Request for Proposals

Reshaping Prosecution, Motion for Justice: Pursuing better paths to public safety

Summary
The Vera Institute of Justice’s (Vera) Reshaping Prosecution program is accepting applications from prosecutors’ offices interested in receiving technical assistance focused on increasing public safety and centering racial equity through diversion programs. At no cost to the prosecutor’s office, Vera will provide training, support, and data analysis for offices that partner with a community-based organization to increase diversion capacity, increase public safety, and pursue reforms centered on race equity. As needed, Vera will also provide support in tracking and analyzing the outcomes of diversion programs. Vera will also provide financial assistance, in the form of sub-grants, to the community-based organization to support increasing diversion capacity.

This document describes the background and context of this program, and how prosecutors’ offices can apply to join. Please read the information provided here, and do not hesitate to contact us with any questions at motionforjustice@vera.org.

Click here to register to attend a webinar on Thursday, May 11th, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. EST to learn more and ask questions about the request for proposal. A recording of the webinar will be available on this page starting on Friday, May 19th, 2023.

Background and Context
Prosecutors are responsible for safety in their communities, but research shows that their reliance on incarceration can have devastating safety consequences. Those consequences, due to our country’s history of racial discrimination, are disproportionately borne by communities of color. To effectively pursue safety, prosecutors should explore new models of accountability that target the root causes of crime, and work with marginalized communities to ensure those solutions meet their needs. The Motion for Justice campaign aids/helps prosecutors and communities ready to answer that call to develop better and more equitable paths to safety.

About Motion for Justice
The Vera Institute’s Motion for Justice campaign brings together prosecutor’s offices and system-impacted communities to pilot and expand diversion programs that promote community safety by centering racial equity. In 2021, Vera engaged with nine district attorney’s offices and community-based organizations that
partnered to implement diversion programs designed to reach marginalized communities. These bold models had three common criteria: they did not exclude people based on criminal legal system history, impose fines and fees, or require a guilty plea. Within that framework, each site focused on an issue based on the unique needs of their community, including: gun diversion, substance use disorder, houselessness, and restorative justice. Our programs served a range of ages, including children and emerging adults, and diverted hundreds of people away from the criminal legal system, providing much-needed services that strengthened communities.

**What would this partnership with Vera look like for your office?**

Vera’s Motion for Justice campaign will continue working with offices interested in improving public safety through diversion programs focused on increasing racially equitable outcomes. We seek partners who approach diversion through a public health lens, focusing not on specific charges, but rather on systemic public health issues such as poverty, being unhoused, substance use, mental health, and interpersonal violence.

Offices that are selected will partner with a local community-based organization to provide services in the community rather than in carceral settings. The community-based organization receives funding to build capacity and support participants who will utilize their services. This model ensures consistent community engagement and recognizes that restoration, healing, service provision, and relationship-building are more effective in the community, not behind bars. In doing so, the programs help improve long-term public safety and reduce crime and have proven cost-efficient.

**Overview of the Engagement**

The engagement will last 12 months and have three main components: collaboration with a community partner to implement and support their diversion program, culture change support for prosecutors from Vera, and quantitative and qualitative data support. The goals of the engagement are to shift office policy, practice, and culture towards greater community collaboration.

**Diversion Program Implementation**

Vera will work with each office to create and implement a diversion program (or expand a currently existing program) that focuses on individuals who come into contact with the criminal legal system and also have intersecting public health-related needs. The community-based organization service provider should focus its services on alleviating not only the specific circumstances that led to the individual charge, but also the larger public health issues. Vera will work with the community-based organization to provide research support and other resources to aid in the growth of the diversion program. Vera will work with the prosecutor’s office to develop and execute a plan for providing referrals to the community-based
organization. Vera will award grants between $50,000 and $100,000 to community partners based on their needs and capacity to support their diversion work.

**Training support**
Vera will work with each prosecutor’s office to determine its needs for office culture change and then work with staff to help galvanize that change. Culture change engagement can include a broad range of offerings, from simple one-pagers on particular reform topics to in-depth working groups encompassing our culture change curriculum.

**Data analysis**
Vera will work with each office and community partner through a mixed methods approach using quantitative and qualitative measures to improve public safety and address racial disparities.

As data quality permits and capacity allows, Vera will assess incoming racial disparities at the front end of the prosecutor office’s caseload (i.e., assess descriptive racial disparities in terms of cases received and filed, differences in charges filed, and potentially differences in terms of other measures of neighborhood socioeconomic status) to center transparency, evaluate if the diversion program addresses racial disparities, and build support for potential revisions or expansions to the program that better help the office meet its goals. Additionally, Vera will assess the outcomes of the diversion program from the community-based organization over the course of several months after implementation by looking at both the prosecutor’s office and community-based organization’s data.

