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The Safety and Justice Challenge

Amid growing national attention to the number of Americans confined in state and federal prisons, significantly less attention has been paid to the local level, where the criminal justice system primarily operates and where over-incarceration begins.

Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have the cumulative costs of building and running them. Nationwide misuse of jails most harshly impacts low-income communities and communities of color. For example, while African Americans and Latinos make up 30 percent of Americans, they make up 51 percent of the US jail population. Today, one in three Americans believes his or her local justice system is unfair.

The Safety and Justice Challenge is a national initiative supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. The Challenge is establishing a collaborative network of jurisdictions to model and inspire effective local criminal justice reforms across the country. The 40 diverse jurisdictions participating in the Challenge are working to reduce jail populations, create fairer and more effective local justice systems, and model reforms for the nation.

Who is participating in the Challenge?

Following a selection process in 2015 that drew applications from nearly 200 jurisdictions in 45 states and territories, the Foundation chose 20 jurisdictions for initial grants and expert counsel to develop plans for creating fairer, more effective local justice systems. In April 2016, the Foundation announced a commitment of nearly \$25 million across these 20 jurisdictions to support implementation of their plans. As the jurisdictions work to reduce their jail populations and address racial and ethnic disparities in their local justice systems, their work will produce a variety of innovations and models for reform that communities across the United States can adopt.

The Foundation awarded each of the following 10 jurisdictions grants between \$1.5 million and \$3.5 million and access to expert technical assistance to implement their plans over two years. All of these sites, if their progress warrants, will be eligible for renewal of implementation funding beyond the initial two years.

- [Charleston County, SC](#)
- [Harris County, TX](#)
- [Lucas County, OH](#)
- [Milwaukee County, WI](#)
- [New Orleans, LA](#)
- [Philadelphia, PA](#)
- [Pima County, AZ](#)
- [Spokane County, WA](#)
- [State of Connecticut](#)
- [St. Louis County, MO](#)

The Foundation also awarded each of the following 10 jurisdictions \$150,000 grants and access to expert technical assistance to continue their local reform work and participate actively in the Safety and Justice Challenge Network. The Foundation's goal is that several of these sites will be in a position to receive implementation funding in 2017.

- [Ada County, ID](#)
- [Cook County, IL](#)
- [Los Angeles County, CA](#)
- [Mecklenburg County, NC](#)
- [Mesa County, CO](#)
- [Mulnomah County, OR](#)
- [New York City, NY](#)
- [Palm Beach County, FL](#)
- [Pennington County, SD](#)
- [Shelby County, TN](#)

In February 2017, the Foundation launched the Safety and Justice Challenge Innovation Fund, which supports additional jurisdictions in designing and testing innovative approaches to local justice reform. 20 jurisdictions received \$50,000 grants and access to expert technical assistance to pursue projects including: gender-responsive risk and needs assessment, culture-based case management and recidivism reduction approaches, and enhanced services for people with mental illness involved with the justice system. These sites will also have future funding opportunities.

The following jurisdictions are participating in the Innovation Fund:

- [Adams County, CO](#)
- [Allegheny County, PA](#)
- [City of Atlanta, GA](#)
- [Broward County, FL](#)
- [Buncombe County, NC](#)
- [Campbell County, TN](#)
- [Clark County, NV](#)
- [Dane County, WI](#)
- [State of Delaware](#)
- [Deschutes County, OR](#)
- [Durham County, NC](#)
- [East Baton Rouge, LA](#)
- [Lake County, IL](#)
- [Minnehaha County, SD](#)
- [Missoula County, MT](#)
- [Polk County, IA](#)
- [City and County of San Francisco, CA](#)
- [Santa Clara County, CA](#)
- [Summit County, OH](#)
- [Yakima County, WA](#)

What are the jurisdictions looking to achieve through the initiative? With support from the Foundation and help from a consortium of national experts and technical assistance providers, jurisdictions are making changes in policy, practice, and system alignment designed to safely drive down jail usage and reduce racial and ethnic disparities. The 10 jurisdictions the Foundation selected to support implementation of their plans over two years have set ambitious goals for lowering their jail populations, ranging from 15 percent to 34 percent. Many are launching initiatives to address the disproportionate impact of jail misuse and overuse on people too poor to post bail, as well as on people with mental health or substance abuse issues.

