True pioneers often set out with limited resources, no clear path, and no instructions. What they do have is a strong vision, and they move boldly forward -- passionate and dedicated -- to bring their vision to life. The need for such pioneers has never been greater, as the events of 2020 have laid bare many of our society’s deepest injustices and inequities.

The Urban Justice Center (UJC) is looking for just such social justice pioneers for the second cohort of our Social Justice Accelerator (SJA). The SJA is designed to shepherd new and early-stage social justice organizations through the challenges of developing a well-functioning and high-impact operation. The Accelerator grows out of UJC’s decades-long history of incubating and supporting organizations that stand with marginalized communities, fight for inclusive communities, and push for transformative system-level change. Fueled by this history, the SJA invests in individuals and organizations at the forefront of social change by providing the support and resources to help them develop and scale early-stage social justice initiatives.

Over the course of one year, with the option and intention to extend for a second year, the SJA provides up to five individuals with the support and resources to turn their vision for social change into a reality.

What we provide:

• Fiscal Sponsorship: UJC will provide fiscal sponsorship for initiatives that are not yet separately incorporated and/or do not have their 501c3 status. Note: UJC does not provide funding as part of the SJA program.

• Back Office Support: Assistance with accounting, finance, payroll, and benefits.

• Organizational Development: Coaching and training to help you build, test, and launch your initiative.

• Extensive Network: Expert guidance from UJC’s extensive network of mentors, consultants, and colleagues, as well as connections to external advisors and potential partners.

• Community: Access to a wider ecosystem of social impact organizations, and the opportunity for collaboration with UJC’s other awardees and anchor projects.

• Space to Work: Free office space in UJC’s downtown Manhattan office, including access to free printing, faxing, postage, office supplies, and conference rooms.

Our goal is to bring together a cohort of individuals who are able to innovate and carve a path forward in the face of uncertainty, and who will champion justice and equity even in the face of challenge.
APPLICATION DETAILS

The application is an opportunity to highlight the aspects of your idea or initiative that are boundary-pushing, creative, visionary, and/or any other factors that you feel set your initiative apart. Please use this space to demonstrate the clarity of your vision, and the reasons why you are the right person to bring your vision to fruition.

APPLICATIONS SHOULD INCLUDE:

Summary Information
- Project Title and one-page project summary
- Name and Contact information
- Two personal or professional references with names and contact information

Project Description:

Please address the following in no more than 3000 words:
- What is the problem you are trying to solve?
- What approach and/or specific strategy will you use to address the problem, and why is this the right approach/strategy?
- What does the world look like when this problem has been solved?
- Who else, if anyone, is addressing the issue and how you will do it differently and more effectively?
- Why are you the person/people to build this initiative, including relevant skills, experience, or personal connection to the problem.
- How do you expect to use the two years of the SJA program to further your work and strengthen your organizational capacity for after the fellowship ends? Please as detailed as possible.

Finances & Funding:
- Annual Budget
- Funding already raised, including specific sources and amounts of funding for salary and benefits (Please note: health, dental and retirement benefits provided by UJC will cost approximately 32% of base salary)
- Current plans for further funding

Resume:
- A recent copy of your resume

TIMELINE AND SUBMISSION

Applications are due on December 1, 2020.

Finalists will be notified and interviewed in January, and UJC will make final decisions by January 31, 2021.

Please submit all materials and questions to:
SOCIALJUSTICEACCELERATOR@URBANJUSTICE.ORG

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

SJA welcomes a diverse pool of applicants representing a variety of backgrounds, communities, experiences and fields of practice.

What we look for
1. A clear articulation of the social justice issue or problem being addressed, as well as a vision for change.
2. A clear description of the strategy or work planned/being used to solve the problem.
3. An understanding of the timeline and resources required to launch and establish the initiative.
4. If you do not already have secured funding to support the work, please include your strategy for securing the necessary funding.

Both individuals and early-stage organizations (under 2-years old), and projects with more than one person may apply. Projects should be based in NYC but can have work targeted anywhere. Projects do not need to be incorporated but should be prepared to incorporate and apply for their 501(c)3 within 2 years of entering the accelerator.

The UJC will offer guidance and assistance with this process, including matching projects with pro bono legal help.
OUR HISTORY OF SUCCESS

Rescuing Refugees

Becca Heller launched the International Refugee Assistance Project while still at Yale Law School. Mobilizing direct legal aid, litigation, and systemic advocacy, IRAP serves the world’s most persecuted individuals and empowers the next generation of human rights leaders – which is why she brought the Project to UJC when she graduated. IRAP flourished in our office, with Heller receiving a 2018 MacArthur Genius Grant for her work. Today, they have 51 staff members and 3000 volunteers, providing services to refugees in and from more than 70 countries worldwide.

Valuing our Veterans

Coco Culhane was working in our Mental Health Project when she came across a horrifying statistic: 22 veterans commit suicide, on average, every day in this country. After discussing the issue with our Executive Director, Doug Lasdon, Culhane launched The Veteran Advocacy Project, which provides free civil legal services to low-income veterans and their families, with a focus on those living with Post Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury, and substance use issues. Thanks to their work, thousands of vets have received critical services and support to help them transition back into civilian life.

Investigating Mass Incarceration

The unparalleled freedom we give our Project leaders is what convinced Bianca Tylek to bring Worth Rises (formerly the Corrections Accountability Project) to UJC, after another fellowship had bogged her efforts down in months of needless paperwork. Worth Rises works to dismantle the prison industrial complex and end the exploitation of those it touches by partnering deliberately with directly impacted people and communities. Before spinning off into an independent organization, they successfully fought to make all phone calls to and from NYC jails free of charge, a model they are now using nationwide.

Assisting Asylum Seekers

Every year, tens of thousands of people fleeing immediate violence cross our borders seeking desperately needed asylum. Many don’t speak the language, and have no assistance or money to acquire legal help. Once in our system, they may be sent anywhere in the United States to wait as their case progresses. When four law students from Yale realized the enormity of the problems these families and individuals were facing, they came to the UJC to launch the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, which provides direct legal assistance, develops innovative communication technologies, monitors detention facilities, and advocates for legislative reform. They are now an independent organization handling over 500 complicated cases yearly.
AsylumConnect
Provides the world’s first tech resource platform designed for those fleeing persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Brave House
Supports young immigrant women in New York City, with a focus on those who are survivors of gender-based violence.

The College Athlete Advocacy Initiative
Advocates for the fair treatment, protection, and representation of college athletes in the multibillion-dollar college sports industry.

Power of Purpose
Is a solution to the violence, crime, and cycle of criminal justice involvement plaguing youth ages 14 to 18 in the Bronx.

Surveillance Technology Oversight Project
Litigates and advocates the dismantling of local and state-level surveillance, particularly those systems targeted at historically over-policed communities.

Domestic Violence Project
Protects the rights of intimate partner violence survivors to allow for a self-determined and safe future.

Human Rights Project
Promotes recognition and implementation of the full spectrum of human rights in the United States.

Mental Health Project
Works to enforce the rights of low-income New Yorkers with mental health concerns.

Peter Cicchino Youth Project
Provides legal representation to homeless youth in NYC, with a focus on the needs of LGBTQQ youth.

Safety Net Project
Advocates to ensure access to public benefits for low-income New Yorkers; defends tenants against eviction & provides legal support for tenant organizing campaigns; and supports & organizes with homeless New Yorkers.

Sex Workers Project
Provides legal services, advocacy, education, and organizing for the human rights of sex workers.

Street Vendor Project
Works to correct social and economic injustice faced by NYC street vendors.