



Overview:

- The Cleveland Foundation is requesting grant proposals to support transformative systems-change, policy, and advocacy work in Greater Cleveland’s criminal legal systems.
- Organizations, agencies, or coalitions working in Cuyahoga, Lake or Geauga counties may apply for a grant of \$25,000 or \$50,000 (please see “eligibility” section below to determine if you or your organization should apply). Individuals and organizations without 501(c)3 status must apply through a fiscal agent.
- Proposals will be accepted between March 29 and May 5, 2023. Grants will be awarded in June.
- In March and April, the foundation will host an information session and technical and grant writing assistance workshops to help those who want to apply for a grant.

Background:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cleveland Foundation (TCF) responded to our nation’s largest civil rights movement since the 1960s by sharpening its focus on the devastating racial disparities that directly impact its work and investments. As part of its response, the foundation hired its first senior criminal justice fellow, Katrice Williams, and asked her to develop a criminal legal reform grantmaking strategy for the foundation. This request for proposals is the first grant opportunity resulting from Katrice’s work.

The Cleveland Foundation’s criminal legal reform priorities:

With the input of a 25-person advisory committee, TCF has created a strategy focused on eliminating policies and practices that further the mass incarceration of adults and juveniles in the Greater Cleveland region. To achieve this goal, our policy priorities are to:

- 1) **Reduce adult pre-trial detention** by investing in strategies that promote racial and income equity, diversion, and community-based alternatives to incarceration.
- 2) **Reduce youth incarceration** by encouraging criminal legal stakeholders to use community-based alternatives to incarceration for youth targeted for detention and decrease the total number of youths currently housed in the Cuyahoga County Detention Center.
- 3) **Improve systems alignment and connectivity** between pretrial services and community-based health systems to reduce the recidivism and unnecessary incarceration of people with mental and behavioral health illnesses.
- 4) **Improve and expand reentry services and community integration** for returning citizens through policy, advocacy, and legislative efforts.

While services and programming are important, this strategy aims for something broader. A focus on systems, policies, and practices is important because it will have the deepest and longest-term impact. Partners and organizations that are focused on a systems-change and policy-oriented approach are best suited for furthering these priorities.



How we define “systems change” in criminal legal reform

A **systems-change approach to criminal legal reform** transforms the dominant institutions and culture that encourage mass incarceration toward community-led and community-oriented strategies and alternatives to incarceration instead. This includes creating alternative narratives, structures, systems, and solutions that respond differently from the “status quo.” Building alternative structures and narratives could include structural, relational, or transformative changes.

- **Structural change** focuses on policies*, practices*, and resource flows*
- **Relational change** deals with power dynamics*, relationships, and connections* between different systems actors, including the community, government, civic and business leaders, and others.
- **Transformative change** rearranges mental models* that put forth incarceration and law enforcement as the only ways to achieve public safety.

*Each of these terms have been defined by Kania, Kramer, and Senge (2018) in *The Water of Systems Change*, and can be found on page 4 [here](#).

Eligibility

Eligible organizations include:

- Organizations, agencies, and coalitions that have an operating budget of \$1.5 million or less (as evidenced by their most recent audit, budget or 990 form) and work in Cuyahoga, Lake, and Geauga counties.
- Community members and leaders from the Greater Cleveland region who are part of a criminal and social justice-focused group, network, or coalition.
 - Please note: Any group *without* a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status may apply through a fiscal agent with a tax-exempt, nonprofit designation.

For this grant opportunity, the foundation will give priority to:

- Coalitions, organizations, agencies, and groups that are led by or comprised of a person(s) with direct lived experience in the criminal legal system.
- Black-led organizations whose leaders have experience with court or justice-involved people.

Organizations that will ***not*** be eligible for funding include:

- Organizations with budgets exceeding \$1.5 million.
- Endowment campaigns, annual appeals, or membership drives.
- Primarily social or direct service organizations.
- Legal defense funds that are not directly connected to an organizing campaign.
- Capital campaigns, projects, or endowments.
- Fundraisers and/or political campaigns and parties.
- Other foundations or grant-giving organizations.

