



## **Vera Institute of Justice**

Proposal to the Open Society Foundations to Support the San Francisco District Attorney's Office Community Safety Performance and Intelligence Strategy

April 2014

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### **Project Summary**

The Vera Institute of Justice requests project funding of \$228,283 over a two-year period from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) to provide support to the San Francisco District Attorney's Office to enhance their Community Safety Performance & Intelligence Strategy. OSF funding will enable the Vera Institute to advance this strategy by providing an on-site researcher and data quality manager (Research Fellow) to validate and elucidate criminal case processing data, facilitate the comprehensive implementation of the SFDA's case management system, and conduct complex analysis and evaluation for the Office's data-based performance tool, DA Stat.

### **Organization Description and History**

The Vera Institute of Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety. Vera is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit center for justice policy and practice, with offices in New York City, Washington, DC, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. Its projects and reform initiatives, typically conducted in partnership with local, state, or national officials, are located across the United States and around the world.

In 1961, the Vera Institute of Justice was born out of a project that examined the injustice of New York City's bail system, which granted liberty based on income. The Manhattan Bail Project introduced the concept of release on one's own recognizance based on an objective screening for risk of flight, revolutionizing the pretrial process. Within a few years, the project had demonstrated that New Yorkers too poor to afford bail but with strong ties to their communities could be released and appear for trial. Evidence of a viable alternative to bail

changed how judges make release decisions in criminal courts around the world, while also reducing costs and minimizing disruption in the lives of innocents.

Then as now, Vera assists its government and community partners to examine the problems that confront the justice system and to plan, implement, and evaluate solutions. Vera conducts detailed analysis of data, policies, and practices, and offers tailored recommendations and expert assistance based on in-depth examination of localities or jurisdictions. Vera seeks to facilitate collaboration and information-sharing among government and community stakeholders and works with partners to build their capacity to gather data and track their performance. Vera's goal is to help government partners achieve measurable improvements in the quality of justice they deliver and to share what they've learned with people around the world. The result: Justice systems that are fairer, more humane, and more effective for everyone.

### **Governance & Funding Model**

Vera has a strong and active board of trustees, representing the full spectrum of expertise in all areas of Vera's substantive work. Among the 23 trustees are prominent lawyers, judges, academics, government officials, and business leaders. The full board meets four times per year, with nearly full attendance at each meeting. Most trustees are also members of one or more board committees – finance and audit, development and communications, research, investment, and nominating. Some of Vera's centers, demonstration projects, and a number of programs also have advisory committees and many of the trustees are involved in these as well. In recent years the trustees have made a significant effort to expand diversity on the board, in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity.

Vera's sources of grants, contracts, and contributions have been fairly consistent over the last few years; its primary funding sources are the federal government, state and local governments, foundations, and other private sources. In 2012, federal funds accounted for 57 percent of Vera's budget, private foundations for 17 percent, state and local contracts for 13 percent, and other private sources for 10 percent. Between 2010 and 2012, the proportion of Vera's funds that comes from federal grants grew by 11 percent due to the addition of several new contracts. Vera's federal funding is primarily from two agencies, but it is awarded by several different

offices within each agency. The funding from state and local governments is primarily from New York State and New York City, respectively. For foundations and other private sources, the funding mix is very diverse, both in the number of foundations and individual contributions.

### **Primary Initiatives and Projects and Strategies**

Vera's programmatic interests are largely represented by its centers and programs. These include the Center on Immigration and Justice, the Center on Sentencing and Corrections, the Center on Youth Justice, and the Center on Victimization and Safety. Other programs include the Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit, the Prosecution and Racial Justice Program, the Family Justice Program, and the Substance Use and Mental Health Program. These centers and programs, while each focusing on a specific aspect of the justice system, use the same problem-solving approach and collaborate with one another to bring all of Vera's varied resources to its partners. Vera has spun off 29 of its demonstration projects, including the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), the Legal Action Center, the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), and Safe Horizon.

### **Communication Strategies & Social Media**

Vera is committed to disseminating knowledge gained from its research and social policy interventions to policymakers and program operators as well as to the general public. With its long history of both rigorous research and intensive technical assistance, Vera is uniquely situated to reach a broad range of diverse audiences. Vera's communications department maintains a multi-faceted, interactive website that hosts blogs, project pages, intranets, extranets, and other features, and produces webinars, podcasts, research articles, and policy briefs. Vera has the capacity to host web conferences, produce audio and video podcasts available for download through the website, and create blog posts to disseminate findings. In 2012, Vera's website received a quarter of a million visits. This was a 30 percent increase, year over year, for the second year in a row. Views of Vera's web page are the result of search (58 percent), direct (24 percent), and referral (18 percent) traffic. The majority of direct traffic results from e-mail campaigns that target the organization's desired audiences: researchers, policymakers, justice practitioners, nonprofits, academics, advocates, and others. While all sources of traffic to Vera's

website have seen growth, search traffic has seen an increase of 69 percent since 2010, in part driven by Vera's use of Google Adwords.

