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**SOLICITATION FOR
THE RESEARCH NETWORK ON MISDEMEANOR JUSTICE**

DUE DATE: October 15, 2016

at John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Funding Agency: The Laura and John Arnold Foundation

The Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice is a three-year initiative that will bring together law enforcement agencies, courts, corrections, and other criminal justice agencies to work with research institutions across seven jurisdictions to examine trends in the enforcement and disposition of low-level offenses such as misdemeanors, citations/summons, and pedestrian and traffic stops.

While most jurisdictions focus attention and publicly report on trends in crime and felony arrests, relatively few also examine the enforcement and outcomes of low-level offenses. These high volume activities play a significant role in the formation of the public's opinion of the police and the criminal justice system. In addition, they consume a large amount of criminal justice resources. These activities have also moved to the forefront of policy discussions as a way to improve the level of public trust in the police and criminal justice agencies.

The goal of the Research Network is to form a national alliance of seven jurisdictions that will examine trends in the enforcement and disposition of low-level offenses at a local and cross-jurisdictional level. The Research Network will aim to create smarter criminal justice policies that enhance public safety, increase public trust in the police, and implement fiscally responsible policies. Through this alliance, the Research Network will produce, for the first time, cross-site analyses on the enforcement and outcomes of low-level offenses.

Following the format of the Misdemeanor Justice Project - New York City, each jurisdiction will form partnerships at the local level between research institutions and local and state criminal justice agencies. Research institutions within selected jurisdictions will receive funding to help build data analytic infrastructure and capacity to examine trends and outcomes of misdemeanors, summons/citations, and stops at a local level. The Research Network seeks to inform and guide criminal justice policy initiatives at the local level. Building this analytic capacity will allow each jurisdiction to continue to monitor these trends after the three-year funding period.

Overview

Our understanding of the enforcement interactions between police and the public – instances when the police use their law enforcement powers – has focused almost exclusively on arrests of individuals suspected of felonies. However, felony-level criminal activity does not constitute the vast majority of public contact with the police. Rather, the most frequent police-public enforcement interactions involve stops on suspicions of criminal behavior, summonses for minor offenses, and arrests for misdemeanors and other low-level crimes.

New York City provides a perfect illustration. During 2013, there were 90,532 felony arrests, but there were also nearly ten times as much enforcement activity that focused on low-level enforcement actions – 265,407 misdemeanor arrests, 191,851 police stops, and 439,029 criminal summonses issued for minor offenses, such as open containers. Cumulatively, this amounts to almost one million documented contact points with the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Most of these interactions are routine, low-level encounters that receive little empirical attention. Yet, it is these interactions that may propel an individual deeper into the justice system (e.g., a warrant for failing to appear in court for a summons can lead to an arrest and jail detention). Low-level enforcement has a profound impact on the rest of the criminal justice system by overwhelming courts with cases that rarely result in convictions, feeding minor arrests into the pre-arraignment process, and ultimately resulting in large numbers of individuals held on pretrial detention for want of monetary bail. These encounters often rise as flash points between communities and police, gaining public attention and influencing the public's opinion of the police and the larger justice system. However, we have not consistently monitored trends and the associated outcomes of these low-level contacts within individual jurisdictions or across jurisdictions. With so much at stake, it is surprising how little work there is on this important topic.

The national dialogue on the relationship between the police and the public, and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, is changing rapidly. Events across the nation – from Ferguson, MO and Minneapolis, MN to Staten Island, NY and Baltimore, MD – have sparked conversations around the exercise of police discretion to enforce low-level crimes, particularly in high crime areas and in communities of color. In 2015, President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing identified a need for data on the prevalence and quality of police-public interactions with a focus on the enforcement of low-level offenses.

Through a generous three-year grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice will build upon the success of the Misdemeanor Justice Project in New York City. We invite six other cities or counties to replicate reports from the Misdemeanor Justice Project – New York City (MJP), which examined [trends in misdemeanor arrests, criminal summonses](#) (e.g., citations), [and combined enforcement activity including felony and misdemeanor arrests, criminal summonses, and pedestrian stops](#). The analyses by the Research Network, for the first time, will shed light on the critical challenges facing local law enforcement agencies, namely making effective use of police power while promoting legitimacy. We also invite these cities or counties to examine patterns in pretrial detention, if possible. Ideally, the jurisdictions will examine trends by demographics, charges, and disposition. Further, all analyses will examine the trends as a rate, to take into account the changing population base of the jurisdiction.

The MJP reports on the enforcement of low-level offenses in New York City have generated substantial attention from media, scholars, and city and state policy makers. These reports have provided an empirical framework for robust policy debate in New York – the role of “broken windows” policing, the choice of criminal versus administrative tribunals for addressing “quality of life” offenses, the extent of pretrial detention, the role of pre-arrest diversion, and the impact of enforcement actions on subpopulations, particularly young men of color. These reports have started an ever-growing conversation regarding criminal justice policy reform within New York City. We hope that the Research Network will inform these same discussions on a local scale, within the six jurisdictions, and on a national scale, through cross-site comparisons. Ultimately, the Research Network will inform and promote large-scale evidence-based policy reform.

