

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY JUSTICE LAB
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR COMMUNICATIONS/MEDIA RELATIONS CONSULTANT
FALL 2021**

RFP OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this Request for Proposals is to hire a Communications/Media Relations consultant or team for the Columbia University Justice Lab.

ABOUT THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY JUSTICE LAB

The [Justice Lab](#) believes that justice policy should foster strong communities and allow people to flourish in a climate of fairness, dignity, and safety. We advance a community-centered future for justice in which healing and resiliency, rather than incarceration and punishment, are used to solve social problems often rooted in poverty and racial inequality. The Justice Lab seeks to foundationally reconceive justice policy, build community safety and resiliency, and advance racial and economic equity. We do this through actionable research, community-centered policy development, and the sustained engagement of diverse constituencies. More details on the Lab's projects can be found starting on page 4 of this document.

SCOPE OF WORK

The Justice Lab is soliciting proposals from individual Communications consultants and/or teams who have expertise and proven records of accomplishment in developing public-facing communications strategies and activities in support of watershed policy changes. The most qualified consultants will have documented expertise in one or more of the content areas of the Justice Lab's portfolio.

In the *short term*, we are looking for more day-to-day communications support for various projects, as needs arise. Over the *long term*, we anticipate needing additional support to address Lab-wide needs, based on the findings from a recently completed strategic planning process and access to additional resources. Depending on how our organizational planning evolves, we may explore with the consultant hired for short-term needs whether they can support the longer-term needs listed under Phase 2 below.

Phase 1: Project-Specific Communications Needs (Short-term)

Media/Social Media Support for Specific Products:

- Become familiar with each team at the Lab, including their goals and audiences and the specific work being done in support of them
- Assist with outreach on major project outputs (report or otherwise), including:
 - Always:
 - Media pitching
 - Social media toolkits (incl. graphics)
 - Email blasts
 - As strategically necessary:
 - Press statements
 - Press lists (if needed in addition to those developed under the first contract)
 - OpEd pitching
 - OpEd drafting
- Assist with virtual events or smaller outputs - includes:
 - Social media toolkit for JL channels and partners (incl. graphics)
 - Running webinar registration and back-end support as needed
- Develop and supporting a social media strategy that includes:
 - Identifying relevant content that advances our project goals/missions and outlining ways to share
 - Project team requests for posting content on behalf of our partners
 - Sharing media mentions or conference quotes where JL staff are highlighted
 - Elevation of our staff and partners on media/social media
- *As needed:* Respond to major news events that connect to our projects through media outreach on op-eds, media interviews, press statements, or other vehicles as appropriate

Communications Infrastructure

- Help track all events and roll outs, including being aware of when events across the Lab are being planned
- Targeted press lists for different projects
- Support for tracking media mentions or other metrics
- Basic overviews of each project

Other

- As-needed support for Place-Based communications work, including:
 - Media scans to support site work
 - Development of comms and message planning tools to guide site work

Phase 2: Lab-wide Communications Needs (Long-term)

This list below outlines our anticipated communications needs for the Lab as a whole. We will move forward on these needs once we have dedicated resources to pursue these areas.

- Impact and Engagement Plans:
 - Understand each project's goals and audience(s) and how it supports the overall mission of the Justice Lab
 - Support each project in creating an Impact and engagement strategy that aligns with project goals and audiences, including advising on:
 - Content creation and dissemination processes
 - Digital presence
 - Media work
 - Editorial support
- Justice Lab branding and design: In collaboration with Lab staff, create a cohesive JL brand, story, and messaging. This identity will sharpen the presentation of our JL vision, mission and values. As part of this process, we would anticipate a plan to:
 - Hone project visual identities so they are distinct yet cohesive, aligning with the overall identity of the Justice Lab
 - Redesign the Lab's current website or create a new website to enable stronger digital presence and enable different types of products
 - Integrate microsites into the overall Justice Lab website
- Refine and align messaging and audience focus with overall Lab strategy
 - Help us develop cohesive messaging and audience focal points for Lab
 - Identify and implement tone and style guidelines for the Justice Lab, to be used across projects
- Assess current strategies for communicating with key audiences and help us design impact and engagement strategies that emphasize digital-first thinking, as well as supporting more traditional communications approaches
 - **Content creation:** Create tools and resources to help staff across the Lab design products that promote and maximize impact and engagement.
 - **Social media:** Develop social media strategy for Lab and projects that amplifies our identity and reach, with the goal of being more present to different audiences on these platforms. Support may include: guidance on how to use social media to advance our goals, a social media calendar, regularly updated and responsive to current and relevant world events, and guidance to Lab leadership on use of personal and/or project-specific social media accounts.
 - **Media relations:** Develop strategy for reaching out to and cultivating relationships with media outlets and recognizing Lab staff and partners as experts. Engage media around major rollouts of events, papers and other milestones. Draft press releases, pitching stories and op-eds, and consistently maintaining the Lab's media presence.
 - **Editorial support:** Work with staff to outline processes for creating and finalizing