Vera has also sought to increase its referral traffic through targeted use of social media. Vera understands that social media channels bring new opportunities to connect and communicate with peers and target audiences. Through regular and purposeful online engagement, Vera aims to use social media to develop and grow deeper relationships with donors, partners, and the general public, which in time should yield new funding, partnerships, and public support. Vera uses Facebook to add a human touch to the organization and to keep its audience informed about new content such as publications, blog posts, and events. Vera currently has more than 1,500 "likes." Vera also uses Twitter to share information and staff expertise on a wide range of issues related to Vera's work with a network of nearly 3,000 followers. For 2012, Facebook and Twitter were two of the leading referral sites to vera.org, bringing more than 5,000 visits to the site.

Vera's other communication approaches include: publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals, presentation of papers and other work products at conferences, organizing workshops and webinars, and strategic mailings of Vera's publications. The recent expansion of Vera's Washington, D.C. office has made possible a new communications tool: arranging Congressional briefings and meetings with members of Congress and their staff.

### **Major Accomplishments**

Below are some of Vera's recent accomplishments:

- Vera's Center on Immigration and Justice worked with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services on law enforcement practices that cultivate trust and collaboration with immigrant communities at the beginning of 2012.
- Vera's Center on Youth Justice (CYJ) released a study on the impact of the New York City Police Department's stop, question, and frisk practices on young people and families in the city's most highly patrolled neighborhoods, supported in part by funds from the Open Society Foundations.

- Vera collaborated with the national nonprofit Turnaround for Children and the New York City Department of Education on a new program to reengage chronically absent youth in school.
- Vera convened a series of “Justice in Transition” breakfast briefings, with the goal of sharing information on justice system reforms in New York City and highlighting critical next steps for the first new mayoral administration in over a decade.
- Vera’s Family Justice Program helped develop national standards for involving families whose loved ones are in juvenile justice facilities.
- Vera’s Adolescent Portable Therapy project expanded to include family self-referrals and to counsel young parents facing involvement with child protective services.
- Drawing on research from Vera’s Segregation Reduction Project, former Vera President and Director Michael Jacobson provided written testimony for the first-ever congressional hearing on solitary confinement titled “Reassessing Solitary Confinement: The Human Rights, Fiscal and Public Safety Consequences,” held by the Senate Judiciary Committee on June 19, 2012.
- Michael Jacobson also provided written testimony for the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing titled the “Rising Prison Costs: Restricting Budgets and Crime Prevention” and for the Committee’s hearing titled “Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline” on August 1, 2012.
- Tina Chiu, director of Vera’s Cost- Benefit Analysis Unit, briefed U.S Senate Judiciary Committee staff on how cost-benefit analysis relates to decision making in criminal justice on April 10, 2012.
- Work in Delaware and Louisiana by Vera’s Center on Sentencing and Corrections led to the passage of major legislation in both states that aims to reduce recidivism and cut corrections costs in late 2012.
- Vera’s Segregation Reduction Project worked with four states to help them understand their solitary confinement population and recommended ways to reduce it.
- As a partner of the National PREA [Prison Rape Elimination Act] Resource Center, Vera helped corrections agencies combat sexual assault in confinement settings and studied the implementation of zero-tolerance policies against sexual abuse and sexual harassment in several juvenile detention facilities.

- Vera's Prosecution and Racial Justice Program completed a project with the New York County District Attorney's office to identify and reduce unwarranted racial and ethnic disparities in prosecutorial decision making, and began work in two new jurisdictions, Lancaster County (Lincoln), Nebraska, and San Francisco, California.
- Launched in April of 2012, our New Orleans Pretrial Services already has seen a 16 percent decrease in the low-risk pretrial population in the overcrowded city jail, while more people requiring restrictive pretrial conditions are identified and held.
- Our Substance Use and Mental Health Program mined mental health and criminal justice agency data in Washington, DC and drew the first comprehensive map of gaps in the system to better identify the psychiatric treatment needs among people they serve.
- Vera's Price of Prisons report, cited by ABC News and many other media outlets, broke new ground with a method to measure the true costs of prisons.
- Vera's Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank helped educate criminal justice and other practitioners and policymakers about how economic analysis, decision making, and budgeting support good programs and outcomes.
- Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS) examined the capacity of mainstream victim service providers to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) survivors of domestic and sexual violence.
- CVS hosted its second national conference on sexual and domestic violence against people with disabilities.
- Former Vera President and Director Michael Jacobson discussed our Price of Prisons report on C-SPAN on February 13, 2012 and was interviewed on CBS News Sunday Morning on mass incarceration and prison overcrowding on April 22, 2012.
- In a speech to the United Nations Security Council, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon highlighted the innovation of the UN Rule of Law Indicators designed and implemented by Vera's International Program on September 24, 2012.
- Vera's International Program carried out the first empirical assessment of the rule of law in the newly independent Republic of South Sudan, as well as a post-earthquake assessment of rule-of-law institutions in Haiti.

