



THE CHICAGO JUSTICE PROJECT

The Chicago Justice Project is an independent organization with the core mission of increasing public access to justice-related information, based on the guiding principle that access to accurate information is the foundation of any meaningful reform to the criminal justice system.





## The CJP approach rests on three key principles

- Accountability and collaboration create and preserve safe and secure neighborhoods;
- Law enforcement agencies rely on the communities they serve; and
- A just system cannot survive when public access to vital information about patterns and practices is restricted.

### Promoting Government Transparency

Today, costly and time-consuming procedural hurdles stymie the efforts of community residents and grassroots groups to keep their neighborhoods safe. Access to even the most basic information about policing and criminal justice practices in our communities remains obstructed. CJP recognizes three primary obstacles to reliable information about criminal justice issues, practices and policy:

- Collection of system-wide statistics;
- Retrieval of data and responsiveness to Freedom of Information requests; and
- Distribution of information and public awareness of systemic issues.

As a result, underserved communities continue to lose ground to criminal elements as residents cannot access the information needed to make statistical or factual cases to improve police practices and criminal justice policy. Inadequate police coverage, failed crime prevention strategies, or patterns and practices of abuse by particular police units or officers remain hidden in inaccessible datasets.

**data  
points**

Office of Emergency Management and  
Communications, Chicago Police Department,  
Cook County Sheriff's Police, Cook County State's  
Attorney's Office, Cook County Circuit Court,  
Cook County Circuit Clerk's Office, Illinois  
Department of Corrections, Cook County Jail,  
Independent Police Review Authority,  
Chicago Police Board



**information**

New technology offers  
low-cost access to  
meaningful information.



### **The Consequences are Significant**

- Poor public access to data from local policing and public criminal justice agencies makes it difficult to identify and remediate practices that generate problematic or undesirable outcomes.
- Poor policing practices costs taxpayers. In 2006, Carol Marin, of NBC's local television news affiliate, documented that the City of Chicago had spent \$100 million over a five-year period to settle court suits.
- Instances of police abuse undercut the trust and accountability upon which the rule of law is rooted in democracies. Patterns of poor accountability over the long term can undermine the larger social compact within communities. Responsible, effective policy cannot be created in a vacuum, but must be based on solid evidence and hard facts

## **The basis for sensible, fair policy**

Our work is designed to remove critical roadblocks to an open and just system of policing and criminal justice policy in the metropolitan Chicago area. CJP's goal is to give people access to the information they need to assess – and improve – justice patterns and practices in the region.

CJP's projects and programs are designed to foster greater transparency and accountability. These attributes cultivate greater cooperation between residents and government agencies seeking to improve police practices and public policy. While this approach can better serve all local communities, CJP's particular priority is in communities whose residents are most vulnerable to the consequences of the malfunctions in our criminal justice system.

As government considers electronic data management, technology offers new tools. CJP promotes implementations that will allow the public to access and assess data. Academics, legal professionals, policy makers and the press have shown how information access can further understanding and ultimately improve the criminal justice system. We also recognize that the data itself – from court transcripts and depositions to district by district crime statistics and detailed data on law enforcement oversight and outcomes – is the linchpin in this system.

CJP aims to enable effective uses of government records to address crucial concern for community residents, advocates, and other stakeholders. CJP sustains dialogues and collaboration with members of impacted communities to move this effort forward.

## Sustaining early successes into the future

CJP can already point to critical developments in meeting its mission.

### **The Civic Open Data Access (CODA) Project**

Developed by CJP, the CODA Project is designed to provide access to statistics and information from our courts and public safety administrators. This data is by definition public, but as a practical matter, it is largely closed to the lens of public scrutiny. The CODA Project builds capacity in the justice field to make fact-based assessments of dynamics in the system, including data-driven strategies to improve policing practices and criminal justice policy. The Information Retrieval Laboratory at Illinois Institute of Technology has supported CJP with expert advice in identifying and evaluating the technology options defined for the CODA Project, including helping us define achievable solutions with proven technologies and will remain active as advisors on complex programming questions.

The CODA Project will warehouse and regularly update existing data sets in a single website, in many cases making this data available electronically to the public for the first time. CODA will use new technologies to mash up data into more user-friendly, easily searchable formats, and marry these data sets with supplementary information from supporting partners and projects.

### **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Review**

In partnership with the Pro Bono and Community Service Initiative at DePaul University, CJP is investigating the impact of the Illinois FOIA over the past 20 years. Through a catalogue of court appeals, the research will reveal characteristics of litigation to ensure that public record keeping serves the public interest.

The FOIA process remains a central way to generate data for public access and CJP will rely on litigation when needed. The significance of this part of our effort cannot be overstated – no other tool is as significant and potent for ensuring public access to the civic processes of our public institutions and agencies. CJP's pursuit of public records through this means will continue to be made available to the public through our FOI Center on our website. We expect to expand our efforts to reach out to core constituencies to encourage use of existing material – and solicit input for ongoing efforts.

### **Chicago Police Board Review**

CJP is also reviewing the efforts of the Chicago Police Board, a governmental agency that plays an important role in the internal police disciplinary process. A view of voting patterns will enable policy makers to understand how this agency operated and to assess the important role the agency played via its rulings on police accountability mechanisms.

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The Chicago Justice Project ardently supports the Illinois Freedom of Information Act and frequently uses it. However, many factors have diminished the effectiveness of this law in recent years. CJP believes future litigation will set new standards for the public availability of government records. Legal action may be necessary to include additional documentation in the database. Our mission is to keep the public domain accessible to the public.

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