

While there has been much activity throughout the U.S. and in New York City on criminal justice reform in recent years, the implementation of long-term, meaningful solutions for women and families remain too few and far between. Challenges include:

- Insufficient attention paid to comprehensive policy and practice solutions that fully center on issues of economic, racial and gender justice;
- few long-term collaborative efforts between cross-sector stakeholders – including funders, nonprofits, government, private sector, and academia – to leverage resources towards common goals at the scale required for impact;
- a paucity of those with experiences of system involvement in key decision-making and leadership roles.

Academic experts, grassroots advocates, and formerly incarcerated women are clear on the reasons why women end up involved in the system, they are: the often-intertwined factors of 1) economic instability, 2) intimate partner and community violence, 3) drug abuse, and 4) mental illness that narrow options for survival. Yet they also agree that there is little public safety rationale to detain many of them, particularly considering the known costs to their children, families, and communities. It is clear that cycles of incarceration are also intricately tied to histories and systems of racial and economic injustice that disproportionately impact women of color and low-income women, among others, further creating instability in already marginalized communities.

**We need a new family-centered paradigm for justice that actively dismantles systems of oppression and creates new paths for stability and opportunity in the lives of New York City women, families and communities. As a public foundation rooted in and led by community experience, we believe we have both a moral and practical imperative to leverage our resources towards a more just society for those traditionally at the margins.**

To this end, The New York Women's Foundation is launching The Justice Fund, a seven-year initiative to help dismantle mass incarceration and its effects on women and families in New York City.

We will invest in and promote community-based and cross-sector solutions that significantly decrease the involvement of women and families in all phases and aspects of the system, including the closing of Rikers Island, and creating new paths for stability and opportunity that advance racial, gender and economic justice.

Key strategies include:

### **Grantmaking and Philanthropic Mobilization**

Increase philanthropic investment in community-based solutions via direct support to organizations, grantee convenings, donor education, and coordinating efforts between individual and institutional funders.

### **Thought Leadership**

Research, public education events, engagement with media and other strategies to strengthen knowledge in the field that supports reform efforts and disseminates best practices.

### **Government Partnership**

Directly engage local policy-makers and leaders at the city and state level in coordinated reform efforts.

As a core tenet of our mission and values, community-led expertise, will be central to the initiative in multiple ways --including individuals with histories of criminal justice involvement, community leaders, CBOs, and academics and researchers to leverage their local voices and visions.

## GRANTMAKING AND PHILANTHROPIC MOBILIZATION: THE LAUNCH OF A COLLABORATIVE FUND

A cornerstone of the initiative's grantmaking and philanthropic mobilization efforts is the launch of a collaborative fund to harness the financial resources and expertise of a diverse set of funders committed to justice reform in New York City with an economic, gender and racial justice lens. While the focus will be on efforts targeted toward women and families, we also recognize that ending the effects of mass incarceration for them means ending mass incarceration for all. Thus, key efforts and projects will also be considered that engage the entirety of the population with criminal system involvement, and the NYC community affected by mass incarceration at large. Currently, The Justice Fund is exploring investment in five key areas of reform, for which it is actively seeking partners. These include:

- 1) Broad-based Community Engagement**, including local and city-wide grassroots organizing, advocacy and community engagement efforts to: involve local voices in the planning, land use, design, and implementation process for new, borough-based jail facilities and related community supports; re-imagining of a repurposed Rikers Island; and advocacy for long-term culture and systems change.
- 2) Gender Justice Reform**, including: the launch of a multi-year public education campaign to implement early closure of Rose M. Singer Center; bail reform efforts, including demonstration projects to the bail out of women and children on Rikers Island who are pre-trial with set bail; and research, needs analysis and implementation of key, immediate supports for justice-involved women and families.
- 3) Capacity Building** for the ecosystem of local, community-based organizations engaging in reform efforts, including field-building technical assistance, convenings, and partnership development opportunities, as well as, direct support to strengthen the infrastructure and performance of key institutions leading gender and racial justice-focused reform work in NYC.
- 4) Community Solutions and Leadership**, including investment in local, community solutions in early stages of development that are informed by the experiences of system-involved individuals, as well as, professional development and leadership opportunities for individuals with histories of involvement.
- 5) Community-Building and Re-Investment**, including the piloting and scaling up of key community supports such as housing, mental health, leadership development, mentoring, education and training for families in neighborhoods and communities most impacted by the inequities of the criminal justice system.

## WHY THE NEW YORK WOMEN'S FOUNDATION?

The New York Women's Foundation's mission is to promote economic justice for women and families throughout New York City. As a public foundation rooted in and led by community experience, we believe we have both a moral and practical imperative to leverage our resources towards a more just society for those traditionally at the margins. To this end, we have a 31-year track record identifying and investing in successful community-based solutions to complex, intersectional and intractable issues at the nexus of racial, economic and gender justice. We also have experience in leading large-scale partnerships for change, including collaborative funds – the most recent being The NYC Fund for Girls and Young Women of Color, which in two years has grown to include 20 local and national partners with a grantmaking total of \$2.5 million annually.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, please contact Guisela Marroquin, Program Officer, at [cjinitiative@nywf.org](mailto:cjinitiative@nywf.org) or 646-564-5996.



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