



ARTS JUSTICE SAFETY COALITION

BACKGROUND

In 2020 The [Confined Arts](#) partnered with the [Center for Court Innovation](#) and [Conspiring for Good](#) to **MAP, GALVANIZE AND SUPPORT** artists, arts organizations, projects, and programs focused on racial justice, restorative justice, transformative justice, and Criminal Justice Reform by forming the **ARTS JUSTICE SAFETY COALITION**. Our goal is to sustain a community of individuals and organizations working at the intersection of art and justice system reform, with a focus on community resilience and prevention through advocacy and reform.

Objectives

- To elevate the status of art as a tool for systemic, cultural, and social change and build power among artists who utilize their work to these ends.
- To create lasting change within the criminal legal system by utilizing artists and artistry to identify and demonstrate problems and envision and advocate for solutions.
- To persuasively provide evidence to policy makers and funders that investing in the arts is investing in safety (and to make that statement be true by creating the tools that help folks in the field be able to do that).
- To create relationships between artists and arts and justice practitioners to learn from each other, create shared language, tools, techniques, and make “ecosystem” progress as our society works for non-punitive responses to trauma.

This coalition is made up of arts programs and practitioners working at the intersection of the criminal legal system and integrating safety, accountability and justice into their work.

The coalition includes organizations and groups such as (but not limited to):

- [Recess Art](#)
- [Artistic Noise](#)
- [Drama Club](#)
- [Art and Resistance Through Education \(ARTE\)](#)
- [Dances for Solidarity](#)
- [Phoenix Players Theatre Group](#)
- Local artists

The Arts, Justice, and Safety Coalition will execute its goals by (but not limited to):

1. Creating a co-learning community

- Host programs and events to build trust
- Offer relationship-building events
- Promote information sharing (toolkits, best practices, updates in the field)

2. Supporting each other in financially sustaining arts and justice work

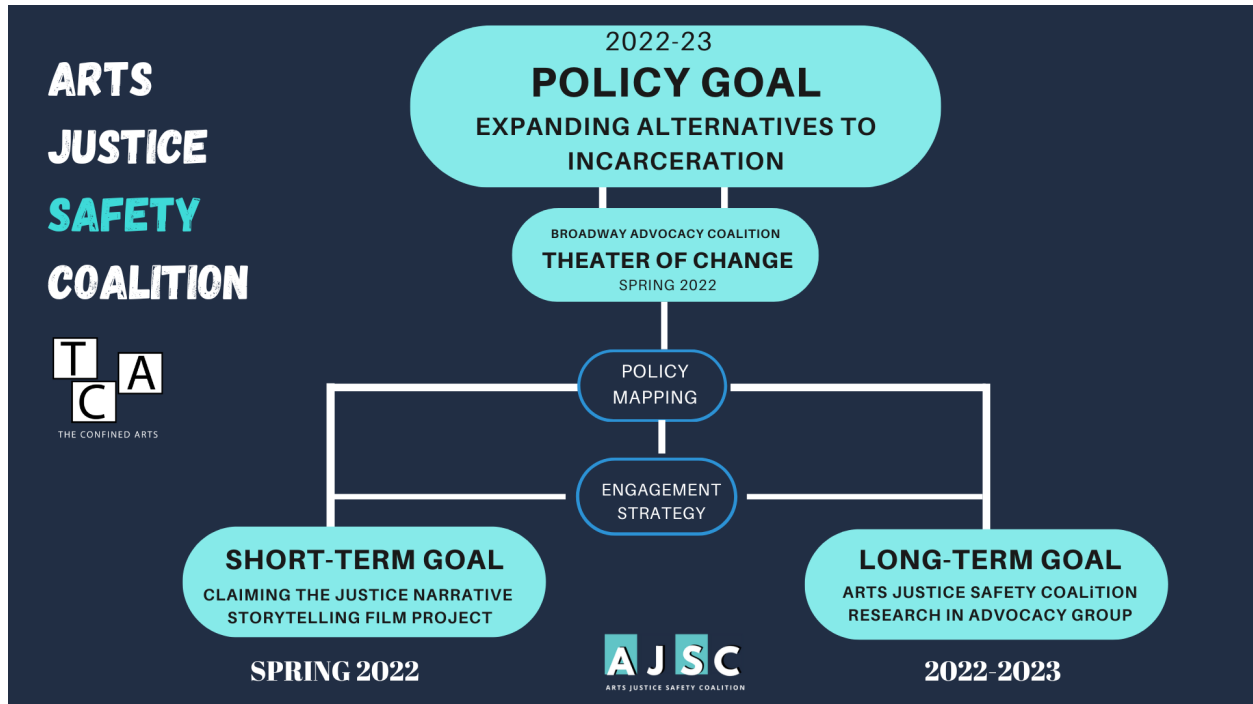
- Share best practices on scaling your work with limited funding
- Support each other in scaling by burden-sharing when possible
- Explore possibilities for collective fundraising