Groups and efforts aligned with TCF’s strategy will fit most of the following criteria:

- **Focus on the criminal legal system:** Work is focused on the criminal legal system – police, courts, and correctional institutions, including private or other public entities that provide surveillance, monitoring, and correctional services.
- **Systems-change and policy-oriented approaches:** Groups, agencies, and organizations use a systems-change and policy-oriented approach, as opposed to programming that focuses on direct services or meeting the basic needs of individuals. *(Please note: Individuals providing direct services are welcome to apply for funding under TCF’s general grantmaking process.)*
- **Organizing, direct action, and base-building:** Organizers may be engaged in base-building, direct action and organizing, in addition to other systems-change approaches like advocacy, policy reform, or other activities directly supporting organizing.
- **Research, advocacy, and policy reform:** Organizations may use other tools to engage in structural and systems change, including data gathering or research, to provide authoritative and accurate evidence to support an advocacy or policy campaign and legislative reform.
- **Transformative Justice:** Groups focused on community-based alternatives to criminal legal institutions (i.e., police, courts, jails, prisons, juvenile detention centers and other correctional facilities). Other advocacy will address how to retract the expansion of the criminal legal system and reduce the harm caused by its actors, policies, and practices.
- **Have clear ideas and focus:** Organizations have a clear mission and purpose as well as a theory of change about shifting the current status quo.
- **Substance over quantity:** Work does not have to be new and innovative or propose taking on too many issue areas to the detriment of being effective. Potential grantees will recognize that structural transformation and systems change takes time, patience, and effort, and requires focus, collaboration, and coalition-building across sectors to be effective.

Available grants:

Applicants can apply for either a \$50,000 or \$25,000 grant, depending on the size of their organization and described need. A total of **five** \$50,000 grants and **ten** \$25,000 grants will be made available.

Applicants’ grant awards may be renewed for a second year if they have demonstrated a clear focus and strategy in their proposal and can document their work in the first year of funding. There is no need to apply separately for a multi-year award. However, the possibility of additional funding may be extended to some grantees.

How the grant dollars can be used:

The grants can be used for general/unrestricted operating support and other systems-change and policy-oriented work, including:

- Leadership development and training;
- Financial support for training, consultation, conflict resolution and/or restructuring;
- Healing, restoration, and retreats for staff;
- Teaching community members to organize, advocate, and engage with elected and civic leaders;



- Strategic planning and development;
- Rapid response to unforeseen political opportunities and/or needs (if it is aligned with the group's mission and vision);
- Public education, including nonpartisan forums, debates, legislative breakfasts and panels;
- Nonpartisan drives and door-knocking campaigns;
- And more.

Timeline

- **March 24:** An [information session](#) for prospective applicants will be held at the MidTown Tech Hive, 6815 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44103 on March 24 at 10 a.m.
- **March 29:** Online application opens at 9 a.m. via the Cleveland Foundation [Grants Gateway](#).
- **April 5 & 12:** Technical assistance workshops with the Grants Management team offered to applicants.
 - To register for a session, click one of the following dates: [April 5](#) or [April 12](#).
- **April 6, 13 & 20:** Grant writing assistance sessions offered to applicants.
 - To register for a session, click one of the following dates: [April 6](#); [April 13](#); or [April 20](#).
- **May 5:** Application closes at 11:59 p.m.
- **May 19:** Applicants who are advancing to the first stage in the review process will receive notification.
- **June 1:** Applicants who are advancing to the final stage in the review process will receive notification.
- **June 30:** Notice and announcement of final funding decisions.

How to apply:

1. Determine whether your organization is eligible to apply.
2. If eligible to apply, read the [applicant guide](#) about what you should submit.
3. If you still have questions after reading the applicant guide, attend our information session on March 22, 2023.
4. Applicants: Apply for funding between March 29 at 9 a.m. and May 5 at 11:59 p.m. Late applications will not be accepted.
5. If you are experiencing technical difficulties with the application, please contact our grants management team by emailing GrantsMgmt@clevefdn.org. For other questions, please email Katrice Williams, Senior Criminal Justice Fellow, at kwilliams@clevefdn.org.