

Centering Disability Justice in the Safety + Justice Challenge

Starting in 2022, the Vera Institute of Justice and Activating Change are launching a new two-year initiative to advance disability justice within the Safety + Justice Challenge (SJC). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that at least 40 percent of people in jail have a disability, although many experts believe this rate is much higher.ⁱ People of color, specifically, are greatly impacted by the over-incarceration of people with disabilities. For instance, although arrest rates of people with disabilities are higher than those of people without disabilities, these disparities are much higher for Black and Latinx people who have disabilities.ⁱⁱ

People with disabilities and Deaf people face outsized and unique harms when interacting with the criminal legal system. The SJC presents an important opportunity to advance disability justice within the three pillars of this initiative: achieving meaningful jail population reduction; addressing racial and ethnic disparities in these systems; and promoting deeper community engagement by governments.

Goals

In the next two years, this initiative aims to:

1. **Raise awareness** within the SJC Network about the over-incarceration of people with disabilities and Deaf people, particularly people of color, and build foundational knowledge at the intersection of racism, ableism, and incarceration.
2. **Expand equity analyses** used by SJC stakeholders to include disability justice and to account for the experiences of people with disabilities and Deaf people.
3. **Increase engagement** of disability organizations and communities in the SJC Network and in SJC sites.
4. **Enhance accessibility and inclusion** in communications, activities, and events in the SJC Network and on the ground in SJC sites.



Activities and Opportunities

This initiative will provide Network members including SJC site stakeholders and community advocates, Site Coordinator organizations, technical assistance providers, and Strategic Allies and other partner organizations with various opportunities to learn about and apply a disability justice framework to jail reduction, racial equity, and community engagement activities.

Forthcoming opportunities include:

- 1. Participating in a monthly disability justice learning community**
Geared towards Site Coordinators, community engagement and racial equity specialists, Strategic Allies, and other partner organizations, this learning community will assist participants with unpacking the dual harms of ableism and racism within the criminal legal system and applying these principles to their work in the SJC and beyond.
- 2. Leveraging a referral network of local disability organizations and advocates**
All SJC Network members will have access to a nationwide referral network of local disability organizations and advocates that sites and TA providers may leverage to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities and Deaf people in local reform and community engagement efforts. We will also offer support to stakeholders in forging and strengthening these new partnerships.
- 3. Tapping into broader training and technical assistance opportunities**
Over the next two years, we will provide a series of workshops, virtual trainings, and technical assistance opportunities available to all SJC Network members. Topics will relate to disability justice and jail incarceration as well as practical steps for increasing the inclusion of people with disabilities and Deaf people in local reform and community engagement efforts.

Next Steps

For any comments or questions and to stay informed about these forthcoming opportunities, please get in touch with:

Kaitlin Kall (she/her/hers), Senior Program Associate

Vera Institute of Justice & Activating Change

Email: kkall@vera.org

Cell phone: 646-937-1953

ⁱ Jennifer Bronson, Laura M. Maruschak, and Marcus Berzofsky. *Disabilities Among Prison and Jail Inmates, 2011-2012*. US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics: December 2015.

ⁱⁱ Erin J. McCauley, "The Cumulative Probability of Arrest by 28 Years in the United States by Disability Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender," *American Journal of Public Health* 107(12): December 2017.