Indeed, the primary goal of the Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice is to inform criminal justice policy. Building on the experience of the MJP – New York City, the key strategy is to produce readable, accessible, objective reports that present data and analyses in ways that support robust discussion about the implications of the results. This approach will also define the presentation and analytic approach of the Research Network. Although the research agenda will ultimately encourage scholars to engage in complex analyses to explore issues of causation and correlation, the signature reports of the Research Network will forgo these analyses in favor of straightforward statistical presentations. After site-specific analyses are completed, the Research Network will be able to examine - for the first time, in a systematic manner, across jurisdictions - the prevalence and outcomes of police enforcement of low-level offenses. These analyses will allow us to describe the differential experience of residents – disaggregated by age, race, gender, and geography – within their jurisdictions.

Within each site, the Research Network will work with a non-government affiliated research partner to create a group of stakeholders such as the police department, local jails, the Mayor’s office, the Governor’s office, the Courts, and District Attorneys to work together to create a within site network of stakeholders. Stakeholders can work closely with the research partner to provide data, guide essential policy questions, and ensure data accuracy.

The Research Network will provide each site with funding, provided by the John and Laura Arnold Foundation, for personnel, data extraction, and other costs. The total funding per site, over the three years will be between \$160,000 and \$220,000. The John Jay team will also provide technical assistance and help each jurisdiction better understand their own analyses, as well as discuss differences and similarities across sites to maximize cross-site comparisons. Further, the John Jay team will provide each site with population estimates using Census data at necessary levels of aggregation (e.g., City, Police Precinct, and/or Census Block). This will ensure similar data collection methods of Census data and comparability across sites. We will ask each site to produce at least one report, as well as participate in cross-site analyses.

Three-Phase Project

In *Phase-I*, we will select the Research Network sites and convene a kick-off meeting at John Jay College to set timelines for data analyses, reports, and other dissemination strategies. We will also work with each site to develop a list of site-specific stakeholders. In addition, we will

develop a site-specific plan for the remaining phases of the project. The funding for each site for *Phase-I* will be between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

In *Phase-II*, research institutions within each site will acquire and analyze the site-specific data. The John Jay team will provide Census level data for the sites. The John Jay team will work with the sites to establish data sharing agreements and Memoranda of Understanding with data partners within their jurisdictions. We ask for each site to replicate one or more of the New York City analyses ([misdemeanor arrest trends by demographics, charges, and dispositions](#); [pretrial detention trends by demographics, charges, and disposition](#); and/or [overall enforcement trends combining felony and misdemeanor arrests, issuance of criminal summonses, and pedestrian stops](#)). These reports will form the basis for cross-site comparisons.

Each site will convene two stakeholder meetings prior to the release of report(s). We plan to work with each site to release their report(s) with a public presentation, ideally in a forum attended by policymakers and stakeholders within the jurisdiction (e.g., the Citizens Crime Commission has hosted the release of the New York City MJP reports). In addition, sites will be required to send two representatives to John Jay College for two annual meetings (one per year). John Jay College will provide travel funding for the annual meetings. The funding for each site for *Phase-II* will be between \$80,000 and \$120,000.

In *Phase-III*, the Research Network will work with each site to secure funding to continue monitoring the trends to influence policy and publish in scholarly journals. Ideally, each site will be able to secure governmental funding to continue monitoring trends over time. Further, the capability created in *Phase-I* and *Phase-II* will provide a platform for additional research and funding. It will also provide a network of researchers to help build knowledge on the enforcement of low-level offenses, nationally. At this time, each site will also have the option to work with the John Jay team on writing cross-site comparative reports, scholarly publications, and opinion pieces for news outlets. The funding for each site for *Phase-III* will be between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

WHO CAN APPLY?

Either a city or county agency or research institution within the site can respond to this solicitation.

If a city or county agency is responding to the solicitation, it should identify a research institution within the site that will carry out the analyses.

If a research institution is responding to the solicitation, it should provide letters of support from relevant site agencies such as the police department, Mayor's office, and/or Department of Corrections.

SELECTION CRITERIA & ELIGIBILITY

The six jurisdictions, in conjunction with New York City, will constitute the Research Network. We will consider the following in selecting a city or county:

(1) Each jurisdiction should have the ability to access high quality administrative data, including at least 10 years of reliable data on misdemeanor arrests for low-level offenses. Ideally, the

jurisdictions will also have data on summonses and stops and case outcomes, including pretrial detention. Sites should indicate the types of analyses they intend to carry out, in the attached form. We will place a premium on the ability to examine enforcement actions and their associated dispositions.

(2) The Mayor's Office or County Executive or the Police Department must have a genuine interest in promoting a local policy discussion about its research findings, and participating in a national conversation on these topics.

Once we receive interest, we will select jurisdictions and hold further discussions about joining the Research Network. In each site, we will ensure that the local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies and a university or non-profit research institute are working together. The ultimate sustainability and objectivity of the project will *require a partnership between the government and a local research institution*.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR SUBMISSION

- 1) Cover Letter
- 2) [Interest and Data Form](#)
- 3) Letters of Support & Participation

COVER LETTER should

- Introduce the jurisdiction and lead agency and highlight the jurisdiction's data analytic capabilities as well as indicate who will lead the project;
- Illustrate the jurisdiction's interest in the work of the Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice and the desire for evidence-based policy reforms; and
- Indicate other key stakeholders.

INTEREST AND DATA FORM: Please fill out the attached form.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT & PARTICIPATION: Please provide letters of support from the police department, research institution, and any other agencies that will have an integral role.

HOW TO APPLY:

Submissions are due, in electronic format (either Word or pdf), by October 15, 2016.

Please submit documents to:

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