

ART FOR JUSTICE FUND



Grantee partners Jackie Sumell and Sherrill Roland at the opening of *No Justice Without Love* at the Ford Foundation Gallery. Photo by Jane Kratochvil

COMMUNITY BULLETIN 06.30

COMMUNICATIONS DISPATCH

Today marks the “sunset” of the Art for Justice Fund (A4J) after six impactful years of operations. During this time, A4J engaged with artists, advocates, and allied donors to end mass incarceration. The Fund supported grantee partners to safely reduce the number of people in jail and prison and shift the narrative around criminal justice through art. We’re proud that A4J helped fortify individual leaders and organizations to transform the broken criminal legal system and the racial bias that drives it.

Many are familiar with Art for Justice’s origins. In 2017, founder Agnes Gund contributed \$100 million from the sale of a favorite painting. The funds were to be used to confront root injustice problems, champion innovative solutions, and support new visions for shared safety. In collaboration with Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, A4J launched what was anticipated to be a 5 year grantmaking program. Agnes and fellow board member, Darren Walker, helped raise an additional \$26+ million to extend the Fund’s efforts by one year.

Being a time-limited initiative was always the intended strategy. It enabled A4J to make deeper investments to secure policy and narrative change and support greater field building among artists, advocates, and allied donors. The urgency of a 6 year duration inspired more creative grantmaking and required the Fund to respond to needs in real time (e.g., the Covid crisis inside prisons and jails, opportune state-based ballot measures). Upon its sunset, Art for Justice made 457 grants totaling over \$127 M to 400+ artists, advocates, and organizations.

Have we met all of our goals? No, but major policy victories were secured during a period of promising political opportunity and narrative/cultural change was advanced using art. Recently, the policy window has narrowed, driving home that mass incarceration remains a long-term and pervasive problem encompassing laws, fairness, how we see one another, and our essential humanity. A vibrant group of artists, advocates, donors, justice impacted people, and others are alligned to build a future of shared safety. The work must continue and all of us have a vital role to play.



Agnes Gund celebrates the launch of the Center for Art and Advocacy with co-founders and grantee partners Jesse Krimes (l) and Russell Craig. Photo courtesy of Center for Art and Advocacy

Preliminary Evaluation Findings

The Fund's evaluation partners, Engage R & D, are in the process of analyzing six years of qualitative and quantitative data. They have worked with A4J since it began, and have the capacity to track outcomes and impacts, as well as places we came up short. Over the next six months, a few A4J staff will help to codify and disseminate results. Our team is also building an archival website to share lessons learned. Below, are some of Engage R & D's early findings.

How Art for Justice Has Made a Difference

In partnership with its grantees, A4J has proven to be a force for change in the movement to end mass incarceration by making strategic investments in policy change, supporting the integration of art and advocacy, engaging new donors, and centering directly impacted people. The following selected impacts illustrate the wide range of A4J's contributions.

Key Policy Wins Across Multiple States

A4J grantees supported policy wins across multiple states and at the national level, including:

- *Landmark cash bail reforms in NY, CA, & IL and the cities of Houston and New Orleans have kept tens of thousands of individuals from being unnecessarily detained.*
- *The First Step Act led to over 3,000 people released from federal prisons. Bans on juvenile life without parole sentences were secured in 9 new states during the life of A4J, bringing the total to 28.*
- *Florida's Amendment 4 won in 2018, restoring voting rights to over 1.4 M formerly incarcerated Floridians. Although opponents have enacted new barriers to voting, grantee Florida Rights Restoration Coalition paid fines and fees for 42,000+ people, freeing them to vote.*

Advancing New Narratives Through Art

- *Among other funded works and exhibitions, artist Jesse Krimes' 2019 immersive *Voices from the Heartland*, evoked the maze of barriers to successful reentry; MoMA PS1's 2020 exhibit *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* featured impacted artists' work that destigmatizes incarcerated people; and Illinois Humanities' *Envisioning Justice* initiative supports artists in advancing narratives on injustice and alternatives to mass incarceration.*
- *High profile earned media coverage (e.g. NYT Sep 2020, Aug 2022, Sep 2022) publicizes A4J grantee artists and the narratives for which they advocate.*
- *Influential leaders (not A4J affiliated) agreed that A4J has helped the movement to articulate and amplify its vision. Support for art and artists fosters new visions for public safety.*

