

**Open Society Institute-Baltimore**  
**Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program**  
**Request for Proposals**  
**Deadline: September 8, 2008**

**Grassroots Organizing For Criminal Justice Reform**

**Summary**

The Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program of the Open Society Institute-Baltimore (OSI-Baltimore) is seeking proposals from non-profit organizations that are engaging or will engage in grassroots organizing of people with criminal records, their families and community members to advocate for reform of the criminal justice system. Individuals who are directly affected by the criminal justice system are intimately aware of its failures and what is needed to improve the system and promote public safety. Nevertheless, they are often excluded from the public policy reform debate. The goal of this Call for Proposals is to identify and support Baltimore-based community organizations that are working to ensure that these individuals and their communities play a leadership role in shaping criminal justice policies and practices in Maryland.

**Background**

The United States leads the world in the number of adults it incarcerates, with an alarming 2.3 million Americans languishing in overcrowded prisons and jails at high economic and social costs to state budgets and communities of color. The State of Maryland is no exception.

Maryland spends over 1 billion dollars each year to incarcerate about 23,000 people in its prisons. Over 60% of these individuals are from Baltimore City. The population behind bars in this State is predominantly African American (73.5%), and the majority of incarcerated individuals have committed non-violent offenses (over 50%). In Baltimore City, about one in five African American men age 20-30 is incarcerated on any given day, and more than half (52%) are under the control or supervision of the criminal justice system (i.e., in prison or jail, or on probation or parole).

The absence of incarcerated young men and a growing number of women from Baltimore communities is having a detrimental impact on those who are left behind. Their absence results in a loss of income for their families and communities. Children of incarcerated parents are often placed in the foster care system or are homeless. Individuals who are on parole or probation do not fare well either. Many have a difficult time finding and retaining employment. Depending on the level of supervision they receive from the Department of Parole and Probation, they may be re-incarcerated not for committing a new crime, but for a technical violation (e.g., being late or failing to report to an agent, no matter the reason).

Additionally, men and women who return to Baltimore City from prisons often have limited educational experiences, are in debt due to child support arrearages that accrued during their time in prison, and are homeless. Yet, Maryland laws and policies limit their access to housing, education, employment and other opportunities for self-sufficiency and success. Consequently, nearly 50% of people who are released from Maryland prisons will be re-incarcerated within three years as a result of the commission of new offenses or technical parole violations, feeding the cycle of incarceration.

Many Baltimoreans with criminal records, their families and communities are eager to work toward changing criminal justice policies and practices, but face many barriers. These include the stigma that accompanies criminal convictions, unreceptive decision makers, limited access to resources, and a lack of public/political education on how to reform Maryland's criminal justice system. This Call for Proposals seeks to remove these barriers by supporting the involvement of people who are directly affected by the criminal justice system in public debates and the development of sound policies.

For over 10 years, OSI-Baltimore, an operating foundation, has worked to reduce Maryland's over-reliance on incarceration - a practice that is costly, disproportionately targets communities of color, and does little to rehabilitate offenders or improve public safety. The OSI-Baltimore Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program supports advocacy and demonstration projects that focus on reforming three critical stages of the criminal and juvenile justice systems: 1)

arrest, detention and pre-trial / pre-adjudication; 2) sentencing and incarceration; and 3) pre-release, parole, and re-integration into the community. These projects typically utilize one or more of the following four strategies and activities:

1. Promote effective community-based alternatives to incarceration to divert people out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems or decrease their likelihood of cycling in and out of the systems;
2. Promote systemic policy reform that reduces incarceration rates (including racial and sentencing disparities), improves conditions of confinement, and removes barriers that prevent people with criminal records from accessing opportunities that result in successful and productive lives;
3. Ensure the successful transition of adult and young offenders from incarceration to the community by providing them with a continuum of services during incarceration and in the community to reduce recidivism and consequently increase public safety; and
4. Utilize communication strategies to expose and reform the social and economic costs of incarceration.

This Call for Proposals seeks to promote criminal justice policy reform work in Maryland by building the capacity of Baltimore-based non-profit organizations to:

1. Engage in grassroots organizing of people who are directly affected by the criminal justice system - prisoners, former prisoners, other individuals with criminal records, and/or their families and communities (the target population);
2. Enhance the target population's leadership skills so that they may exercise their power to advocate for institutional change; and
3. Identify and carry out criminal justice advocacy strategies to reach specific goals.

