



Division of Safety and Permanence

DSP Informational Memo Series 2026-15i

May 20, 2026

To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator
DCF Area Administrators
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Group Home Providers
Private Child Placing Agencies
Residential Care Center Providers
Shelter Care Providers
Tribal Chairpersons

From: John Elliott
Administrator

Re: **Notice of Available Funding: Youth Justice Innovation Grants**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to inform county human service agencies of an opportunity to pursue innovative youth justice projects at the local level. Utilizing underspending in CY 2025 Youth Aids, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is offering another round of Youth Justice (YJ) Innovation Grants. YJ Innovation Grants are a competitive opportunity for county human service agencies to implement new evidence-informed practices or programs with short-term start-up funding from DCF. All proposed projects must serve the overall purpose of improving community-based youth justice services and should meet requirements of one of the following topic areas: deflection-reducing YJ referrals, diversion-pre-court services, or post-dispositional services.

DCF is excited to offer a second year of funding for **YJ - Micro Grant Lived Experience**. Funds would be used specifically to recruit or facilitate youth attending DCF's [Youth Leadership Team](#) (YLT) meetings or an equivalent county-led youth lived experience group.

BACKGROUND

Innovation Grants are funded by unused Youth Aids funds, pursuant to [Wis. Stat. § 48.526\(3\)\(e\)](#). DCF can carry forward two (2) calendar years. A list of past YJ Innovation Grant projects is available via the [DCF YJ webpage](#) (Innovative Practice tab).



INFORMATION SUMMARY

Only Wisconsin county human service agencies are eligible to apply for this grant opportunity. Counties may apply in partnership with other counties or tribes—all participating partners should be listed on the application. County agencies may apply for one (1) micro grant and/or one (1) project area innovation grant in 2027. Grant instructions and the application are linked as an attachment at the end of this memo.

Counties receiving a Youth Justice Micro Lived Experience Grant must:

- Use funds specifically to recruit or facilitate youth attending DCF's [Youth Leadership Team](#) (YLT) or an equivalent county-led youth lived experience group. A few funding ideas include transportation assistance, county YLT marketing strategy, attendance incentives, or other supplies.
- Amplify life experiences through reflection on engagement practices, create opportunities for youth feedback, and raise awareness of opportunities to share lived experiences.

Counties receiving a Youth Justice Innovation Grant Project Area must:

- Attend and participate in periodic grantee conference calls, site visits, and presentation requests.
- Collect program data and report out on outcomes bi-annually. Counties will be asked to review and track specific measures related to demographics using data from eWiSACWIS eWReports.
- Amplify life experiences through reflection on engagement practices, create opportunities for youth feedback, and raise awareness of opportunities to share lived experiences.

All proposed projects must satisfy the following requirements:

- Will provide community-based youth justice services within the scope of services allowable under [Youth Aids](#).
- Will not contribute to “net widening” or expanding YJ system involvement of youth whose primary needs would be best addressed in another system.
- Will serve a target population **age 10 and over**.
- Will use innovation funds to initiate or significantly expand an evidence-informed program or practice. Innovation Grants should not be used to fund existing programs or initiatives.

INITIAL GRANT ELIGIBILITY

Initial grants are reserved for counties starting a new evidence-informed practice or program. Counties awarded a grant (initial or continuation) in 2025 are **not eligible** to apply for an **initial YJ - Project Area Grant option**. However, 2026 innovation grantees are **eligible** for the **YJ - Micro Grant Lived Experience option** and should contact DSP on how to apply for the micro



grant. **Counties awarded a grant (initial or continuation) in 2025, please contact DSP about a continuation renewal.**

Applications must be submitted electronically to DCFYJ@wisconsin.gov no later than July 9, 2026, by 11:59pm CST. An email will be sent out on July 10, 2026, confirming receipt of application.

An optional Zoom Q&A will be held on June 11, 2026, at 11:00am CST. Please register using the link for Zoom access:

June 11 registration link:

<https://dcfwi.zoom.us/j/85607653739?pwd=QXm9np8TBQh3Zn3e79v1iuWJmsnkdE.1>

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT: DCF Area Administrator

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT: Youth Justice Policy Coordinator
Bureau of Youth Services
920-360-3520
dcfyj@wisconsin.gov

MEMO WEB SITE: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>

Attachments <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/yj> (Notifications tab)
[2027 Youth Justice Innovation Grants Application Packet](#)