



Making justice systems fairer  
and more effective through  
research and innovation





Fifty years ago, the founders of the Vera Institute of Justice began working with government leaders

in New York City to improve the services people rely on for justice and safety. Today, Vera is making important contributions to the administration of justice across the United States and internationally.

As an independent, nonpartisan partner of government, Vera offers a unique, multidimensional approach to problem solving that includes conducting research and analysis, pioneering new service models, and providing assistance to leaders in government and civil society.

Whether we're working to improve relations between police and immigrant communities, conducting research on how drug use and mental health influence contact with the justice system, exploring nonpunitive responses to teens who are chronically absent from school, or pursuing any number of other initiatives, our goal is to help government achieve measurable improvements in the quality of justice it delivers and to share what is learned with people around the world.

*The result:* justice systems that are fairer, more humane, and more effective for everyone.

—Michael Jacobson, Director

## THE VERA METHOD

Vera joins research and analysis, expert assistance, and program innovation to plan, implement, and evaluate improvements in systems that deliver justice, such as courts, law enforcement, immigration, and social services.

Detailed analysis of existing data, policies, and practices, combined with knowledge of the field and access to expert practitioners, allows us to tailor our research, recommendations, and implementation support to our partners' specific conditions and goals.

We also conduct demonstration projects as direct-service solutions to significant gaps in how justice is delivered. We develop a workable solution to an identified challenge and a comprehensive implementation plan. Then we put theory into practice, testing real-world feasibility and real-life benefits.

In every case, we try to foster collaboration and information sharing among all those inside and outside government with a stake in solving the problems we're addressing. And we work with our partners to help them gather their own data to track ongoing performance.

In short, we give leaders in government and civil society the tools they need to make justice systems work better for everyone.



## Our Story

IN 1961, PHILANTHROPIST LOUIS SCHWEITZER AND MAGAZINE EDITOR HERBERT STURZ recognized the injustice of a bail system in New York City that granted liberty based on income. Working with criminal justice leaders, they studied the problem, developed a solution, and rigorously tested it. Within a short time, the Manhattan Bail Project had demonstrated that New Yorkers too poor to afford bail but with strong ties to their communities could be released and still show up in court.

Evidence of a viable alternative to bail forever changed how judges make release decisions in criminal courts worldwide, while also reducing costs and minimizing disruption in the lives of many defendants, especially those who are innocent. It also led to the founding of the Vera Institute of Justice—named for Schweitzer's mother—to pursue similar initiatives that make a difference in the lives of individuals.

## DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS & SPIN-OFFS

VERA SPINS OFF SUCCESSFUL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS as independent organizations or into existing government or nonprofit agencies. Seventeen former projects have gone on to provide combined annual services worth nearly \$200 million. And these spin-offs, like the New York City Criminal Justice Agency and the Center for Employment Opportunities, are generating their own impressive records of achievement.

Vera's current demonstrations include [The Guardianship Project](#),

a court-appointed team providing legal, financial, and social services for people who cannot care for themselves because of age or illness. [Adolescent Portable Therapy](#) delivers uniquely adaptable mental-health and substance-use treatment to youths in the juvenile-justice and child-welfare systems. [Common Justice](#) offers a facilitated, dialogue-based response to serious felonies that pursues accountability, reconciliation, and healing for those who are harmed by crime and those who are responsible.

# Our Achievements

Highlights from Vera's 50 years of innovation include:



When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Bail Reform Act in 1966, he credited Vera for leading the way.

> **DEVELOPING** responses for people who need help, rather than punishment. By offering detoxification services to people charged with public drunkenness, Vera showed in the 1960s that courts and jails were not always the best answer to problem behavior. The project inspired new thinking about those who come into contact with law enforcement because they are homeless or coping with mental illness or substance use. It continues to serve thousands of vulnerable people today as Project Renewal.

> **FOSTERING** new practice within the justice system to support and empower victims of crime. In creating the Victim Services Agency for New York City in the 1970s, Vera

set a national precedent for offering comprehensive services to crime victims. This Vera demonstration project is now the nationally recognized nonprofit Safe Horizon.

> **SEEDING** sentencing policy reform. In the 1980s, Vera collaborated with scholars to found the *Federal Sentencing Reporter*, the now-preeminent journal that judges, lawyers, policy makers, and academics turn to when thinking about or looking for ways to improve sentencing and correctional policy.

> **PAVING** the way for government-subsidized "supported work" to be adapted to help New Yorkers with developmental disabilities live more easily on their own—an approach later adopted across the United States. A spin-off since 1999, Job Path has expanded to help clients find housing and integrate into the community.

> **ESTABLISHING** a response to rape in developing nations that both meets the needs of victims and empowers criminal prosecutors. Vera's Thuthuzela Care Center, launched in 2000, has been widely replicated throughout South Africa—there were 25 as of 2010—and adapted by other nations in Africa and South America.

## Vera Today

In its sixth decade, Vera continues to pursue its mission to improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety. Here are some examples of our current work:

- > To improve outcomes for kids, their families, and their communities, Vera is helping juvenile justice agencies across the United States respond to many troubled youth without separating them from their families, which evidence shows is both costly and counter-productive for a promising future and public safety.



- > In partnership with a nationwide network of 30 legal services providers, Vera is making government immigration courts more effective and fairer by providing legal information to detained adults and coordinating pro bono representation for children facing deportation.
- > Recognizing that mass incarceration is expensive, harmful to families and communities, and not always effective at reducing crime, states and localities are turning to Vera to understand why so many are in prison and jail and to seek policy options that can safely reduce prison and jail populations and return more people to productive lives in the community.
- > Vera is working in more than 40 communities across the United States to increase the capacity of social service and criminal justice agencies to serve Deaf women and women with disabilities who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- > To sustain and build confidence in criminal proceedings, Vera is helping district attorneys develop internal management systems that can guard against racial bias influencing prosecutors' decisions.
- > Having helped establish consensus around an ambitious criminal justice reform agenda for New Orleans, Vera is working with local officials, foundations, and community groups to make the city's sentencing and corrections policies less onerous and more effective in protecting public safety.

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