

FY 20 JAG Project Narrative for the Burlington Community Justice Center:

Category 2 – Eligible Allocation Amounts of \$25,000 or More

The program narrative for Category 2 applications should include:

- (a) Description of the Issue – Identify the unit of local government’s strategy/funding priorities for the FY 2020 JAG funds, the subgrant award process (if applicable, including disparities) and timeline, any progress or challenges, and a description of the programs to be funded over the 2 to 4 year grant period.**

With a population of slightly over 42,000 Burlington is Vermont’s most diverse and culturally vibrant city. Burlington also has some of the highest poverty rates in the state, with extreme socioeconomic and racial disparities and cultural divisions. The Burlington Community Justice Center (BCJC) practices restorative justice to constructively address crime and conflict as an alternative to the traditional criminal legal court system. However, we currently do not have the funding or capacity necessary for programming to include supporting community members in resolving their conflicts quickly and peacefully before they escalate. The BCJC seeks to create a Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program to enable people who are not involved with the criminal legal system to take more control of their safety and well-being and that of their families, roommates, neighbors, friends, and colleagues.

The Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program would educate and provide Burlington youth and adults with a body of culturally-specific tools and resources that build on the BCJC’s work in restorative justice and conflict resolution. Alongside concrete skill building and support, this Program involves cultural competence, patience, promoting creative problem solving, and teaching communication skills that minimize aggressive ways of resolving conflict. We believe that everyone can develop confidence and competence to successfully solve issues in their own lives, and build community one conversation at a time. Conditions are ripe for violence and harm when historically marginalized groups and individuals do not feel heard, seen, believed by, and connected to the greater community. When we are empowered with the space, structure, and support to address interpersonal and neighborhood problems as healthy, generative conflicts, we all build stronger bonds of belonging and civic engagement. Our Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program will teach and model myriad ways to resolve differences by providing Burlingtonians with the necessary problem solving and communication skills to build strong and sustainable community relationships.

- (b) Project Design and Implementation – Describe the unit of local government’s strategic planning process, if any, that guides its priorities and funding strategy. This should include a description of how the local community is engaged in the planning process and the data and analysis utilized to support the plan. It should identify the stakeholders currently participating in the strategic planning process, the gaps in the needed**

resources for criminal justice purposes, and how JAG funds will be coordinated with state and related justice funds.

The Burlington CJC's Fiscal Year '21 Operational Goals include identified interests in moving more toward the conflict prevention and resolution realms, with widely offered opportunities for community members to self-refer for our services. The BCJC's Community Advisory Board – comprised of community members and partner agency stakeholders - supports this goal. Hence, the Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program would expand Burlington residents' options for resolving conflicts peacefully and productively by expanding the BCJC's current service offerings from working solely with criminal justice offenders and victims, to being a public resource that offers free-to-low-cost training and assistance in addressing conflicts, disputes, and disagreements.

A collateral goal of the Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program is to empower community members to address conflicts so as to decrease incidents of police involvement in civil complaints. This Program would build active listening, conflict resolution, mediation, and nonviolent communication skills in all community members who are interested in doing so. We will work with established community partners such as the Burlington Community and Economic Development Office's Trusted Community Voices Program which liaises between City services and our migrant BIPOC communities, the Burlington Police Department's social work-informed Community Affairs Liaison, regional housing trusts and Neighborhood Associations, as well as community members - with a particular focus on populations targeted by crime and conflict - to provide training, resources, and structured supports so they can resolve differences peacefully and in a more cost-effective and life-affirming way than through the courts.

This Program seeks to narrow the opportunity gap among Burlington residents, and increase civic engagement by building trust between community members and the institutions that serve them. In its twenty years of offering alternative paths through the traditional criminal legal system, the BCJC enjoys strong support from a variety of partners including the University of Vermont Police Services, the Burlington Police Department, the Vermont State's Attorney's office, the Vermont Department of Liquor Control, the Burlington Mayor's office, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (our local community action agency), local domestic and sexual violence agencies, agencies specifically serving our migrant communities, and other community organizations. In April 2019 we distributed a poll to many of these partners to gauge interest in a Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program. Over the last couple of years, we have also had interest from community members asking for the BCJC's help with addressing conflicts in their neighborhoods. The results indicated a strong interest and need for this program as well as a preference for educational and informational resources.

This grant would fund a temporary, part-time position to develop, coordinate and launch the Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program. This role would administer and "market" the program, facilitate mediations, train

community members on conflict resolution and mediation in a “train-the-trainer” model, and send trained community members with BCJC support to help neighbors engage in conversations that address interpersonal conflict and problem-solving.

(c) Capabilities and Competencies – Describe any additional strategic planning/coordination efforts in which the units of local government participate with other criminal justice juvenile justice agencies in the state.

The BCJC is part of two networks of community and restorative justice in the state: we are one of 18 CJC’s funded by the Vermont Department of Corrections, offering restorative justice panels and offender reentry services, and we are a member of the Vermont Association of Court Diversion and Pretrial Service (VACDP) Programs - 12 agencies which offer a selection of programs serving youth and adults charged with misdemeanor and felony crimes. These networks offer a variety of ways to engage at the legislative and programmatic levels.

Additionally, the BCJC works with the Vermont Department of Children and Family Services through the Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) program, as a subcontractor with Spectrum Youth and Family Services. BARJ works with at-risk and justice-involved youth to repair harms caused by delinquent behavior. Many of these cases - especially the at-risk youth cases - are conflict-related and benefit from our restorative interventions.

Lastly, the BCJC staff serve on the leadership team of the local Reclaiming Futures initiative, which connects and facilitates collaboration between youth justice decision-makers and stakeholders in Chittenden County to create a more effective county-level youth justice system that allows youth to establish and lead meaningful lives. The Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program would coordinate with these programs, organizations, and agencies to provide education, conflict engagement, and support for case-specific needs.

(d) Plan for Collecting the Data Required for this Solicitation’s Performance Measures – OJP will require each successful applicant to submit specific performance data that demonstrate the results of the work carried out under the award. The performance data directly relate to the objectives identified under " Objectives" in Section A. Program Description.

The BCJC’s Community Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program would coordinate with Burlington Police Department to acquire current, quantifiable data regarding noise and other civic disturbances known as "nuisance calls," as well as with local housing agencies for current data around neighbor conflicts and disturbances that rise to the level of property management response. We will gather quantifiable data on outreach versus participation by community members, nonprofit agencies, and partnering organizations. We will also work with a BCJC intern who is skilled in evaluation and data collection to offer pre- and post-surveys around increased conflict resolution skills.