2026 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

INTERSTATE COMMISSION FOR JUVENILES

Strategic planning is essential for setting priorities, focusing resources, and ensuring everyone is working toward common goals. The Commission's strategic plan is built upon the four long-range priorities outlined below. In 2026, the Commission advanced all four priorities through coordinated work among its committees, the Work Group on Returning Non-Delinquent Youths, the National Office, ex officio members, and external partners. This update highlights progress and identifies the work continuing into 2027.

1. ADDRESS GAPS IN ICJ RULES AND RESOURCES

The Commission strengthened the legal and operational framework supporting interstate juvenile cases by clarifying ICJ Rules, updating authoritative guidance, and advancing solutions to complex issues requiring further study.

Key progress included:

- Increased clarity and consistency in interstate case administration by implementing six rule amendments clarifying requirements for relocation prior to acceptance, home evaluation reports, travel arrangements in return cases, and travel permits.
- Aligned Commission guidance and training with current requirements by revising the ICJ Bench Book, three advisory opinions, one white paper, and 14 training materials and resources.
- Promoted consistent implementation of the amended Rules by training more than 800 participants through four national sessions and providing curricula for states to use in training.
- Moved toward a more effective rulemaking process by developing a proposed amendment to Rule 2-103 to extend the rule amendment cycle from two years to three years, allowing additional time for research, stakeholder input, and implementation.
- Prepared a proposed amendment to Rule 6-103 to clarify the home state court's responsibility for applying the "best interest standard" in requisition cases.
- Developed recommendations addressing overdue home evaluations and established a subcommittee to examine relocations within the receiving state after case acceptance.
- Strengthened the foundation for future guidance by conducting legal and policy analysis of the use of the terms "custody" and "detainment" in the ICJ Rules.
- Strengthened consideration of due process and parental rights in return procedures through legal research and the creation of a subcommittee focused on improving returns of non-delinquent youths.
- Used a national assessment to identify future training priorities and responded to 10 requests for training and technical assistance, strengthening states' capacity to administer the Compact effectively.

Looking ahead to 2027: At the next Annual Business Meeting, the Commission will consider proposed rule amendments intended to clarify responsibilities, strengthen protections, and promote more consistent interstate practice. Preparatory work will focus on reviewing the proposed amendments and identifying the UNITY enhancements, guidance, and training needed for effective implementation. The Commission will also continue examining home evaluations and Rule 7-103, improving the processes for returns, and reviewing the Family Resource Guide on Returning Runaways.

2. IMPROVE UNITY FOR BETTER OUTCOMES

The Commission strengthened UNITY as a tool for case management, compliance monitoring, and informed decision-making.

Key progress included:

- Aligned UNITY with amendments to the ICJ Rules through system enhancements, testing, and user training, helping states implement the revised requirements consistently.
- Improved states' ability to monitor compliance and performance by launching the Transfers of Supervision Dashboard.
- Restored systematic compliance measurement by launching the updated Performance Measurement Assessment program using UNITY data.
- Strengthened states' capacity to understand and improve their performance through the PMA Toolkit, educational video, revised corrective action plan template, and Targeted Compliance Assistance program.
- Delivered the first quarterly PMA reports and established a process for states to request amendments to reported results, supporting accurate and transparent compliance assessment.
- Expanded practical support for UNITY users through *Tech Tip* videos and a review of onboarding courses for new users.
- Advanced plans to collect more consistent human-trafficking information, supporting future identification and analysis of cases involving vulnerable youths.
- Developed recommendations to strengthen the UNITY Privacy Policy, promoting clearer safeguards and more responsible management of sensitive case information.

Looking ahead to 2027: The Commission will continue implementing the updated PMA process, developing the Returns Dashboard, resolving technical limitations affecting one PMA standard, modernizing UNITY onboarding, and implementing updates to the UNITY Privacy Policy. These efforts are intended to give states more reliable information for identifying compliance concerns, improve new users' ability to manage cases effectively, and strengthen safeguards for sensitive information.

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3. PROMOTE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND RACIAL JUSTICE

The Commission strengthened leadership capacity, expanded opportunities for learning and mentorship, and advanced racial justice and equity in interstate practice.