3. Amplify the work and efforts of arts and justice organizations

- Distribute the findings and successes of member organizations on public platforms and to all members
- Encourage, coordinate, and cross-promote each other's work

We understand that arts organizations and practitioners each have different roles, different access and different competing stressors. We work hard to try to embody practices and choices that support the entire ecosystem rather than particular organizations or artists. We acknowledge the systemic pressures (from living in the capitalist system that make it difficult for us to genuinely powershare). Through collaborative partnerships, we strive to undo the structures that force us to compete against each other and do the best we can to support those who have been the most marginalized.

2022-23 POLICY GOAL



Our coalition seeks to advance alternative to incarceration (ATI) possibilities by positioning the arts as a necessary tool in prevention, pre-trial, supervised release, and post-conviction sentencing options by utilizing trauma-informed arts practices to inform public safety strategies and to center the humanity of individuals who are system-impacted. Our policy objective is to:

1. Diminish the popular narratives and attitudes that drive the punishment paradigm,
2. Foster collective healing through restorative approaches and,
3. Provide capacity-building tools for self-advocacy and entrepreneurship.

WORKSITES

AJSC's work sites include:

1. Columbia University
2. [Another Choice Youth and Family Outreach \(ACYF\)](#)

Individual projects will be hosted by the organization whose mission and priorities are most closely aligned with the project's goals.

SHORT-TERM GOAL: CLAIMING THE JUSTICE NARRATIVE

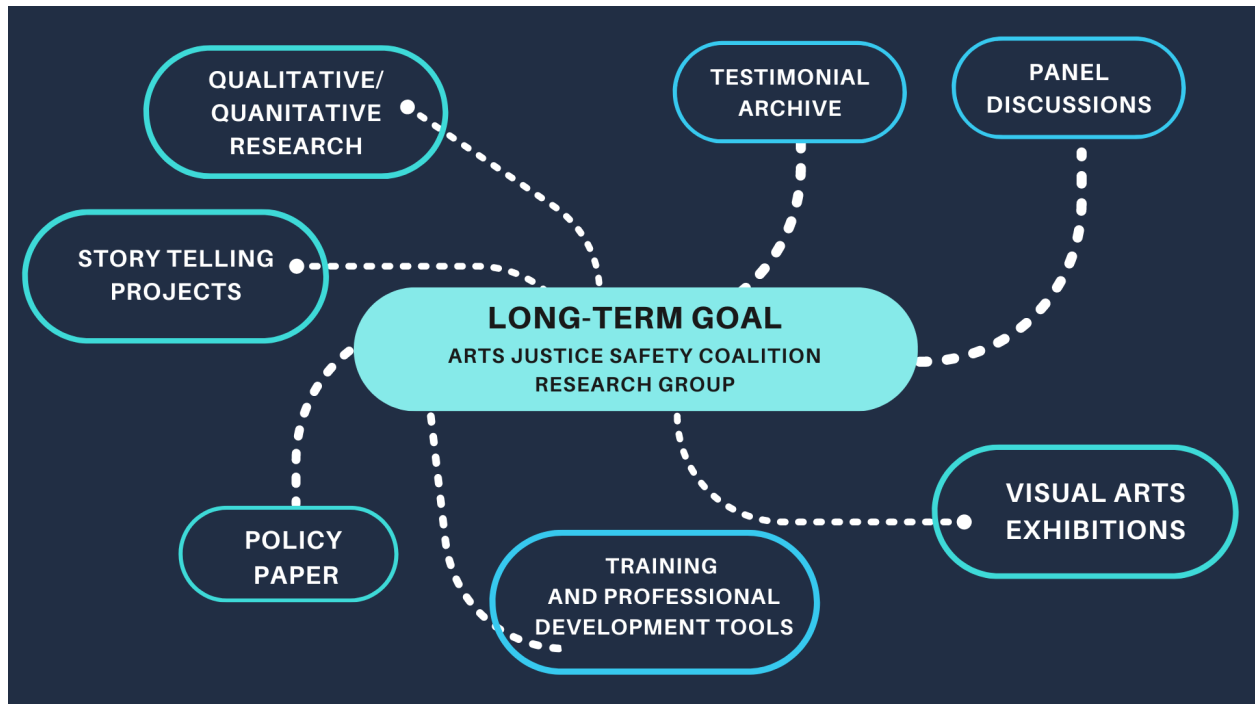
The [Claiming the Justice Narrative](#) media and advocacy project seeks to support recent incursions in the felony court space by furthering alternatives to incarceration policy shifts.