- Common Justice, a Vera demonstration project piloting participatory justice in Brooklyn, New York, won the Award for Professional Innovation in Victim Services from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime on April 20, 2012.

### **Project Overview/Background**

The Vera Institute of Justice requests project funding of \$228,283 from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) to provide support to the San Francisco District Attorney's Office (SFDA) to enhance their Community Safety Performance & Intelligence Strategy, a two-pronged data-driven strategy focused on operational performance and criminal intelligence.

In a recent survey, the Center for Court Innovation found that prosecutors' offices lag behind all other criminal justice agencies in their use of innovative practices, research and evidence.<sup>1</sup> Just as data, research and evidence-based practices have significantly improved policing strategy in recent decades, the prosecutorial field also stands to benefit, and promote public safety, from the effective use of data.

In February 2013, SFDA launched DA Stat, a data-based tool, modeled after COMPSTAT, to inform operational decision making. Through DA Stat, SFDA has begun to examine criminal case processing in a comprehensive manner, from charging through sentencing, perhaps for the first time in San Francisco's history. During monthly review sessions, DA Stat provides managing attorneys wide-ranging case processing data to identify and address inefficiencies, ensure that the office is making appropriate charging decisions, and evaluate case dispositions. The only other jurisdiction engaged in a similar examination of prosecutorial operations is the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. DA Stat's objective is to bolster attorney performance in order to maximize recidivism reduction and improve public safety. And yet, due to limited resources, SFDA has only begun to scratch the surface of available data. Until, SFDA is able to fully implement DA Stat, it will not be able to undertake the intelligence phase of the Community Safety Performance & Intelligence Strategy.

It has long been a given that information, in the form of evidence, is essential to the work of the prosecutor. However, criminal intelligence—information used to anticipate, prevent and/or

monitor criminal activity—has not been a standard focus of prosecutors' offices. The strategic use of crime data and information would enable SFDA to make connections between criminal events, defendants, witnesses and victims that could facilitate more effective investigations, charging decisions, and ultimately case dispositions. Furthermore, criminal intelligence can help the office to *prevent* crime and victimization. By synthesizing City crime data with internal stores of information, SFDA will identify those individuals responsible for the majority of crime, those areas most affected by crime, and the most vulnerable victims, and direct prosecutorial resources accordingly.

The primary objective of this request is to solidify the infrastructure of DA Stat. This project will enable SFDA to fully integrate DA Stat into the office's operations, sustain the program into the future, and lay the ground work for Criminal Intelligence phase of the strategy. With the support of the Vera Research Fellow, funded by OSF, the San Francisco District Attorney's Office can advance the field of data-driven prosecution and serve as a model for prosecutors' offices nationally.

### **Activities for Which OSF Funds Are Sought**

**Objective:** Solidify the infrastructure of DA Stat and fully integrate DA Stat into the office's operations.

**Activity 1:** Evaluate database functionality and data validity, and develop a strategy to enhance data collection as necessary.

**Activity 2:** Develop procedures for querying, cleaning and validating data for statistical analysis

**Activity 3:** Research performance measurement in the prosecutorial field and develop or enhance measures for DA Stat

**Activity 4:** Conduct advanced statistical analysis in support of DA Stat, and automate this analysis to the extent possible



Concept paper submitted to Name of Organization

**Activity 5:** Provide ongoing database training to all front end users on existing and new database modules to assure data quality

### Project Work Plan/Timeline

Year 1:

Activity	6/14	7/14	8/14	9/14	10/14	11/14	12/14	1/15	2/15	3/15	4/15	5/15
1. Data collection strategy	X	X	X									
2. Data validation	X	X	X									
3. Performance Measurement Research & Implementation	X	X	X	X	X	X						
4. DA Stat Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Database Training & Data Quality Assurance				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Year 2:

Activity	6/15	7/15	8/15	9/15	10/15	11/15	12/15	1/16	2/16	3/16	4/16	5/17
4. DA Stat Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Database Training & Data Quality Assurance				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

### Bank information

Bank Name: Citibank

Branch Name: N/A

Branch Address: 601 Lexington Avenue, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor, NY, NY 10022

Beneficiary on Account: Vera Institute of Justice

ABA/Chips# (Routing #): 021000089

Account Number: 4976083942

<sup>1</sup> Labriola, Melissa. *Innovation in the Criminal Justice System: A National Survey of Criminal Justice Leaders*. New York, Center for Court Innovation. May 2013. <[http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/Innovation\\_Survey\\_Report\\_0.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/Innovation_Survey_Report_0.pdf)>