The jurisdictions' plans employ an expansive array of local solutions, such as diversion programs, which can steer people out of the criminal justice system who are not a threat to public safety; implicit bias training for police and other system practitioners, probation officers, prosecutors, and judges; and expanded community-based treatment options. Their diversity of sizes, geographies, demographics, and challenges will produce a variety of creative approaches and models for reform that jurisdictions across the country can adopt.

Which organizations are providing technical assistance to grantees?

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations are providing technical assistance and counsel to Safety and Justice Challenge jurisdictions: the Center for Court Innovation, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Vera Institute of Justice, and the Urban Institute.

Why jails?

The overuse and misuse of jails in America has reached a crisis point. Local jails—intended to hold people who pose a flight risk or threat to public safety—are instead warehousing people for non-violent offenses, or simply because they are too poor to post bail. This is one of the greatest drivers of over-incarceration in the US. Some key statistics that illustrate the extent of the problem:

- There are nearly 12 million local jail admissions in the US every year—almost 20 times the number of prison admissions, and equivalent to the populations of Los Angeles and New York City combined.
- Two-thirds of jail inmates haven't been convicted of a crime and are awaiting trial. Many of these people—all presumed innocent—spend long stretches of time in jail because they are too poor to post bail.
- Nearly 75 percent of the population of both sentenced offenders and pretrial detainees are in jail for non-violent traffic, property, or drug offenses.

Research shows that only a few days in jail can limit future job prospects, worsen the health of those detained, increase the likelihood of a repeat offense, and increase the likelihood of incarceration—making jail a gateway to deeper and more lasting involvement with the criminal justice system. Taxpayers spend billions of dollars each year on local jails; more effective local justice systems would allow cities and counties to reinvest in critical services that improve lives and strengthen communities, such as education, mental health care, and workforce development.

Press Release: February 1, 2017

SAFETY AND JUSTICE CHALLENGE TO CREATE FAIRER, MORE EFFECTIVE LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS

20 Counties and Cities Receive Grants to Design, Test Innovative Criminal Justice Reforms

Chicago, IL, February 1, 2017 – The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today announced that 20 additional jurisdictions will join the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), a national \$100 million initiative to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. The jurisdictions will design and test innovative local justice reforms to safely drive down jail usage and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in their local justice systems.

The jurisdictions expand the membership of the [Safety and Justice Challenge Network](#), a collaborative of counties, cities, and states modeling and inspiring reforms to create fairer, more effective local justice systems across the country. Through the Challenge’s [Innovation Fund](#), the 20 jurisdictions will receive support and expert technical assistance in designing and implementing local reforms. Their innovations will range in focus from crisis intervention to behavioral health to pretrial release and supervision. Projects that will receive support include gender-responsive risk and needs assessment, culture-based case management and recidivism reduction approaches, and enhanced services for people with mental illness involved with the justice system.

“Local jurisdictions are leading the way on justice reform,” said MacArthur President Julia Stasch. “Demand for reform at the local level is considerable and growing, as evidenced by the number, diversity, and creativity of the applications we received. This momentum is encouraging, particularly as the federal justice reform landscape evolves and shifts.”

The Innovation Fund jurisdictions expand the Challenge’s reach into new states and deepen its work across the country. They include:

- Adams County, CO
- Allegheny County, PA
- City of Atlanta, GA
- Broward County, FL
- Buncombe County, NC
- Campbell County, TN
- Clark County, NV
- Dane County, WI
- State of Delaware
- Deschutes County, OR
- Durham County, NC
- East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

- Lake County, IL
- Minnehaha County, SD
- Missoula County, MT
- Polk County, IA
- City and County of San Francisco, CA
- Santa Clara County, CA
- Summit County, OH
- Yakima County, WA

The Innovation Fund jurisdictions receive short-term support of \$50,000 each, are eligible for future funding opportunities, and have access to the resources, peer learning opportunities, and expertise of the Safety and Justice Challenge Network. The Urban Institute, which is managing the Innovation Fund in partnership with the Foundation, will provide expert technical assistance to the jurisdictions as they implement their plans. Key learnings and resources emerging from the Innovation Fund will be shared with and beyond the justice reform field.

