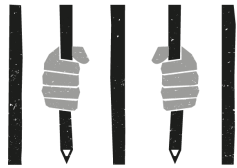


**PEN AMERICA**  
**WRITING**  
FOR JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP



**PEN America's Writing for Justice Fellowship will commission six or more writers—emerging or established—to create written works of lasting merit that illuminate critical issues related to mass incarceration and catalyze public debate.**

The PEN America Writing for Justice Fellowship aims to harness the power of writers and writing in bearing witness to the societal consequences of mass incarceration by capturing and sharing the stories of incarcerated individuals, their families, communities, and the wider impact of the criminal justice system. Our goal is to ignite a broad, sustained conversation about the dangers of over-incarceration and the imperative to mobilize behind rational and humane policies. As an organization of writers dedicated to promoting free expression and informed discourse, PEN America is honored to have been entrusted by the Art for Justice Fund to engage the literary community in addressing this pressing societal issue.

**Applications Open:** January 15, 2021

**Deadline to apply:** 11:59pm EST on February 15, 2021

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## **GUIDELINES**

*Please read the following closely, as our application requirements have changed and our program has shifted due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The Writing for Justice Fellowship is open-genre, and proposed writing projects, which must be authored by the applicant, may include—but are not limited to—fictional stories; works of literary or long-form journalism; theatrical scripts; memoirs; poetry collections; or multimedia projects. The most competitive applications will demonstrate how the proposed project will engage issues of reform, fuel public debate, crystallize concepts of reform, and facilitate the possibility of societal change. As part of our mission to stimulate discussion, emphasis will be placed on proposed projects that show strong promise for publication. Fellows must commit to contribute actively to bringing attention to their work and that of other Fellows. The Fellowship is open to writers at any stage of their career. Currently and formerly incarcerated writers are highly encouraged to apply, and special provisions will be made for incarcerated writers to participate through alternative methods.

Fellows will receive an honorarium of between \$5,000-\$8,000, based on scope of project. Fellows will be paired with a mentor to serve as a source of guidance for the project, and the cohort will convene at least twice for intensive shared experiences either digitally or in person, depending on the pandemic's continued impact. PEN America will draw on the Writing for Justice Advisory Committee, as well as its network of agents, editors, publishers, partner organizations and outlets in order to assist efforts for publication and dissemination of the work of the Fellows. Opportunities for sharing the created work through public forums will be organized in New York City, in the Fellow's home community, and possibly additional locations.

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## **FELLOWSHIP TIMELINE**

The first eight months of the Fellowship are designed for Fellows to research, create, and connect with mentors and the cohort, working toward submission of a polished final product that is ready for publication. The final four months of the Fellowship will focus on placing the works for public dissemination and opportunities for Fellows to present their work publicly.

**January 15, 2021:** Application opens

**February 15, 2021 11:59pm EST:** Deadline to apply

**May 2021:** Applicants notified of final application status

**May 2021-December 2021:** Fellows work on their projects, meet with mentors

**April 2021:** Cohort meeting #1 (NYC or digital)

**September 2021:** Cohort meeting #2 (Location TBD or digital)

**Late December 2021:** Work completed and submitted for publication

**January 2022–May 2022:** Placing work and local public presentations

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## ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for this Fellowship, the applicant must be:

- 21 years of age or older.
- An individual writer. Collaborative projects are acceptable, but only one project lead may apply and participate in the Fellowship's activities.
- A United States resident.
- Available to participate actively in all dimensions of Fellowship programming, including mandatory gatherings and public programs. (The Fellowship will cover costs associated with these events, separately from the Fellowship honorarium.) Currently incarcerated writers and formerly incarcerated writers restricted by parole will participate through alternative means.
- Able to demonstrate a track record of successful projects brought to completion on time.

Membership in PEN America is not required. Please see FAQs below for more information.

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## SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Fellows will be selected on artistic merit, the project's approach and potential for impact, and the feasibility of project to be fully completed and in polished, publishable form within the given time frame. Applications will be reviewed by PEN America and expert advisers through an anonymous process.