outward facing content, ranging from traditional reports to other media, like digital publications, videos, or infographics.

- **Video:** Advise staff during the creation and rollout of videos produced by community partners and collaborators to help maximize impact.
- Help us think through staffing to reflect Lab-wide direction on communications strategy; identify appropriate funders for Lab-wide needs
- Create, assess and evaluate, and share metrics for measuring communications reach and impact. Share with senior staff and iteratively adjust comms strategy to create maximum reach for the Justice Lab and impact for its projects.

TO APPLY

In addition to the documentation requested in the RFP package, please submit the following to Paulette Louissaint at PL394@columbia.edu by **JANUARY 7, 2022**:

- A current resume, CV or pitch deck
- A cover letter that specifies:
 - Why you are suited for the current communications needs of the Justice Lab
 - Relevant examples, including citations, of how your expertise matches our immediate, as well as potential long-term needs
 - References, with contact information, from customers for comparable work
 - Your hourly rates by staff level and specialty
 - Your anticipated availability, beginning in January 2022 and over the next 6-12 months

These documents can also be downloaded from Columbia's Finance page [HERE](#).

NOTE: Submitting information in response to this RFP does not guarantee employment. Rather, this serves as the first step in our ability to engage individuals as consultants for the Lab. Should the Justice Lab choose to engage the services of someone who responds to this solicitation, we would present the consultant with a specific scope of work for the project and the exact payment terms.

Information submitted for this RFP will be valid for up to 2 years from the date of submission.

THE JUSTICE LAB'S PROJECTS

- **[Emerging Adult Justice \(EAJ\) Project](#):** The fact that the U.S. has become a carceral state, with the highest incarceration rates in the world, has finally become more widely recognized in public discourse, but what is still too often overlooked is that emerging adults (between ages 18 - 25), especially poor youth of color, are bearing the brunt of mass incarceration. Our focus is specifically on this distinct developmental age group, working to create less punitive, more effective, and developmentally appropriate responses to young people who are swept up in our legal system. Our work includes conducting action research projects; creating webinars, podcasts, videos and infographics; partnering and supporting our community partners; developing a digital clearinghouse; providing testimony and sharing research to legislative bodies; hosting forums and conferences; and engaging in communication activities that ensure the wide dissemination of our work. We seek to foment support for bold policy change and provide critical information to advocates, practitioners,

policymakers, researchers and others, so that emerging adult justice becomes part of the package of justice reforms being pursued nationally.

