



# National Juvenile Justice Network

## National Juvenile Justice Network Juvenile Justice Leadership Development Institute

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### Mission

The Juvenile Justice Leadership Development Institute's mission is to create the foundation for a more effective juvenile justice reform movement by developing a strong base of well prepared and well trained advocates and organizers who reflect the communities most affected by juvenile justice system practices and policies, with a particular focus on cultivating and supporting leaders of color, youth and family members. The Institute seeks to build, nurture and expand the group of emerging advocates and organizers with proven leadership potential that is knowledgeable about juvenile justice system structures and reform needs, and trained in effective advocacy and organizing techniques to achieve systems change. The ultimate goal of the Institute is to increase the number of advocates and organizers from communities most affected by juvenile justice practices, who are engaged in the work of reforming juvenile justice systems.

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### Statement of Need

The juvenile justice system is in need of widespread reform. The system has become overly punitive and it relies too heavily on confinement, rather than providing resources to communities so they can better respond to delinquency. In addition, the juvenile justice system disproportionately punishes youth of color, treats far too many youth as adults, and does not adequately safeguard the rights and well-being of children. As a result, jurisdictions continue to waste hundreds of millions of dollars a year on ineffective and misguided practices and policies that fail to protect public safety and fail to help youth who have made mistakes to get back on track. Too often, these misguided practices and policies not only fail to help, but actually do harm. Fortunately, there is growing awareness among legislators, system administrators, juvenile justice practitioners, child advocates, and the general public about the need to reform our juvenile justice system. However, the field lacks a diverse workforce to help initiate and promote this necessary reform.

Unfortunately, the current base of juvenile justice advocates and organizers does not appropriately reflect the people and communities that are most affected by the juvenile justice system. Thus, reform activities themselves mirror – and may in fact perpetuate – some of the power imbalances, inequities and patronizing approaches that plague juvenile justice systems today and have done so historically. Individuals of color, youth and family members who advocate for juvenile justice system reform all too frequently find themselves hungry for information, support and training and become isolated from the larger advocacy community – a situation that can quickly lead to frustration and “burnout.” By providing comprehensive training in the juvenile justice system's history and operations, working with promising individuals to build the advocacy and organizing skills they need in their work, and bringing emerging advocates and organizers into a vibrant advocacy network, we can not only help these individuals effectively bring about reform, but

also ensure their longevity in and lasting commitment to the field of juvenile justice advocacy and organizing. Because NJJN believes that the perspectives, voices and determination of these advocates and organizers are critical to the implementation of any meaningful, successful and durable reform, it has developed the Juvenile Justice Leadership Development Institute to cultivate and support a broader range of people who are working effectively toward system reform.

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## **NJJN Leadership**

NJJN is uniquely poised to launch and lead this project. It is the only organization of its kind in the country – a network of state-based advocates working towards juvenile justice reform. NJJN’s members are experts in the field and have an impressive wealth of experience and achievements in bringing about legislative and administrative change. NJJN can engage emerging advocates and organizers in its dynamic learning community; offer an established framework for information-sharing through teleconferences and a discussion listserv; provide research summaries and policy briefs; and share the collective wisdom of ready-made colleagues and a solid support network. This support that NJJN can provide for advocates and organizers new to the field is crucial. The pool of juvenile justice advocates is small, and often individuals working alone in a state find support only through their membership in NJJN.

The Institute is led by a Planning Committee composed of NJJN staff, members and partners, which is advised by an Advisory Board of experts in the field. This diverse body, with significant representation from communities most affected by juvenile justice policies, will help to shape the overall structure of the Institute and provide expert consultation throughout the planning process. Board members will also help to establish the Institute as a credible, sustainable professional development program for emerging juvenile justice advocates and organizers. The Planning Committee (“the Committee”) is led by two co-chairs and is responsible for ensuring participation from NJJN members, facilitating the planning process, guiding the vision for the Institute, and working with NJJN’s Executive Committee to ensure that the Institute accords with NJJN’s mission and fiscal responsibilities.

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## **Participant Selection**

The Institute seeks to reach individuals who have a proven passion and demonstrated promise for transformation of the juvenile justice system. The Institute will aim to reach 15-20 participants in order to enrich the collaborative learning environment. The Institute’s impact, however, will extend beyond just the participants. The Institute’s engagement of leaders in the field – as faculty members, mentors and advisors – will serve to energize the current field of reformers and encourage experts to broaden and deepen the role they play as nurturers of emerging advocates and organizers. The Institute will create and reinforce structures that support all emerging advocates and organizers, whether or not they participate in the Institute’s programming.