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About the MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people, effective institutions, and influential networks building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. MacArthur is placing a few big bets that truly significant progress is possible on some of the world's most pressing social challenges, including over-incarceration, global climate change, nuclear risk, and significantly increasing financial capital for the social sector. In addition to the MacArthur Fellows Program, the Foundation continues its historic commitments to the role of journalism in a responsible and responsive democracy, as well as the strength and vitality of our headquarters city, Chicago. More information about the Foundation's criminal justice reform work can be found at www.macfound.org/criminaljustice.

About the Urban Institute

The nonprofit Urban Institute is dedicated to elevating the debate on social and economic policy. For nearly five decades, Urban scholars have conducted research and offered evidence-based solutions that improve lives and strengthen communities across a rapidly urbanizing world. Their objective research helps expand opportunities for all, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

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Press Release: May 27, 2015

MACARTHUR ANNOUNCES 20 JURISDICTIONS TO RECEIVE FUNDING TO REDUCE JAIL USE

*Twenty \$150,000 awards are part of \$75M Safety and Justice Challenge to foster
Innovative reform in local criminal justice systems*

Chicago, IL – After a highly competitive selection process that drew applications from nearly 200 jurisdictions in 45 states and territories, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today announced it is awarding 20 jurisdictions \$150,000 grants and expert counsel to create plans that will lead to fairer, more effective local justice systems. The grants are a part of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), the Foundation’s \$75 million initiative to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. From this group, 10 jurisdictions will be selected in 2016 to receive a second round of funding – between \$500,000 and \$2 million annually, depending on the size of the jurisdiction – to implement their plans for reform.

The 20 jurisdictions range from large cities including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Houston to small localities like Mesa County, CO, and Pennington County, SD, as well as the State of Connecticut. Together, the selected jurisdictions represent 11% of the nation’s jails capacity. Therefore, the initiative has the opportunity to impact a large proportion of today’s jails population, as well as pioneer evidence-based alternatives to incarceration that other jurisdictions can successfully adopt and implement. (For a full list of the 20 recipients, see below.)

“Nearly 200 diverse jurisdictions responded to our challenge, reflecting nationwide interest in reducing over-incarceration,” said Julia Stasch, President of the MacArthur Foundation. “Each of the sites selected has demonstrated the motivation, collaboration, and commitment needed to make real change in their local justice systems. The aim is that local efforts will model effective and safe alternatives to the incarceration status quo for the rest of the country.”

Despite growing national attention to the large number of Americans confined in state and federal prisons, significantly less attention has been paid to local justice systems, where the criminal justice system primarily operates and where over-incarceration begins. Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have cumulative expenditures related to building and running them. According to recent research from the Vera Institute of Justice, [nearly 75 percent](#) of the population of both sentenced offenders and pretrial detainees are in jail for nonviolent offenses such as traffic, property, drug, or public order violations. Further, low-income individuals and communities of color disproportionately experience the negative consequences of incarceration.

MacArthur created the Safety and Justice Challenge competition to support jurisdictions across the country seeking to build more just and effective local justice systems that improve public safety, save taxpayer money, and yield more fair outcomes. In light of the large-scale response received to the

Challenge competition and in an effort to build a broad network of jurisdictions that are engaged in local justice reform, the Foundation plans to create new opportunities – open to jurisdictions across the country – for funding to support training, technical assistance, and promising local innovations that seek to reduce the misuse and overuse of jails.

As part of the initiative, the Vera Institute of Justice recently released a new report, [*The Price of Jails: Measuring the Taxpayer Cost of Local Incarceration*](#), showing that hidden costs make jails far more expensive than previously understood. The report finds that because other government agencies bear significant costs not reflected in jail budgets, taxpayers are spending more to incarcerate people than official statistics show.

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will provide technical assistance and counsel to the 20 jurisdictions as they prepare their comprehensive plans for local reform: the Center for Court Innovation, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Pretrial Justice Institute, and the Vera Institute of Justice.

