

# Using Arts and Humanities to Engage Chicago Communities in Conversation about Criminal Justice Reform

## ***Planning and Design***

Coordinated by Illinois Humanities, Envisioning Justice is a citywide initiative that uses art and humanities-based programming to engage Chicagoans in dialogue about the effect of incarceration upon communities and encourages them to imagine new strategies for lessening the criminal justice system's negative impacts.

## ***Why the Arts and Humanities***

- Center the investments and conversations on those most affected
- Creatively stimulate citywide conversation
- Appeal to a broad audience
- Create inclusive environments for discussion and collaboration

## ***Program Elements***

### 3 Grant Cycles

- Dialogues about incarceration
- Storytelling about policy, data and impact
- Public discussions about imagining a new system of justice

### 7 Community Hubs

- Community Based Conversations
- Includes Hubs Located in Local Jails
- Arts Classes and Related Programming
- Public Humanities Events
- Community Open Houses

### 7 Artist Commissions

- Culminating City-Wide Exhibition
- Compendium To Memorialize the Initiative
- Documentary Film "We are Witnesses" Produced by The Marshall Project

## ***Outcomes***

- Increase knowledge about the criminal justice system, the causes of incarceration, and its impact on Chicago
- Amplify the voices of those most affected by incarceration
- Build empathy for others' lives and inspire activity around policy change
- Create new collaborations among community residents and leaders, scholars and politicians

## ***Lessons Learned***

- Involve community partners from the beginning to build trust
- Incorporating community voice and insights can lead to better criminal justice policies
- Building community capacity and creating citywide networks takes time but is enduring and has lasting ripple effects
- Funding partners need to be patient and open to learning or adjustment as historically marginalized communities are working to overcome years of racial and economic oppression
- Citywide initiatives need to be predicated on multi-year commitments of funding in order to develop responsive programming and authentic relationships between funders and community organizations

