



Overview

Under the philanthropic vision of Agnes Gund, **Art for Justice Fund (A4J)** partnered with artists, advocates, and allied donors to disrupt mass incarceration and advance new visions of shared safety for all. With institutional support from the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, A4J provided over 450 grants to nearly 200 artists, advocates, and organizations. When this time-limited fund ended after six years on June 30, 2023, it had granted over \$127 million to over 200 artists, advocates, and organizations.

Starting in 2018, the Fund partnered with Engage R+D and the Center for Evaluation Innovation to conduct a developmental evaluation of A4J. This overview offers a summary of evaluation findings on A4J’s impacts. When it comes to complex social change strategies, it can be difficult to attribute progress to a single donor or the set of grantees they support.¹ Nonetheless, this overview focuses on areas where evaluation data analysis suggests A4J has made unique contributions and impacts in the movement to end mass incarceration. A fuller analysis and report is available on A4J’s archival website: www.artforjusticefund.org.

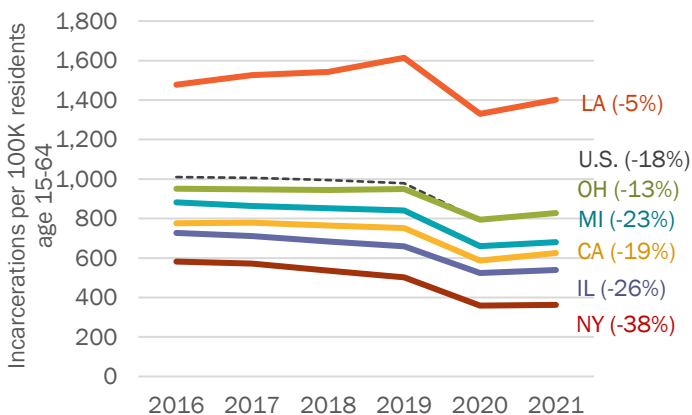
The Backdrop: The Mass Incarceration Crisis

The US continues to hold the dubious distinction of imprisoning its people at the highest rate in the world—far exceeding other countries, especially those with comparable crime levels.² Despite incarceration rates declining since 2008, a full 1.8 million people were held in US jails or prisons in summer 2021.³ Black and Latinx people remain disproportionately impacted by a criminal justice system deeply rooted in the racialized legacy of chattel slavery.⁴

Incarceration Trends During the Lifetime of A4J

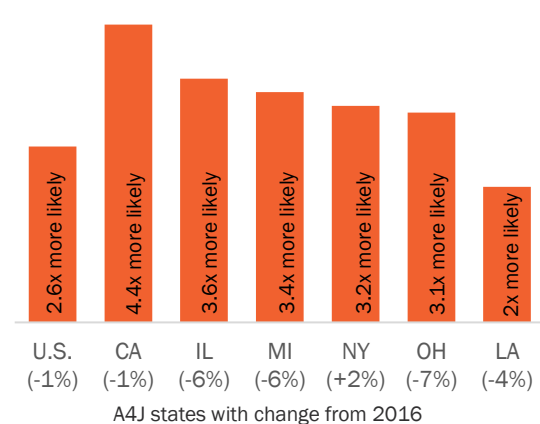
Mass incarceration rates in jails and prisons declined 2016-2021 in the US overall. This is reflected as well in the six A4J states identified below. Of these, the decline in CA’s, IL’s and NY’s rate of incarceration was greater than that of the US overall. While most states continue to have worse racial disparities for African Americans in prison compared to the national average, there have been notable improvements in Midwestern states such as OH, IL, and MI. While incarceration rates have declined over the years, experts generally expect to see an increase in rates as public sentiment and policy have focused on curbing crime post-pandemic.

Jail & Prison Incarceration Rates in A4J States (2016-2021)



Source: Vera. 2016-2021 data. <https://trends.vera.org/>*

Racial Inequity for African Americans in Prisons Compared to All (2021)



¹ Making progress on complex issues such as mass incarceration is typically the result of multiple factors, donors, and grantees. Accurately pinpointing which of these is most responsible for observed changes is cost-prohibitive and not always possible.

² Widra E, Herring T. Sept 2021. States of incarceration: The global context 2021. Prison Policy Initiative. www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html

³ Vera. Incarceration Trends (updated Feb 14, 2023).

⁴ Sawyer W, Wagner P. Mar 14, 2022. Mass incarceration: The whole pie 2022. Prison Policy Initiative. www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2022.html

How Art for Justice Contributed to a Movement

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

1

Key Policy Wins Across Multiple States

A4J grantees supported various 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 from being unnecessarily detained.
- The **First Step Act** led to over 3,000 people released from federal prisons. **Bans on juvenile life without parole** won in 9 new states during the life of A4J, bringing the total to 33 states.
- Florida's Amendment 4 won in 2018, **restoring voting rights to over 1.4M 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.

2

Advancing New Narratives Through Art

- Among many other funded works and exhibitions, artist Jesse Krimes' 2019 immersive *Voices from the Heartland*, aimed to evoke the maze of **barriers to successful reentry**; acclaimed MoMA PS1 2020 exhibit *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* featured justice system impacted artists' work that **challenged stereotypes** about incarcerated people, and Illinois Humanities' ongoing Envisioning Justice initiative supports artists in advancing narratives about **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's support for art and artists has helped the movement increase its work on narrative and amplify new visions for public safety.

3

Building an Art and Advocacy Network

- Grantees **tripled collaborations** across arts and advocacy sectors since joining A4J (from only 23% of grantees being connected across sectors to 75% being connected today).
- **Artists and advocates partnered** on numerous projects to change the narrative on mass incarceration, from an artist in residency programs at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office to work with youth organizers.
- **A4J helped grantees** attract new donors (94%), increase the visibility of the human impact of mass incarceration (97%), and support advocates to advance policies that reduce jail and prison populations (95%).

"My views about what and how to make change [have] grown tremendously."

- Advocacy Grantee

4

Centering Directly Impacted People

- A4J grantees and partners have contributed to a broadening recognition that people with lived experience in the carceral system are essential to changing narratives.
- As of June 2023, A4J had given over **\$50M in grants to organizations** led by directly impacted leaders (78 in total), representing 44% of all grant dollars allocated. Grantees also hired and engaged directly impacted people in their work.

"This is the first time there has been a push to change the narrative by enabling people to be seen as artists first and formerly incarcerated second."

- Arts Grantee

5

Engaging Allied Donors and Funders

- As of June 2023, A4J had **raised \$27M** via >300 donations.
- A4J 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 Auction House to support criminal justice.
- The Fund **promoted a unique model of allyship** to unite artists, advocates, and donors around ending mass incarceration. It shared this model at the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations' (GEO) May 2023 Learning Conference to encourage other funders to take on creative roles for philanthropy in social change.

"You're seeing philanthropy invest a lot more in organizations led by people directly impacted by the justice system."

- Advocacy Grantee