Placement Description

Connecticut Bail Fund is a grassroots nonprofit dedicated to reducing the harms of the prison system, while building power among those most impacted by incarceration, border enforcement, and homelessness. We operate two revolving bail funds, both of which free community members from wealth-based jailing: one in the criminal context, one in the immigration context. Post-release, we work alongside bail fund beneficiaries and their families to advocate for their human and civil rights. While our interventions have profound case-specific impacts—preventing incarceration, deportation, family dis-unification, plea-bargaining, and job loss—our ultimate aim is to leverage bail funds as tools for community organizing. We practice a community organizing model called Participatory Defense, dedicated to building the power of defendants and their families in the courtroom. We also organize and facilitate a member-based collective called Housing Not Jails, composed of currently and formerly homeless community members working to end the criminalization of homelessness.

Fellow’s Job

The fellow would support our co-directors in the day-to-day activities of the organization, which include facilitating bail-outs, engaging in Participatory Defense organizing to support community members fighting cases in court, and performing research and coalition-building to support reform efforts.
Please write a complete description of the specific project you propose and list the duties/outcomes expected of the Fellow.
(Suggested length: one to two pages.)

The Fellows duties will divide into two categories: ongoing organizational support, and independent projects.

Ongoing organizational support involves assisting with the daily tasks of the bail fund, Participatory Defense, and Housing Not Jails. As a new grassroots organization, our workflow is constantly evolving to meet the needs of our community and the capacities of our leadership and volunteer base. We are seeking a Fellow who will be adaptable, organized, and thorough in assisting with various tasks on short notice. Such tasks may include: generating lists of potential beneficiaries inside detention centers, accompanying members and beneficiaries to court, obtaining letters of support to assist beneficiaries in court, prepare for Housing Not Jails general meetings, and more.

The PPSF Fellow will also have the opportunity to take on independent projects. They will need to be independent, organized, and motivated to accomplish these with minimal oversight. (We will have a weekly check-in to review workflows, make adjustments, and set goals.) In the upcoming summer, the Fellow will have the option to lead any of the following projects:

**Project 1: Capturing and Sharing Individual Narratives.** A lot of the work we do as an organization is focused on public education and storytelling. Each of the individuals we bail out have complicated and important personal stories, and many desire to share those stories in order to support advocacy, public education, fundraising, and member recruitment. Project #1 involves the Fellow conceptualizing and actualizing new strategies for storytelling around the themes of criminalized poverty, structural racism, wealth-based jailing, impacts of criminalization and border enforcement on families, and more.

**Duties/Outcomes**

1. In conversation with CT Bail Fund staff, identify an issue area in which storytelling is essential for advocacy work (for example, the presumption of guilt on probation, the growth of the crim-imm pipeline, etc.)
2. Conduct outreach with members and record stories through text, photography, video, and more
3. Cultivate virtual and physical spaces to share these stories with proper audiences.

**Project 2: CourtWatch.** The fellow will assist in organizing and conducting research for a new CourtWatching program, in collaboration with a coalition of allied organizations. In January 2019, we will be starting to organize, with a coalition of allied organizations, a CourtWatch program in order to hold courtroom actors accountable while building knowledge and grassroots leadership among community volunteers. This project may be conducted to generate data for litigation surrounding the constitutionality of wealth-based detention in Connecticut. The PPSF Fellow will have the opportunity to play a leading role in the development and growth of this new project.

**Duties/Outcomes:**
1. Manage volunteers, possibly through the creation and/or cultivation of a web-based database
2. Generate reports (or, at the very least, the structure for a future report) from CourtWatching data
3. Assist with volunteer recruitment efforts, particularly in the Yale community
4. Engage in CourtWatching and dialogue with CT Bail Fund staff to troubleshoot in real-time

**Specific skills/experience required for the project (Please list):**

1. Strong attention to details and organizational methods
2. Strong communication and people skills
3. Demonstrated commitment to social justice movement building

(Not required but strongly desired)

1. Spanish-language skills
2. Experience working in New Haven with community-based organizations in the city
3. Community organizing experience
4. Legislative advocacy research experience (e.g. writing or giving testimony, working for or with state legislators, preparing policy briefs or memos)
5. Experience working with people who are currently or formerly incarcerated
6. Direct personal or family experiential knowledge of criminalization
7. Driving ability

Additional requirements (e.g. a car or weekend working hours). If a car is required, please include information regarding parking arrangements and mileage reimbursement):

N/A

Briefly describe the work that Yale PPSF Fellows have done with your agency in the past and present. If you have not worked with Yale Fellows, please describe any work that Yale students have done with your agency.

In 2017, Alejandra Trujillo worked for the months of June, July and August providing crucial help in organizing fundraisers, writing our first annual report, engaging in preliminary participatory defense meetings, and supporting our Executive Director in the day-to-day operations of the fund. In 2018, Esul Burton worked alongside a Fellow from the Schell Center at Yale Law School to create “The First 24,” a community resource guiding community members through the initial hours after the arrest of a loved one. Esul also engaged in research on probation for future advocacy and ongoing organizational support with daily operations.