Applications close February 15, 2021. Fellows will be announced in May 2021.

## HOW TO APPLY

Closely review all required materials listed below. Please be mindful of the specific application requests. Failure to follow instructions carefully will result in immediate disqualification. Late applications will not be accepted. We suggest you submit early to avoid technical issues.

There is no fee to apply to the Writing for Justice Fellowship.

All non-incarcerated applicants are required to submit online through [Submittable](#).

Currently incarcerated writers who cannot submit via a proxy online are welcome to submit by sending application materials (preferably typed, but clean, legible handwritten applications will also be accepted) to the address below:

Writing For Justice Fellowship  
588 Broadway, Suite 303  
New York, NY 10012

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## REQUIRED APPLICATION MATERIALS

Typed materials should be:

- 11 or 12 pt standard font (Times New Roman, Arial)
- Spaced at 1 or 1.15
- One-inch margins

Currently incarcerated writers should follow formatting to the best of their ability and estimate word count as closely as possible. We will not disqualify applications for being reasonably over count.

**1. Cover Page:** Include name, address, telephone number, email address, and title of the proposed project. Online applicants will fill this information out in the Submittable form.

**2. Project Title and Brief Description (maximum of 100 words):** Please do not include your name or any other identifying information on any part of the Project Title and Brief Description. Online applicants will fill this information out in the Submittable form.

**3. Project Proposal (maximum of 750 words):** Online applicants will fill this information out in the Submittable form. Do not include your name or any other identifying information on any part of the Project Proposal. Please respond to the following questions:

- Describe the project, including genre, relevance to the topic of mass incarceration, and the geographic regions your project addresses.
- Share what is new and significant about your project's approach and why it matters. What inspired your choices and interest?

- Where are you in the timeline of your project? What work do you hope to accomplish during the eight-month creation portion of the Fellowship? What resources would be most helpful in this process? What form of mentorship would your project most benefit from? (E.g., a writer in your genre, an editor, an expert in an aspect of criminal justice/mass incarceration, etc.)

- What impact do you hope your project will have? What audiences/communities are you writing toward? How do you imagine your project might be used to catalyze conversations on mass incarceration? What change might it spur? Please provide specific examples.

- Where do you imagine this project living or being featured? Share any ideas/connections to publications or other relevant venues that might be a good fit for your work.

**4. Work sample:** 7–10 pages of your written work, or 5 files of multimedia (video, audio, visual). You may submit a combination of both, adding up to the maximum (2 files and 8 pages of writing, for example.) Media files that require watching or listening should be under fifteen minutes in length in total. If you are applying with a project that is already in motion, the work sample content should reflect this. Please do not include your name on any part of the Work Sample, including the file name. Typed work samples should be submitted in the same single file (.doc, .docx or PDF) and formatted with one inch margins and 1.15 or 1.5 spacing. Online applicants will submit as an attachment.

**5. Biographical Context (maximum of 500 words):** Briefly introduce yourself as a creator. This might be an artist/career biography to express past accomplishments, a statement of philosophy and approach, or an overview of your current practice and/or creative mission. Online applicants will fill this information out in the Submittable form.

**6. Optional CV (maximum of 2 pages):** Encouraged, but not required. Applicants who do not include a CV will not be penalized. Online applicants will fill submit as an attachment.

**7. References:** Submit three reference names and contact information that can speak to applicant's track record of success and completion of past projects. *These are not letters of reference.* This is required for non-incarcerated writers. Incarcerated writers are not required to supply references, but encouraged to do so if possible. Online applicants will fill this information out in the Submittable form.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What kind of work does this Fellowship support?

Our main stipulation is that the work addresses issues of mass incarceration in a way that will provoke meaningful discussion and the potential of change. The projects should be of creative merit and must be able to be produced in publishable form within the eight-month creation portion of the Fellowship. We will consider projects of different shapes and sizes and at various stages in the creative process. We are not necessarily looking for projects as ambitious as book-length manuscripts or stage-ready plays, though we will consider such projects if *absolutely feasible* for completion within the Fellowship time frame.

What kind of work does this Fellowship NOT support?