In alphabetical order, the 20 jurisdictions are:

- Ada County, ID
- Charleston County, SC
- Cook County, IL
- Harris County, TX
- Los Angeles County, CA
- Lucas County, OH
- Mecklenburg County, NC
- Mesa County, CO
- Milwaukee County, WI
- Multnomah County, OR
- New Orleans, LA
- New York City, NY
- Palm Beach County, FL
- Pennington County, SD
- Philadelphia, PA
- Pima County, AZ
- St. Louis County, MO
- Shelby County, TN
- Spokane County, WA
- State of Connecticut

The MacArthur Foundation has been active in promoting justice reform for more than 20 years. Through its [*Models for Change*](#) juvenile justice reform initiative, the Foundation supported reform in more than 35 states in an effort to create a more rational, fair, effective, and developmentally appropriate juvenile justice system. MacArthur also supported seminal research on the effects of modern neuroscience on criminal law and has a rich history in international justice, including helping to establish the International Criminal Court. During the exploration of a strategy for criminal justice reform, the Foundation supported the National Academies of Sciences 2014 report [*The Growth of Incarceration in the United States*](#).

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Press Release: February 11, 2015

MACARTHUR FOUNDATION LAUNCHES \$75M INITIATIVE TO REDUCE AMERICA'S USE OF JAILS

Safety and Justice Challenge includes national competition to support innovation in local criminal justice systems

Chicago, IL – The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today announced an initial five-year, \$75 million investment that seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. The Safety and Justice Challenge will support cities and counties across the country seeking to create fairer, more effective local justice systems that improve public safety, save taxpayer money, and lead to better social outcomes. Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have cumulative expenditures related to building and running them.

“For too long America has incarcerated too many people unnecessarily, spending too much money without improving public safety,” said Julia Stasch, MacArthur’s interim president. “Jails are where our nation’s incarceration problem begins; there are nearly 12 million jail admissions every year, and jails too often serve as warehouses for those too poor to post bail, nonviolent offenders, or people with mental illness. With this substantial, long-term commitment and investment, MacArthur hopes to support and demonstrate alternatives to incarceration as usual, and to create demand and momentum for change across the country.”

The Challenge will support jurisdictions across the country working to safely reduce over-reliance on jails, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color. Core to the initiative is a competition through which the Foundation will fund up to 20 jurisdictions to design and implement plans for creating fairer, more effective local justice systems using innovative, collaborative, and evidence-based solutions. The Foundation released a request for proposals for the competition today.

Despite growing national attention to the large number of Americans confined in state and federal prisons, significantly less attention has been paid to local justice systems, where the criminal justice system primarily operates and where over-incarceration begins.

According to a report released today by the Vera Institute of Justice, “Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America”:

- There are nearly 12 million local jail admissions every year – almost 20 times the number of prison admissions, and equivalent to the populations of Los Angeles and New York City combined.
- Nearly 75 percent of the population of both sentenced offenders and pretrial detainees are in jail for nonviolent offenses like traffic, property, drug, or public order violations.

- From 1982 to 2011, cumulative expenditures related to building and running jails increased nearly 235 percent. Local jurisdictions now spend \$22.2 billion annually on correctional institutions.

The Challenge will engage a diverse range of organizations and individuals – law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, defenders, policymakers, academia, advocates, and funders – to lend their insights and participation to this effort. Four of the nation’s leading criminal justice organizations will provide technical assistance and counsel to Safety and Justice Challenge jurisdictions: the Center for Court Innovation, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, and the Vera Institute of Justice.

The MacArthur Foundation has been active in the justice field for more than 20 years. Through its Models for Change juvenile justice reform initiative, the Foundation has supported reform in more than 35 states in an effort to create a more rational, fair, effective, and developmentally appropriate juvenile justice system. MacArthur has supported seminal research on the effects of modern neuroscience on criminal law and has a rich history in international justice, including helping to establish the International Criminal Court. The Foundation has for several years supported work related to criminal justice reform as part of an exploration of a strategy for reform in the field. This work included support for the National Academies of Sciences 2014 report *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States*.

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About the MacArthur Foundation

The MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology affects children and society. More information about the Foundation’s work, including in the justice field, is available at www.macfound.org.

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