Building an Art and Advocacy Network

- *Grantees tripled their cross-sector collaborations between art and advocacy since joining A4J (connectivity grew from 23% to 75%).*
- *Artists and advocates partnered on numerous projects to change the narrative around mass incarceration, including an artist-in-residency program at the Philadelphia district attorney's office and work with youth organizers.*
- *A4J helped grantees attract new donors (94%), increase the visibility of the human impact of mass incarceration (97%), and advance policies that reduce jail and prison populations (95%).*

Centering Directly Impacted People

- *A4J grantees have contributed to wider recognition that leadership of people with lived experience in the carceral system is essential to changing narratives and policies.*

- *As of June 2023, A4J had given over \$50M in grants to 78 justice-impacted individuals and organizations led by justice-impacted people, representing 37% of all primary grants.*

Engaging Allied Donors and Funders

- *As of May 2023, A4J had raised over \$27 M via more than 300 donations.*
- *A4J has helped bring more institutional funding from criminal justice donors into the arts and narrative change space (for instance, Galaxy Gives) while also encouraging more support from artists and art institutions such as Mark Bradford, Julie Mehretu and Christie's to support criminal justice.*
- *The Fund promotes a unique model of allyship to unite artists, advocates, and donors around ending mass incarceration. The model was shared at Grantmakers for Effective Organizations' (GEO) May 2023 Learning Conference.*

[Click here to read Engage R & D's report.](#)



A4J's LeAnne Alexander (l) and Amy Holmes embrace grantee partner Marcus Manganni at a celebration of Fountain House Gallery artists. Photo by Sue Simon

ASSESSING A4J's IMPACT

Another important way to gauge the Fund's successes and challenges is through stakeholder feedback, including grantees, donors, institutional philanthropy, media, and academics. A recent *Inside Philanthropy* article by Dawn Wolfe, *Six Years and \$125 Million Later, Art for Justice Takes a Final Bow* in *Inside Philanthropy*, offered some observations:

With a specific focus on three major criminal justice reform areas — bail reform, sentencing reform to address the disproportionate impact of the carceral system on people of color, and creating meaningful reentry opportunities for people weighed down by criminal convictions — the fund's grantees have racked up some impressive wins.

Three states and two cities, for example, have reformed their cash bail systems thanks in part to grantees' work. Florida's 2018 Amendment 4 started the groundwork for restoring voting rights to 1.4 million formerly incarcerated U.S. citizens in that state, although it has been attacked by forces looking to suppress Democratic and independent voters since passing.;

The fund's support contributed to a three-fold increase in collaboration between arts and advocacy, and its work both attracted an additional \$26 million in donations and inspired other funders to give at the intersection of arts and criminal justice advocacy.

The fund's accomplishments reflect its three goals: changing public policy to reduce the number of people in the country's prisons and jails, changing public narratives through the arts, and bringing artists and activists together, said Art for Justice Program Director Helena Huang. Our role and responsibility was to be catalytic and to help create proof of concept," she noted. "We believed that if we were successful in working with our partners to do so, then others would see fit to support the work. And that is happening.

[Click here to read the Inside Philanthropy article](#)

[Click here for a PDF of the Inside Philanthropy article](#)



RESILIENT COMMUNITY

The charged political environment requires each of us to be extra resilient at a time many are experiencing a backlash to the racial justice reckoning and erosion of human rights here and around the world. We know such repercussions come, in part, as a reaction to the powerful progress that's been made by those seeking to transform the criminal legal system. The work of healing individuals, families, and our democracy is activated by the Art for Justice community.

There is also a welcome push towards intersectional movement building – an understanding that **when we lift together, all of us will rise**. Grantee partners are forging strategic coalitions in support of policy, practice, and narrative issues in unprecedented ways. There has been growth in funding for criminal justice reform over the past few years—and this trend continues. Together, artists, advocates, and allied funders will continue disrupting mass incarceration and building a future of shared safety for all.

Please look for another newsletter in mid-July with reflections from A4J Board members, news on some policy wins, and updates on the Fund's closing activities. Expect a few additional newsletters later in the year with links to evaluation reports and other resources.

On behalf of the Fund's Board and staff, it has been an honor and inspiration to work together.



Art for Justice Fund Board members Agnes Gund, Darren Walker, and Ava DuVernay.