- Projects centered on applicant's personal social media or blog page.
- Projects that are purely promotional or educational in nature.
- Work that is solely in relationship to academic degrees.
- Work produced by organizations.
- Book printing, graphic design, or other costs associated with publishing.

Can my project be almost done at time of application?

We will consider projects at all stages, but keep in mind that a significant amount of work should occur over the eight-month creative portion of the Fellowship and should benefit from conversation with other members of the cohort, mentorship, and/or research.

Can you tell me more about the mentorship aspect?

Fellows can request mentorship in their field/genre, an expert in a particular aspect of the conversation on mass incarceration, an editor, or other form of support. PEN America will seek a mentor that best fits the needs of the Fellow and will support the pair to meet in person, digitally, or via written communication monthly over the course of the Fellowship.

What will happen at the cohort convenings?

*\*Please note: in the event that the pandemic compromises the ability to travel and gather safely, these experiences will take form as thoughtfully produced online events.*

Cohort Convening #1: New York City

Fellows who are not currently incarcerated will be invited to take part in a daylong series of roundtable discussions at the start of the Fellowship with partner organizations that can offer deep expertise on issues of mass incarceration. These sessions will focus on spotlighting critical, current debates in the field in order to inform the work of the Fellows and help maximize its relevance to shifting both public opinion and policy. Incarcerated Fellows will receive information from these sessions and will be invited to ask questions of the expert advisers as well as to rely on them for guidance in pursuing their projects.

Cohort Convening #2: Location TBD

The second convening will take place in a state with a high rate of incarceration where PEN America Members are active. This weekend will offer Fellows an opportunity to deep dive into their projects, sharing progress, challenges and resources. Fellows will meet with local affected communities, and be facilitated to mobilize as a cohort of writer-activists to spur greater awareness of mass incarceration across the wider literary and artistic communities. In follow up, they will be able to tap PEN America's seasoned advocacy and policy staff for assistance in considering opportunities for outreach and campaigning.

### What does participation look like for an applicant who is currently or formerly incarcerated?

Currently incarcerated writers will participate in the Fellowship program via alternative methods of engagement. Mentorship will occur via phone calls, online prison email platforms if available, and/or letters with an identified mentor. Fellows will be invited to pose questions and ideas in advance of the cohort meetings and will be sent materials and notes from the gatherings. If the Fellow has access to telephone, they may also schedule routine calls with the program director for additional support and call into the cohort meetings, to the best of their ability, at a scheduled time. Incarcerated Fellows will receive honoraria as permissible or be able to direct their disposition.

Understanding some formerly incarcerated Fellows might be restricted in various ways, PEN America will work with the Fellows to participate as fully as possible, including supportive interfacing with parole officers or other authorities and making necessary accommodations to support alternative means of engagement.

### Why is PEN America offering this Fellowship?

PEN America stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to protect open expression in the United States and worldwide. We champion the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world. Our mission is to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression and defend the liberties that make it possible. We have a membership of more than 7,000 writers and their allies across the United States and offices in New York, Washington, and Los Angeles.

PEN America strives to encourage the role of the writer and the written word in promoting discourse and discussion of vital societal issues. We strive to elevate the voices of communities too often pressed to the margins and to celebrate the craft and creativity of writers, whether established or emerging. PEN America has for decades supported the work of incarcerated writers through its Prison Writing Program, which provides mentorship and an awards program. The Writing for Justice Fellowship is an outgrowth of this long-standing engagement with the experience of incarceration. The program is generously funded by the Art for Justice Fund.

### What projects have won in the past?

#### **2018-2019 Writing For Justice Cohort:**

Through the voice of a state-raised prisoner, Arthur Longworth will work on *Journal of a State-Raised Prisoner in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, a book-length compilation of creative nonfiction essays that elucidates the foster-care-to-prison pipeline.

Cleyvis Natera's personal essay will illuminate mass incarceration's painful impact on members of an Afro-Dominican immigrant family and their surrounding community through the story of her own brother's arrest for minor offenses and subsequent deportation.

