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Liz Ryan
Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, DC 20531

Dear Administrator Ryan,

Congratulations on your nomination to lead the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. We are confident your proven commitment to prioritizing and centering the needs of justice-involved young people will be of great benefit to OJJDP, and we look forward to working with you.

In the Fiscal Year 2022 Omnibus, Congress provided explicit direction to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to “establish an Arts in Juvenile Justice demonstration program to provide competitive grants to partnerships between arts organizations and juvenile justice systems, programs, and nonprofit organizations, to pilot promising and effective art-based and art therapy models for youth at-risk of, or engaged with the juvenile justice systems.” Congress further directed OJJDP to establish the demonstration program with “the advice and consultation from the National Endowment for the Arts and arts stakeholders.”

At the urging of Appropriations Committees, we, the undersigned working group of arts in juvenile justice stakeholder organizations, write to respectfully offer our advice, recommendations, and partnership to OJJDP as the agency begins work on creation of an “Arts in JJ” demonstration program.

The undersigned working group is neither an exhaustive nor exclusive list of Arts in JJ stakeholder entities, and we encourage OJJDP to seek the advice and consultation of a wide range of organizations and viewpoints. Our recommendations are intended to be grounded in racial justice and equity and the value of authentic youth collaboration, and we uplift OJJDP to consider the impacts of systemic racism in all aspects of justice systems while designing the Arts in JJ demonstration program.

Through a robust history of research and practice, arts-based programs have proven promising and effective at improving economic, social, and mental health outcomes for youth at risk or involved with the juvenile justice system. There are innumerable promising arts programs working with at-risk youth throughout the country, but more work is needed to expand these supportive programs and create a multisystem effort to ensure youth are empowered to live safe

and fulfilling lives. In 2020, the Arts Education Partnership published two reports on expanding the arts across the juvenile justice system, citing strategies for effective programming and examples of programs operating across the country. [Engaging the Arts Across the Juvenile Justice System](https://www.ecs.org/expanding-the-arts-across-the-juvenile-justice-system/)¹ (Apr. 2020) explores research and programs that employ the arts along the juvenile justice continuum, including in prevention, intervention, transition, and healing. [Expanding the Arts Across the Juvenile Justice System](https://www.ecs.org/expanding-the-arts-across-the-juvenile-justice-system/)² (October, 2020) is a brief that builds on the prior report by capturing the insights and policy considerations that came out of a Thinkers Meeting with 11 experts in the arts education and juvenile justice fields.

Moreover, in May 2021, OJJDP updated its own literature review examining “[Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths](#).” The review found that, “arts-based programs and arts therapies provide a unique way to help youths in times of transition and development... provid[ing] a nonthreatening, engaging way for children and adolescents to express their feelings, manage emotional and behavioral problems, express cultural awareness, cope with trauma and victimization, develop artistic talents and skills, and improve strengths and assets they already possess.” The OJJDP literature also calls for additional research and demonstrations to further identify how arts can directly affect the behavior of at-risk, justice-involved, and traumatized youths. A well-designed, implemented and evaluated Arts in JJ demonstration program will further existing evidence, uncover new promising practices, and prove efficacy of arts-based and art therapy models across the juvenile justice continuum.

To that end, we respectfully offer the following recommendations regarding the structure of the forthcoming Arts in JJ demonstration projects for OJJDP’s consideration:

- Require applicants to be a partnership between a nonprofit arts organization and a state or local juvenile justice agency, or a nonprofit dedicated to serving young people connected to or at-risk of engagement with the juvenile justice system.
- Require nonprofits to be established for at least three years to be eligible as part of an application and to propose the use of an arts-based or art therapy model that has been shown as “promising” by a reputable private or public study/evaluation within the last 10 years.
- Allocate no less than **\$1 million** to the Arts in JJ demonstration program in FY22 for its first year of operation.