Key progress included:

- Created structured opportunities for members to examine race, equity, and the experiences of youths and families through five *Conversations in Film* sessions supporting greater awareness of how interstate practices may affect individuals differently.
- Strengthened home evaluation guidance and training by addressing implicit bias and developing scenario-based instruction on equitable practices for the 2026 Annual Business Meeting.
- Increased awareness of the intersection between ICJ and human trafficking through national training and identified opportunities to strengthen guidance for cases involving vulnerable youths.
- Expanded peer support and the Commission's leadership pipeline by initiating three new mentorships through the ICJ Mentoring Program.
- Improved access and participation for first-time Annual Business Meeting attendees through a virtual orientation to the Commission and its meeting processes.
- Clarified organizational direction by developing new mission and vision statements to guide Executive Committee priorities and National Office operations.

Looking ahead to 2027: The Commission will continue integrating racial-equity considerations into its resources and practices while strengthening mentorship, onboarding, and leadership-development opportunities This work will promote more equitable interstate practices, prepare state leaders for Commission leadership roles, and support meaningful participation in the Commission's work.

4. LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES

The Commission leveraged national partnerships to identify systemic barriers, strengthen legal and policy analysis, expand national training, and establish priorities for improving interstate responses to runaway youths.

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Key progress included:

- Brought together ex officio members, allied organizations, legal researchers, and other national experts to inform the Work Group on Returning Non-delinquent Youths' analysis of interstate return practices and potential solutions.
- Partnered with the Alliance for Community Justice and Innovation, national experts, giving the Work Group a broader foundation for evaluating interstate return practices and potential solutions.
- Strengthened legal and policy analysis through research by the University of Maine School of Law's Center for Youth Law and Policy addressing due-process and parental-rights issues affecting non-delinquent youths.
- Integrated the expertise of the National Runaway Safeline, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and National Children's Advocacy Center into national training and the 2026 Annual Business Meeting program, strengthening participants' understanding of the needs of runaway youths and resources available to support them.
- Identified interagency coordination and partnerships as a leading national training need, helping shape future education, resource development, and collaborative efforts.

Looking ahead to 2027: The Work Group will finalize recommendations establishing a framework for continued collaboration and long-term improvements in the treatment and return of runaway youths. These recommendations will inform the Commission's strategic planning. The Commission will also partner with the American Probation and Parole Association to expand ICJ training for frontline staff increasing their understanding of Compact requirements and supporting more consistent interstate supervision.

SUMMARY

In 2026, the Commission made substantial progress across all four strategic priorities. Major accomplishments included implementing rule amendments and related UNITY enhancements, updating rules-related resources and training, launching the updated PMA program, expanding tools for proactive monitoring, incorporating racial-equity considerations into home-evaluation practices, and strengthening national partnerships to improve responses to runaway and other vulnerable youths.

Several major initiatives were intentionally carried into 2027 because they require additional research, technical development, stakeholder engagement, or policy review. These include improving the return process for non-delinquent youths, resolving technical limitations affecting UNITY dashboards and PMA measures, and updating UNITY onboarding courses.

PLANNING AHEAD: 2028-2032 STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Over the coming months, the Commission will begin developing its next five-year strategic plan. This process will build on the strong foundation established by the current plan while engaging Commission members and partners in shaping the organization's future direction.

Preparation will begin this winter, when state ICJ Commissioners, Compact Administrators, other ICJ staff, and ex officio members will be invited to share their perspectives through a brief survey. A comprehensive environmental scan will also bring together relevant data, reports, emerging trends, and other information to provide a deeper understanding of the Commission's current position, the challenges ahead, and the areas offering the greatest opportunities for impact.

The Executive Committee will provide leadership throughout the planning process, with its spring planning meeting serving as a dedicated opportunity to dive deeply into the development of the new strategic plan. Completing groundwork in advance will allow the Executive Committee to focus its time together on strategic discussion, thoughtful prioritization, and consensus-building around the initiatives that should guide the Commission over the next five years.

The process is intended to do more than produce a strategic plan. It will strengthen strategic thinking across the Commission, align its work and resources with its mission, and establish focused priorities that best serve its members and the jurisdictions they represent.