C.T. Mexica will work on *18 With a Bullet: Or, With Love & Respect*, a nonfiction memoir of intergenerational incarceration, anchored in the author's incarceration from the age of 13 to 21 for acts of mutual violence committed against other bonded males, and transformation to a postdoctoral researcher and emerging writer.

J.D. Mathes will work on *In Strange Company*, a novel that reveals a free nation's dark impulse toward punishing the mentally ill and the addicted, told through the story of a young man struggling with the trauma of prison to find peace, grace, and humanity through learning music.

Jonah Mixon-Webster will create *Protocol*, an immersive two-fold documentary poetics project. The full length hybrid manuscript and digital archive aims to unpack—through dashcam footage, guerrilla audio recordings, arrest documents, and lyrical narration—the procedural relations between police officers and civilians in 21st century America.

Justine van der Leun will combine narrative journalism, primary data collection and analysis, and investigative techniques to report on the structural, historic, cultural, and legal forces behind the criminalization of women's defense and survival from abuse.

Sterling Cunio will write and produce *Austin's Echo*, a cross-time dramatic dialogue between Austin Reed—who in the 1830s was the first African American to write a memoir about his incarceration—and a 21st-century prisoner. The similarities of prison dynamics, reform debates and social issues are compared through poetic narration, theatrical elements and music to demonstrate how prison is virtually the same after 185 years.

Vivian D. Nixon will write a personal essay as a precursor to a book-length memoir chronicling her passage from a stable suburban home through phases of mental illness, addiction, incarceration and re-invention. The work exposes the complex individual and structural drivers of mass criminalization through the lens of race and gender.

### **2019-2020 Writing For Justice Cohort:**

Reginald Dwayne Betts will complete his collection of poems, *Felon, Another Spelling of My Name*, and in collaboration with a dramaturg, translate the work into a one-man show that interrogates the experience of coming home from prison.

Nadja Eisenberg-Guyot will use long-form journalism to examine opposition to the prison reform approach represented by New York Mayor Bill de Blasio's "Smaller, Safer, Fairer" Roadmap, which under the guise of decarceration will close Rikers Island and replace it with four "community integrated" jails.

Keeonna Harris will work on *Mainline Mama*, a memoir of her experience as a Black mother co-parenting with an incarcerated father for almost twenty years, exposing the complexities of raising a family while living in the borderlands of the criminal justice system.

Mitchell S. Jackson will work on *Survival Files*, a multimedia project of portrait photography and prose that exposes the often tenuous biographical distinctions between those working within, and those who've become wards of, the criminal justice system.

Justin Rovillos Monson will work on *AMERICAN INMATE*, a sequence of poems in the form of a literary mixtape that samples and remixes various sources, and explores the desires, pains, and experiences of being a young, Filipino-American man in prison.

Priscilla Ocen will use long-form journalism to push against the concept of community supervision as

an antidote to mass incarceration, specifically in relationship to system-involved Black women, accompanied by photographic portraiture and community resource guides.

David Sanchez will mine personal experience to complete a novella-length work of fiction that follows an unnamed 20-year-old protagonist as he struggles with drug addiction, incarceration, joblessness, homelessness, and mental illness.

Beth Shelburne will complete *The Castaways*, a long-form narrative journalism piece about a group of aging men in Alabama who are serving life without parole for minor, nonviolent crimes committed as young adults.

David Heska Wanbli Weiden will work on a hybrid piece of memoir, reportage, and essay that explores the Major Crimes Act's direct contribution to the rise of Native American incarceration through the story of his cousin's first-degree murder conviction, rehabilitation, and release home.

Thomas Bartlett Whitaker will work on *Dividing by Zero*, a series of long-form articles that describe his time living on the Deathwatch section of Texas's death row, his successful clemency commutation by the governor mere minutes before his death, and the administrative limbo of his present life.

#### Further Questions?

Contact PEN America if you have quick questions regarding the application requirements, submission policies, deadlines, or other Fellowship-related issues at [writingforjustice@pen.org](mailto:writingforjustice@pen.org) or by writing to us at **588 Broadway, Suite 303 New York, NY 10012**