## **Application Guidelines**

OSI-Baltimore may approve up to three grants ranging from \$33,000 to \$50,000 to be used toward the salaries or stipends of grassroots organizers and direct costs related to the work of the organizers (including participation in leadership and political education trainings). Grants will be for one year.

Applicants must demonstrate that their proposed projects will:

- Involve the organizing and leadership development of individuals who are directly affected by Maryland's criminal justice system (e.g., prisoners, former prisoners, other people with criminal records, and/or their families and communities);
- Work with the target population to: identify policies and practices that result in inequalities in Maryland's criminal justice system; create plans of action for reform; and carry out these plans of action; and
- Support movement building and collective action by collaborating with like-minded individuals, organizations and unlikely allies.

## **Required Qualifications**

All eligible applicant organizations must demonstrate:

1. Non-profit 501(c)(3) status;
2. A track record of providing direct services to or engaging in criminal justice reform efforts on behalf of individuals with criminal records and/or their families;
3. Relationships and collaborations with: community-based organizations that provide direct services (e.g., housing, life-skills and job training, and addiction treatment) to individuals with criminal records; legal and other advocacy organizations; the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Corrections and other relevant public agencies; and/or local community and faith-based organizations; and
4. Experience facilitating the leadership development of people with criminal records and/or their families and providing them with the necessary tools and resources to become change agents.

## **Required Proposal Content**

The proposal must include a cover letter, proposal narrative, and appendices, as described below:

1. **Cover letter**  
Applicants submitting a grant proposal should submit a cover page on institutional letterhead that includes the following:
  - A one to two-sentence description of the proposed initiative;
  - The amount requested;

- The total organizational budget amount;
- The name and website of the organization that would serve as the fiscal sponsor for the grant if awarded; and
- The name, address, e-mail and telephone number of the program's primary contact.

## 2. **Proposal Narrative**

The proposal narrative should be no longer than 10 pages, double spaced, 12 point type, and should describe:

- The target population to be organized (including the demographics of the population, i.e., gender, age, race/ethnicity);
- The methods used to organize the target population;
- Any need or issue that the target population has identified to be addressed;
- The proposed project, including its objectives, strategies and activities;
- The program's expected outcomes (grantees will be expected to participate in meetings convened by OSI-Baltimore to allow for the exchange of ideas and experiences; additionally, they will be expected to document certain outcomes, including the frequency of meetings with the target population, attendance rates of meeting participants, and the ultimate results of meetings);
- The organization's current work in this field and its capacity to carry out the proposal;
- Potential trainings on leadership development, grassroots organizing, political education, etc., in which project staff will participate (technical assistance will be available to help grantee organizations further identify effective training programs);
- A description of the organization's plans to collaborate with any other community-based organization and/or public agency during the implementation of the proposed project (please identify any potential partners); and
- The financial sustainability of the proposed project or program (continuing OSI-Baltimore support is possible, but not guaranteed).

## 3. **Appendices**

Appendices to the proposal should include:

- A budget for the project or program;
- A list of current and proposed funders of the project or program;
- A one-page program implementation timeline for the 12 month grant period;
- Résumés of the organization's director, project director and other key staff;
- A list of the organization's board members and affiliations;
- A copy of the IRS letter stating the organization's tax-exempt status,
- A copy of the organization's overall budget; and
- A copy of the most recent annual report and audit (or financial statement).

## **Application Timetable**

**Applications must be received by the Foundation office no later than 5:00 p.m. on September 8, 2008.**

All applications must be complete upon initial submission and must be received via mail or hand delivery. No late or faxed applications will be accepted.

Foundation staff will endeavor to make final decisions on grants by early December 2008.

Proposals should be addressed to:

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 Open Society Institute-Baltimore  
 201 N. Charles Street, Suite 1300  
 Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
 410-234-1091

Questions regarding this Request for Proposals should be directed to Monique Dixon, [mdixon@sorosny.org](mailto:mdixon@sorosny.org) and Justin Schaberg, [jschaberg@sorosny.org](mailto:jschaberg@sorosny.org).

*The Open Society Institute is an international private foundation that was founded by philanthropist George Soros in 1993. It works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. The heart of OSI's mission is to improve the lives of marginalized people and communities.*

*With support from a range of investors, the OSI-Baltimore office works within four program areas: Criminal and Juvenile Justice; Tackling Addiction Treatment Initiative; Education and Youth Development; and Community Fellowships and Initiatives.*