Led by member organizations Recess, The Confined Arts, and [The Phoenix Players Theatre Group](#), the Arts, Justice & Safety Coalition is launching Claiming the Justice Narrative. This project, the first collaborative arts exchange among members of the Arts, Justice, and Safety Coalition, will generate a stage performance, collateral video documentation and research data for present and future advocacy efforts. This project demonstrates the efficacy of the arts as a tool for transformation and envisioning alternatives with those most impacted by the carceral system. This production will bring together the expertise and lived experiences of artists, system-impacted individuals, scholars, researchers, and activists.

Twenty system-impacted people participated in the sessions led by teaching artists from four organizations: Recess, Theatre of the Oppressed NYC, Dances for Solidarity, and The Phoenix Players Theatre Group. During these eight sessions, participants were introduced to various performance techniques in movement, improvisation, and narrative approaches to autobiography.

At the conclusion of the workshops, nine individuals were available to begin the process of creating a devised, autobiographical piece performance piece. Beginning in late January of 2022, participants met in both virtual and hybrid settings once-a-week, facilitated by four collaborators from the AJS coalition. Through prompts, storytelling, improvisation and written submissions, a script was evolved that focuses on incarceration and its effects, early trauma, post-release issues after coming home, the impact on family, the personal histories of events leading to individuals becoming justice impact, and the evolving support that each member of the group shared with the others as a model for an abolitionist practice.

The script was finalized in late April and participants were invited to virtual one-on-one rehearsals with one of the facilitators. The filmed segments will be shot in mid May to early June. The final presentation will be a hybrid performance with some group members in the theatre space and some appearing on film. The script itself interweaves stories, events, conversations, poetry and spoken word material into an eloquent representation of the humanity of the participants and their resiliency in light of their pasts and the impact of the justice system on their lives and the lives around them.



LONG-TERM GOAL: AJSC RESEARCH & ADVOCACY GROUP

1. ON-GOING RESEARCH

Historically, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have not benefited from research being done in their communities. The AJSC research group’s goal is to conduct interdisciplinary research that is community-centered and evolves to meet the needs of the communities it addresses. It will be informed by lived experience and will benefit the individuals and communities directly impacted by the criminal legal system. The ASJC research group has run focus groups with [Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church](#) and Recess Art.

Mt. Zion A.M.E Church

We ran two focus groups at Mt. Zion. The topic of the first session was research: we asked participants for their reactions both to the word “research” and the AJSC research group’s goals. The second focus group was structured around questions relating to public safety and the intersections of art and public safety. We asked: What does safety look like? How have the arts been used as a means to promote public safety? Where are avenues for arts to be used to advance public safety?