¹ Johnson, K. Pechota, D. (2020) *Engaging the Arts Across the Juvenile Justice System*. Arts Education Partnership. <https://www.ecs.org/expanding-the-arts-across-the-juvenile-justice-system/>

² Pechota, D. Johnson, K. (2020) *Expanding the Arts Across the Juvenile Justice System*. Arts Education Partnership. <https://www.ecs.org/expanding-the-arts-across-the-juvenile-justice-system/>

- Establish project periods of no less than 24 months, of which up to the first six months may be utilized by the awardee for planning and capacity-building activities.
- Release a request for applications (RFA) that allows organizations of various sizes, utilizing differentiated models, to apply for the funds so that the use of the arts may be piloted in all communities --rural, urban and suburban-- where justice involved youth live and thrive. To that end, we recommend the following components be included in the RFA for an “Arts in JJ” pilot:
 - Allow for a variety of award sizes to accommodate smaller, often rural applicants, as well as larger, suburban, and urban organizations.
 - We recommend two categories of award sizes, similar in structure to the OJJDP Youth Mentoring Grants: \$50,000 - \$150,000.
 - We also recommend that OJJDP allow for awards 25% above and below these categories, if applicants can provide reasonable justification based on local needs or local cost-of-living adjustments.
- Allow applicants to propose projects at any point within the juvenile justice continuum, including prevention, diversion, secure detention, and/or reentry, but provide competitive priority points to applicants that demonstrate a continuity of services for program participants across the continuum.
 - e.g., An applicant that proposes an arts-based program for youth in secure detention but with continuity of programming for participants as they reenter society would have competitive advantage over an applicant solely focused on secure detention without adjacent connections of continuity of service.
- Provide additional competitive priority points within the NOFA for the following conditions:
 - Applications developed through authentic collaboration with young people who have lived expertise/experience. Applicants can demonstrate this collaboration by discussing their approach to participant engagement, and how the applicant intends to center and partner with participants on programming.
 - Culturally aware programming that is appropriate to the population to be served.
 - Arts partners with previous experience in serving youth engaged, or at risk of engaging, in the juvenile justice system.

- Applicants who propose to integrate innovative arts-based services as a core component to their JJ system operations and who include a plan for sustainability of arts-based programming beyond the life of the award period.
- Foster youth participants’ artistic expression without restriction on content and artistic medium as authenticity is key to successful engagement of young people. Rely on the good judgment and discretion of grantees, with guidance that grantees err on being more permissive than less in artistic expression.
- Permit awardees to use a moderate percentage of funds on capacity building, long-term project sustainability, and direct and indirect costs associated with operating the project. Include payments to young people with lived expertise and participants stipends as an eligible grantee expense.

The value of the arts is self-evident to any parent or caregiver of a young person. Many successful adults can quickly point to the role the arts and music play in their formative years, helping them to navigate the many challenges of adolescence and young adulthood that are inherent in even the best of life’s circumstances. OJJDP’s literature review, [*Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths*](#), found that “the arts can influence the social and emotional functioning of at-risk juveniles, while also having positive effects on all parties involved in the implementation of the programs, such as community members, staff from arts organizations, and staff from other organizations and justice agencies.” However, the review also found that more work is needed to “disaggregate and connect the arts components of specific interventions to positive outcomes, [and] future studies should explore how and in what optimal conditions the arts can directly affect the behavior of at-risk, justice-involved, and traumatized youths.”³

We encourage OJJDP to develop a pilot project with those evidentiary goals in mind but note that quantifying the benefits of the arts using only traditional metrics of juvenile justice is difficult and is unlikely to be as accurate as utilizing other metrics which incorporate aspects from the existing arts field. We encourage OJJDP to consider new and alternative methodology of evaluating an Arts in JJ demonstration program that are atypical of traditional metrics. Specifically, we recommend OJJDP partner closely with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to devise metrics that examine the socio-emotional development of youth, self-expression, and capture the intrinsic value of the arts in a young person’s growth and development.

³ Development Services Group, Inc. 2021. *Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths*. Literature review. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/media/document/arts-based-programs-for-youth.pdf>

An “Arts in JJ” demonstration program that builds upon existing promising practices, elucidates clear evaluation metrics that are designed in partnership with arts stakeholders, and examines a variety of settings and models, will meaningfully advance OJJDP’s mission as a national leader.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and further discuss our recommendations for a pilot program. Requesting public comment on a draft plan for the demonstration program would be an excellent means of collective early feedback in the process. We look forward to working with you and greatly appreciate your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,