The Applicant Review Committee, comprised of Advisory Board and Planning Committee members from various disciplines, as well as NJJN staff, will select Institute participants. Applicants will complete an application, which will describe their experience as advocates, any relevant personal experience with the juvenile justice system, and their future goals, as well as a telephone interview with a member of the Applicant Review Committee. Each applicant must be supported by two nominators who endorse the applicant as an individual with exceptional promise to become an effective, enduring juvenile justice advocate or organizer. Nominators may be NJJN members, experts in the juvenile justice field, or others who are familiar with the candidate’s work towards and commitment to reform. Potential candidates must

have a base level of advocacy or organizing experience and knowledge of the juvenile justice system, which the Institute's curriculum will significantly augment and strengthen. The Applicant Review Committee will choose the final group of participants by vote, with consideration given to racial, ethnic and geographic diversity.

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## **Structure and Curriculum**

The Institute will consist of three distinct components: *Learning Academy*; *Engagement with the Field*; and *Mentorship and Distance Learning*.

### **Learning Academy**

On July 11-14, Institute participants will gather in New Orleans, Louisiana prior to NJJN's Annual Forum for advocates in the field for an intensive course in juvenile justice system structure and policies, system reform, advocacy skills, and movement building. The Committee will design coursework so that it supplies a broad and deep base of knowledge of the juvenile justice system, the history of the juvenile court and significant policy changes over the past 30 years. The Learning Academy will provide a foundation of organizing and advocacy techniques and strategies, including, but not limited to, campaign development, organizing theory/tactics, issue identification, and strategy development. The Learning Academy will also include an overview of movement building, with a focus on movement theory, base building and coalition building.

### **Engagement with the Field**

After completing the Learning Academy, Institute participants will integrate into NJJN's Annual Forum, during which they will increase their juvenile justice system and reform process knowledge, develop relationships with the larger advocacy field, and lay the foundation for a relationship with a mentor. The Forum is an in-person gathering of representatives from NJJN member organizations and offers workshops, site visits, skill building sessions, and networking events. NJJN's 2010 Forum will take place on July 14-16 in New Orleans. The integration of the Institute with NJJN's Forum will also serve to provide a more structured format through which longstanding advocates can welcome and engage new advocates.

### **Mentorship and Distance Learning**

After the Learning Academy and Engagement with the Field, Institute participants will commit to a year-long mentorship with either an NJJN member organization, NJJN partner organization, or another expert in the field of juvenile justice reform. Mentors will provide Institute participants with ongoing guidance, technical assistance, networking opportunities, professional connections, and support and encouragement. Ideally, mentors and mentees will reside in the same geographical area to facilitate relationship development. The Committee will identify mentors prior to the Institute's launch in July 2010 and will select mentors based on relevant experience, commitment to the Institute's mission and goals, and geographical location.

Distance learning opportunities will also support and enhance participants' growth as advocates. Specific topics for distance learning and online coursework may include: leadership skills for advocates; resources for technical assistance and training; peer learning and support; sustaining morale and motivation; advances in public policy; lobbying/legislative relations; and issue-based discussions with experts in the field. Distance learning will maintain connections among participants and will present continued opportunities for networking and strategy sharing. The Institute will also establish an Institute-specific working group and

listserv so that participants can discuss and strategize around the particular challenges that they face as advocates that represent and emerge from affected communities.

Connections to NJJN – through its discussion listserv, members-only resources, teleconferences, written policy statements, research summaries, and a network of 40 organizations that share common goals – will further facilitate participants’ professional development and connection to the larger advocacy field. Members of the Advisory Board will act as additional resources for participants and may offer individualized instruction and guidance. This continued connection with NJJN and its partners will help to ensure that participants do not become isolated and have sufficient access to a variety of supports.

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## **Conclusion**

The Juvenile Justice Leadership Development Institute is founded on the need to increase the number of people of color, youth and family members who are engaged in systems reform and to provide ongoing support for these individuals to ensure their longevity and sustained impact in the field so that juvenile justice reform activities are driven and informed by those communities most affected by juvenile justice policies.

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