In addition to analyzing data from the office and participating community-based organization, Vera will conduct a qualitative evaluation of existing diversion programs relying on a community engaged research (CEnR) model that centers community consultation. To ensure that Vera’s evaluation is equitable and inclusive, Vera will involve impacted communities in the measurement process by asking them what outcomes of diversion programs are most important to them (i.e., safety concerns and whether diversion makes them feel safe). Vera will consult with diversion program participants, family members, mentors, community-based organizations, etc. to develop metrics that center the values and interests of impacted and participating communities. Ultimately, Vera will rely on these community-defined metrics to measure whether existing diversion programs, during and after the primary engagement with the office, meet community needs and, if not, how they can be improved. These metrics can also be applied to Vera’s quantitative analysis.

**Sustainability**
Offices and community partners will become part of a national collaborative network of Reshaping Prosecution partners past and present. The National Collaborative Network is a learning community with the goal of increasing
expertise, strengthening partnerships, and building capacity for sustainable public safety.

**Requirements for Participating Offices**

*Please note: Motion for Justice prosecutor offices should submit their application with the community partner that will manage the required diversion program.*

Partner offices will be expected to commit to the following:

- **Values alignment:** The elected prosecutor and a sizeable portion of line prosecutors must be committed to a public safety vision that includes reducing the number of people entering the system, centering racial equity, and increasing transparency and accountability towards the community they serve. **To solidify this commitment, and to ensure the program is rooted in racial equity, applicants must commit to a diversion program that does not exclude participants based on criminal legal system history or require payment of fines and fees.**

- **Community engagement:** Offices must be committed to working with a community partner to expand diversion opportunities for racially marginalized people and identify sustainable policy changes that improve public safety by centering racial equity. The office will prioritize selecting a community partner that is led by, advised by, or works in close proximity with people impacted by the criminal legal system.

- **Staff capacity for reform efforts:** Offices must designate a project lead within the office who will coordinate reform efforts internally and act as a liaison to the community partner. This individual should have relationships and credibility with staff throughout the office and effective leadership skills and authority to support staff and manage resistance.

- **Access to the office:** Partner offices, particularly the project lead, will be asked to be in regular contact with Vera throughout the engagement. Regular meetings, occasional site visits, focus groups, and/or interviews with staff and discussions with members of the community are an essential part of this project. The elected district attorney is also asked to commit to meeting with Vera staff on at least a quarterly basis to discuss the progress of the engagement.

- **Ongoing access to data:** The engagement also requires access to case-level data from the office’s case management system. In order to assess recidivism and other outcomes of the program over multiple years, Vera will require regular updates to the data requested beyond the end of program engagement, for a duration to be determined with DA.
How to Apply

Vera is asking prosecutors’ offices and community partners to engage in a four-step application process. Offices will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- shared values of public safety through reducing the reach and negative impacts of the criminal legal system and addressing racial inequity;
- commitment to genuine partnership between community-based organizations and a prosecutors’ office to increase collaboration with the communities most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system;
- dedicated capacity and staff time for discussions, workshops, and trainings throughout the engagement; and
- quality of the data in the case management system and ease of access to case-level data for analysis.

Step 1: Written Materials Submission

Written Application

Both the office and the community-based organization will be required to complete separate online applications. The application aims to collect contact information for participants, gather information about data capacity, and learn more about the applicants’ vision for pursuing safety that includes limiting who enters the criminal legal system, centering racial equity, and increasing collaboration with the community it serves. Applicants will also be asked to explain how they plan to implement a diversion program that serves Black and brown communities most harmed.

Reference Letters

Both the applying office and the community partner, separately, should submit at minimum one reference letter that speaks to their relationships in the community and ability to successfully implement the proposed diversion program.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and must be submitted to motionforjustice@vera.org by close of business on Wednesday, May 31st, 2023.

Applicants can complete their written application by clicking the relevant "Apply" button below.

PROSECUTORS OFFICE APPLICATION APPLY

COMMUNITY PARTNER APPLICATION

You may preview the prosecutors’ office application or the community partner application.
Step 2: Phone Screen Interview (15 minutes)
After reviewing written applications and reference letters, Vera will select a group of prosecutor’s offices and associated community partners to participate in the interview process. Initially, Vera staff will separately speak briefly via phone with a designee from both the community-based organization and the prosecutors’ office.

Step 3: Data Capacity Interview (30 minutes)
Following the initial phone interviews, a video interview will be held with the offices’ designated data contact, the database administrator, and the data training administrator who trains office staff on the systems. For community partners, a separate interview will be held with their lead program contact to discuss data quality prior to engagement and access to community members as potential research participants. Vera will notify offices on a rolling basis of their selection to participate in interviews to be scheduled during the month of June 2023.

Step 4: Final Video Conference Interview (1 hour)
Vera will notify offices and their community partner on a rolling basis following the Data Capacity Interview of their selection for a final video conference interview. These interviews will be scheduled during the month of June 2023. The interview will include the elected prosecutor, the project lead from the office, and the community partner diversion program lead.

Vera will notify selected offices, no later than June 30, 2023, of their final decision.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us at motionforjustice@vera.org with any questions. An informational webinar will be held on Thursday, May 11th, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. EST. You can register by clicking here.