This paper describes a collaboration between the District Attorney of New York County (DANY) and the City University of New York’s Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) to improve public safety, develop broad crime prevention efforts, and promote a fairer, more efficient justice system. DANY established the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) in 2014 to invest approximately $250 million of criminal asset forfeiture funds to accomplish these goals, and selected ISLG through a competitive bidding process to manage the initiative. CJII spans four focus areas: youth, family, and communities; victims of crime; diversion and reentry support; and enhancing effectiveness across systems. Since early 2016, DANY has invested in projects and programs within these four areas. For instance, in February 2017, DANY announced a $58 million investment in youth, family, and community-based programs.

This paper presents the origins of the initiative and outlines the process of implementation, from strategic planning to funding decisions. It discusses how such an approach can be collectively beneficial and serve as a model for similar initiatives nationwide. Such a collaboration offers safer and more just communities for the public; greater access to scarce resources for practitioners; and an expanded evidence base for policymakers. Yet the approach also includes possible challenges that must be negotiated in order to maintain institutional integrity for both DANY and ISLG.

The paper discusses the underlying framework for CJII. Based on DANY’s interests, ISLG conducted literature reviews in domestic violence, victim and witness services, substance use disorders and treatment, crime prevention, and reentry and diversion. In addition, ISLG conducted more than 250 interviews with community organizations, experts, and city personnel to learn about: a) current gaps in domains intersecting with the justice system in NYC; b) impactful ideas to address those gaps; and c) best practices. This paper also discusses the challenges encountered in the implementation of CJII and how they DANY and its partners are addressing them, including processes for decision making and strategies for communication; as well as implementation of specific investments as part of CJII and how they can inform other investments in criminal justice and other policy areas.