

Without appropriate intervention, these youth are at significant risk of continued system involvement, which carries both public safety implications and substantial financial costs associated with detention and residential placement. Evidence-based diversion programs are critical to interrupting this cycle by addressing the underlying drivers of delinquent behavior while maintaining youth safely in the community.

To address this need, the Lowndes County Juvenile Court is requesting funding to serve 59 youth and families through Functional Family Therapy (FFT) during the FY2027 grant period. FFT is a well-supported, evidence-based intervention designed for youth ages 11–18 who present with behavioral challenges such as delinquency, substance abuse, and family conflict. The model focuses on five structured phases—engagement, motivation, relational assessment, behavior change, and generalization—each designed to address specific risk factors and improve family functioning.

FFT is delivered primarily in the home, allowing therapists to engage families in their natural environment and reduce barriers to participation. Services are flexible, culturally responsive, and tailored to the needs of each family, resulting in high engagement and completion rates. Youth typically receive between 15 and 30 sessions over a three- to four-month period, with frequency adjusted based on risk level and treatment phase.

Over three decades of research, including multiple randomized clinical trials, have demonstrated FFT's effectiveness in reducing recidivism, improving family relationships, and decreasing reliance on out-of-home placement. By investing in FFT, Lowndes County is able to provide a cost-effective alternative to detention and commitment, improving outcomes for youth while reducing the long-term burden on the juvenile justice system.

Absent continued CJCC funding, Lowndes County would face a significant reduction in its ability to provide these evidence-based diversion services, likely resulting in increased reliance on secure detention and higher long-term costs to the State.

3. Target Population

- a. Provide a detailed description of the clearly defined target population to be served in the grant period, include the following:
 - i. Explain how and why the target population was selected, including any risk factors.

The target population as described above in part 2.a includes an at-risk population of 26,602 youth. In accordance with the intent of the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program, the Lowndes County Juvenile Court is choosing to prioritize the target population of youth determined to be medium to high-risk offenders as assessed using the Pre-Disposition Risk Assessment (PDRA). The demographics and referral behaviors of the youth served in the Functional Family Therapy program are likely to reflect similar demographics as youth in the County juvenile justice system. The majority of referrals to Lowndes County Juvenile Court are male and African American. Reducing reliance on residential placement for these priority populations is consistent with the Court's mission to safeguard both long-term public safety