- **Incarceration:** After a sustained increase in the incarceration rate, the prison and jail population of the United States is now more than seven times higher than in the early 1970s. The growth in incarceration rates was produced by a transformation of sentencing policy and a new emphasis on incapacitation and deterrence as the main purposes of punishment. As incarceration rates have now started to decline slightly, a new conversation has started about alternatives to incarceration and continuing reductions in prison and jail populations. Our Incarceration research includes:
 - **The Pennsylvania Solitary Study (PASS):** The PASS aims to understand how harsh conditions of confinement may affect health and well-being for incarcerated populations and their communities; identify the effects of solitary confinement on social, economic, and health outcomes after prison release, including physical and mental health conditions; and describe the conditions of living and working in high levels of custody in a large U.S. prison system. PASS is a collaborative, mixed-methods study that includes a longitudinal survey of men incarcerated in solitary confinement in a maximum-security prison in Pennsylvania, interviews with incarcerated people and prison staff, a neurocognitive battery administered to incarcerated respondents, and administrative records from the prison and parole systems.
 - **The Rikers Island Longitudinal Study (RILS):** The RILS is a panel study of nearly 300 New Yorkers facing a new criminal charge. The RILS seeks to understand how race, poverty, and other structural forces shape pretrial outcomes. We recruited about half of the sample at Rikers Island Jail Complex and half at arraignment courts in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx. We follow each respondent for about one year after their initial court appearance or immediate post-arraignment incarceration. We also use administrative data to calculate risks to jail incarceration to different populations in New York City.
 - **COVID-19 and Incarceration:** Jails, prisons, and detention centers have been hot spots of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States. Although correctional settings may seem isolated from the communities in which they are located, there is, in fact, continuous movement in and out of facilities, both as staff go to and from work, and as people are admitted and discharged. This movement entails transmission risks to correctional settings but also to surrounding communities. As a result, just like with other epidemics of the past thirty years, conditions of confinement in U.S. jails and prisons pose a significant threat to public health during the coronavirus pandemic. This study examines the relationship between incarceration and the coronavirus pandemic in New York City using a unique combination of qualitative and administrative data. This study draws and builds on Bruce Western's work as co-chair of the National Academies Committee on Decarcerating Correctional Facilities during COVID-19.

- **[Legal Debt](#)**: The Legal Debt Study is a field experiment of the effect of criminal justice debt relief in Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. The study examines how unpaid criminal justice debts affect people’s criminal justice contact, economic security, stress, and well-being. We are revising a journal article to report one-year results on criminal justice contact. We are continuing to collect longer-term data and will analyze interview data on a variety of outcomes.
- **[Probation and Parole Reform Project](#)**: Aims to end mass supervision, ensuring that far fewer people will be under supervision; the time people spend under supervision will be dramatically reduced; and instead of being supervised under a punitive regime of surveillance, community sentences – whether under improved probation and parole or some other community-driven approach – will become an opportunity for people to receive services, supports and opportunities so they can successfully integrate into their communities. We work to promote these watershed reforms through research, policy/practice formulation, leadership coaching and communications activities. We work collaboratively with advocates, formerly supervised people, policy makers, academics, practitioners, and philanthropy focused particularly on states in which there are policy maker- or advocacy-driven efforts at reform.
- **[Reentry](#)**: About 600,000 people are released from state and federal prison each year, returning overwhelmingly to neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. The Reentry Studies— the **Boston Reentry Study** and **New York Reentry Study**— are tailored to studying the process of transition from prison to community of a hard-to-reach population under contemporary conditions of mass incarceration
- **[The Square One Project](#)**: Works to facilitate, accelerate, and amplify a national conversation about how to reimagine justice and foundationally reconsider our response to violence, economic injustice, and racism in the US. A central question grounds Square One’s work: if we set aside traditional responses to crime, and ask what else might be more effective—if we start from a new “square one”—how would justice policy be different? Put differently, if we ask tough, perhaps heretical, questions about our society’s current justice policy, could we propose better ways to promote public safety, respond to crime, and address the harms caused by crime? Through our work, we hope to make the ground fertile for jurisdictions to reckon with and dismantle systemic racism and inequality; generate concrete policies and pathways that support community wellbeing; uplift human dignity; and underscore the importance of healing and community strength.
- **[Youth Justice Initiatives](#)**: Imagines a world where the tens of thousands of youth currently under the custody of juvenile justice systems are treated the same way that we would want our own children to be treated – in their own homes and communities, provided with dignity and respect, and given opportunities to grow and become successful, productive citizens. To achieve this goal, we are working to replace outdated, punitive youth prisons, which are often located far from youths’ families and communities and still exist nationwide, with expanded community capacity. We use an “inside-outside” strategy that works collaboratively with advocates, system-impacted youth and families, practitioners, and elected officials, to plan, design, and implement new systems where ineffective, archaic youth prisons become relics of the past and youth are served in their own homes and communities. Through a combination of policy, research, leadership-coaching and communications activities, our work aims to build widespread support for state and local reforms and develop the capacity of current and future leaders to execute bold change.