support

The Statewide FJCIP Team works closely with local courts to help them integrate the Core Components into their day-to-day operations. This happens through annual training sessions with practical, hands-on experience and real-world examples. These trainings are designed to help courts understand the Core Components and know how to implement them effectively within their unique contexts.

Courts will adopt these Core Components using a phased approach, where each component is introduced gradually. For example, a court might first implement the cross-system learning component, and only once this is fully integrated and functioning well, move on to implementing trauma-responsive support strategies. The phased implementation can also apply within a single core component. For example, a court might start by introducing trauma-informed training for its judges and staff, focusing on understanding the impact of trauma on families and how to respond empathetically. Once feedback indicates that staff are effectively applying trauma-informed practices in their interactions with families, the court might develop and implement specialized support services to address trauma-related needs more directly. This phased method ensures that each component is adopted in a manageable way, allowing courts to adjust and refine their practices as needed.

Throughout this process, the Statewide FJCIP Team continuously monitors the integration of the Core Components, offering technical assistance and guidance to address any challenges. The Blueprint for FJCIP Implementation provides a practical toolkit for new and existing FJCIP courts to effectively implement each component.

Evaluation and Feedback

The Core Components and the new framework provide essential guidance for evaluating the FJCIP program. Regular assessments track the effectiveness of each component to ensure they are meeting their goals and, if goals are not met, offer guidance for how to improve performance. The Statewide FJCIP Team will oversee these evaluations and collaborate closely with courts to ensure adherence to the FJCIP model. Feedback from judges, court staff, and community partners will be regularly collected to understand how well these components are enhancing court operations and outcomes. This feedback loop is crucial for making informed adjustments and refining practices to better serve the community.

FJCIP Implementation Framework Video

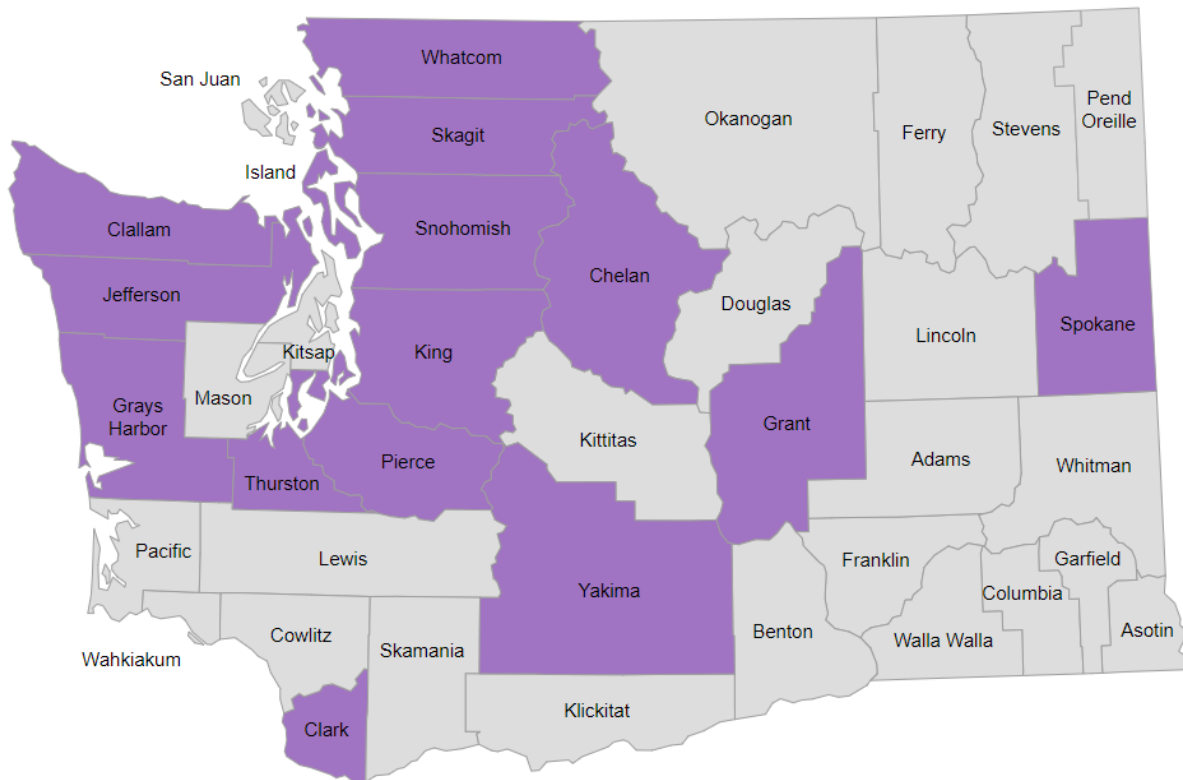


<https://youtu.be/TbNseZRa8Ag>

FJCIP Courts

The FJCIP program currently operates in 15 courts across Washington State, which collectively serve 77% of all dependency cases in the state. See Figure 2 below. These counties include urban, suburban, and rural areas, and they represent a broad range of social and economic backgrounds. This diversity is advantageous as it provides valuable insights into the program's effectiveness across various contexts and enhances the ability to collaboratively address common challenges.

Figure 2: Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program Counties



Since 2022, the FJCIP program has expanded to six additional counties, each with its unique culture, local context, and varying dependency caseloads, resources, and levels of service availability. These new courts operate in different Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) regions with diverse approaches to working with dependency partners. The new framework is designed to accommodate this variety diversity by providing flexible guidance and support tailored to each county's specific needs. By accommodating the individual characteristics of the courts, the framework ensures that all counties can effectively implement the program and address the needs of children and families in their distinct localities.