Recess Art

We ran a focus group with Recess to understand the perspectives of youth. Our questions were designed to elicit their perceptions of personal safety and community needs as well as ideas for interventions to improve public safety.

2. ATI EXPANSION IN NYC

Abolition is Not A Fairytale

AJSC collaborated with [Broadway Advocacy Coalition](#) and Columbia Law School through their course, “Theater of Change: Imagining Justice Through Abolition” to advocate for the expansion of alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) in New York City. The ATI group spent the spring semester questioning the role of incarceration and studying ATIs. Our theater performance, Abolition is Not a Fairytale, focuses on the moments where incarceration could have been avoided. It invites the audience to consider what the outcome of incarceration is supposed to be, what other ways we might be able to achieve that outcome, and whether justice is served in the end. The accompanying zine presents our abolitionist vision for ATIs, which calls for alternatives that shrink the criminal legal system and re-allocate power and resources within the communities most affected by mass incarceration.

- i. [Zine](#)
- ii. [Preliminary Research & Interviews with Columbia Law Faculty](#)
- iii. [NYC ATIs](#)

Community Resource Manual

AJSC will create a community resources manual to encourage NYC District Attorney’s offices, local courts, social service providers, and community organizations to take advantage of and build on existing resources to increase New York City’s capacity to provide ATIs to people who come into contact with the criminal legal system.

Creating a community resources manual will allow us to develop our abolitionist vision for ATIs, specify the resources necessary for its achievement, and identify the challenges and obstacles that stand in the way. We believe that art and art-making are underutilized as means of reducing harm, promoting healing, and creating economic opportunities for system-involved people. This manual makes an argument for centering the arts and entrepreneurship in ATIs and proposes opportunities for change.

- i. SEE [Project Description](#) (pp. 2–4)
- ii. SEE [Draft Table of Contents](#) [Brainstorming document]

The purpose of the manual is four-fold:

P1. To identify and evaluate existing ATIs

- What is the ATI’s capacity to accept and serve new clients?
- Does the ATI center the arts or entrepreneurship? Does it provide arts programming or arts therapy? Does it provide professional development opportunities for artists and creatives?

- Do elements of the ATI replicate aspects of incarceration? Do features of the ATI expand or intensify the reach of the criminal legal system? If so, how can those features be removed?
- What makes something an ATI that preserves mass incarceration? What is an ATI that actually shrinks the system and re-allocates power and responsibility within communities?

P2. To identify and evaluate the capacity of arts organizations to host ATI programs or serve ATI participants

- What arts organizations could host ATI programs? What are the needs of these organizations?
- How can ATI programs partner with arts educators, programs, and organizations in the community which offer venue space and other in-kind resources to support the capacity building learning and artistry of “clients”?
 - Non traditional approaches to trauma informed care
 - Increase visibility and interest and retention in participation
 - Strategic communication and relationship building and research
 - Fostering public safety through community gathering and public programming

P3. To create a person-centered assessment for legal actors (judges, lawyer, and prosecutors) to connect people (clients) to ATI programs

- What is the client’s story? What factors (e.g., house, family life, history of substance misuse, ect.) contributed to their involvement in the criminal legal system?
- What are the client’s self-identified skills, needs, and goals?
- What are the client’s preferences? (e.g., program location, length of judicial supervision)
- Has the client been informed of the benefits, risks, and alternatives to participating in an ATI program?

P4. To call attention to ATI programs and organizations that are led by system-impacted people

- Are system-impacted people in the leadership positions that drive the organization?
- Does the organization make an effort to hire staff who are system-impacted? Does the organization support the professional development of system-impacted staff?
- Does the ATI program provide pathways to employment and/or educational opportunities for former participants?

Resources

- i. [Art & Public Safety Research Document](#)
- ii. [Art & Public Safety Resources](#)
- iii. [Arts-Based Methods Resources](#)