

Press Kit

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The Safety and Justice Challenge

Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have cumulative expenditures related to building and running them. 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.

The Safety and Justice Challenge is a major new initiative supported by the MacArthur Foundation to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Through the Challenge, the Foundation is making an initial five-year \$75 million investment in local reform, research, experimentation, and communications in an effort to create national demand for local justice reform as a means of reducing over-incarceration in America.

At the center of the Challenge is a competition to 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. The Foundation is funding 20 jurisdictions to design and implement plans for creating fairer, more effective local justice systems using innovative, collaborative, and evidence-based solutions.

The Challenge is engaging 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.

Why Jails?

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. While the primary purpose of jails is to detain those awaiting court proceedings who are a danger to public safety or a flight risk, they now hold many who are neither. Jails too often serve as warehouses for those too poor to post bail, nonviolent offenders, or people with mental illness.

- Most jail inmates—three out of five—are legally presumed innocent, awaiting trial or disposition through a plea in facilities that are often overcrowded and chaotic.
- Nearly 75 percent of the population of both sentenced offenders and pretrial detainees are in jail for nonviolent traffic, property, drug, or public order offenses.

Research shows that only a few days in jail can increase the likelihood of a sentence of incarceration, make such a sentence harsher, reduce economic viability, and promote future criminal behavior—making jail a gateway to further involvement with the criminal justice system. In thinking about the problem of over-incarceration, it is critical that we begin to focus on the contribution that local jails, and the systems that fill them, make.

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For more information on the Challenge, please visit www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org.

What is the Safety and Justice Challenge Network?

The Safety and Justice Challenge supports a network of 20 competitively selected local jurisdictions committed to reducing the overreliance on jails in their communities. With support from the MacArthur Foundation and help from a consortium of national experts and technical assistance providers, Challenge Network sites will make policy, practice, and system alignment changes designed to reduce the use of jail incarceration, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color.

The Challenge Network is comprised of 16 counties, three cities, and one state-wide system. Collectively, the jurisdictions account for 11 percent of the national confined population in jails.

The 20 Challenge Network sites 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, 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

How does the Safety and Justice Challenge Network work?

The Challenge Network sites were selected from a competitive pool of 191 applications from jurisdictions across 45 states and territories, with the help of external expert consultants. The 20 selected jurisdictions will receive a grant of \$150,000 and expert consulting help during a six-month collaborative planning round, during which they will build plans to create more fair and effective local justice systems. Beginning in 2016, as many as 10 of these jurisdictions will be selected for a second round of funding of up to \$2 million annually to support implementation of their jail reduction plans over two years.

What kinds of reforms are you hoping to see in selected jurisdictions?

The changes that will result from this work will be determined by the jurisdictions themselves, based upon their evaluations of problems, opportunities, and potential solutions within their local justice systems. Their work will reveal new and better ways of targeting resources, more effective risk assessment to determine if confinement is really necessary, and approaches that foster collaboration among justice system actors, as well as better public safety returns and social outcomes.

Which organizations are providing technical assistance to grantees?

Several 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 Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, and the Vera Institute of Justice.

For more information on the Challenge, please visit www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org.

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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