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Building Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College:

College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change

Susan Sturm, Kate Skolnick, and Tina Wu

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**Building Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College:
College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change**

REPORT

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Center for Institutional and Social Change**

**In collaboration with The Public Science Project at the Graduate Center of the City
University of New York and Michelle Fine, Social/Personality Psychology at the
Graduate Center of the City University of New York.**

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INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, communities, especially marginalized and low income communities, face challenges resulting from the “school-to-prison pipeline”—a continuum of conditions increasing the probability that people from such marginalized communities, particularly black men, will find themselves in prison rather than college.¹ Dismantling this pipeline has become a significant national focus of advocates and policy makers. In New York City, a network has emerged in the last ten years to focus on building a new pipeline from criminal justice to college. This network focuses on rebuilding the lives of the over 70 thousand people who have fallen into the school-to-prison pipeline. These reentry organizations have identified higher education as a core strategy for reclaiming hope and possibility for people who have become enmeshed in the criminal justice system. This case study documents the strategies and systemic impacts of College Initiative (“CI”), an innovative organization focused on enabling people with criminal justice involvement to enter and succeed in higher education. CI, in collaboration with a larger reentry network, is building pathways of possibility from criminal justice into and through college.

CI grew out of an earlier era of programs in New York State and nationally, when college programs in prison enabled thousands of incarcerated people to receive a college education. From the mid-1970’s until 1994-1995, college programs in prison flourished. CI grew out of an earlier network of programs in New York State that enabled people in prison to receive a college education. Until the mid-1990’s, prison-to-college efforts nationally and in New York concentrated on providing higher education to people in prison. At one point, there were over 350 college programs nationwide, made possible through Pell and state based grants providing financial aid for all low income persons, including people in prison.² Numerous studies have documented the benefits of providing higher education to people in prison. Research shows that participation in higher education reduces re-incarceration and increases public safety, yields taxpayer savings, produces positive impacts on family members, and enables positive contributions by

formerly incarcerated people.³ Nonetheless, in 1994, a provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act eliminated the right of incarcerated men and women to receive federal Pell Grants for postsecondary education while they were incarcerated. Following this move, Governor George Pataki of New York eliminated the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), further limiting the financial assistance available to incarcerated people pursuing higher education. These funding restrictions led to the demise of all but 8 college-in-prison programs.⁴

For Benay Rubenstein, the founder of CI, the loss of these programs spurred a search for another avenue into higher education for people with criminal justice involvement. She became part of a group organized around returning college education to prisons by mobilizing private resources and institutional support. Starting at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, that initiative developed into a consortium that involved 12 different colleges and continues to this day.⁵ But Rubenstein became increasingly frustrated with the fact that “the program at Bedford Hills remained an exception to the rule.” Most of the people who were incarcerated after 1994 did not have access to higher education programs.

Rubenstein decided to create a program to fill the “black hole” of providing higher education to people when they leave prison. She situated the program in New York City because “that’s where most of the people from the New York State System were coming back to.” She discovered that, unlike people still in prison, formerly incarcerated people could receive public funding for college. Through this work, Rubenstein also learned of higher education venues, mostly at City University of New York (CUNY), that afforded access for economically disadvantaged, first generation college students and others in transition to college from challenging circumstances, including those who had been formerly incarcerated. In Rubenstein’s words:

I believe very deeply in the public education system and that CUNY in terms of having schools in every borough where no matter where a person was coming home to, there was a CUNY College that was not difficult to get to. The tuition is as low as you are going to get. New York City has lots of private schools, but when you compare the quality of education and the cost and then, the best bang for the buck always ends up being CUNY.

Equipped with this knowledge and an emerging network of advocates and reentry organizations committed to supporting people coming out of prison, in 2002 Rubenstein founded College Initiative “to rebuild lives, families, and communities through higher education”.⁶

CI’s programmatic approach developed from the insight that financial aid alone would not suffice to enable people coming out of the criminal justice system to enter and succeed in college. Aspiring students must be able to weather a host of challenges facing those seeking to move from criminal justice to college. These challenges are well documented and include insufficient income and access to employment, gaps in academic

skills and preparation, physical and mental health concerns, unstable housing, disrupted family relationships, and parole compliance.⁷ A disproportionate number of those involved in the criminal justice system are products of failing urban schools and are undereducated.⁸ Many of these students come to college from high schools and GED programs that have not prepared them adequately for college-level work. These students typically do not have access to the social capital and opportunity networks that are so crucial to any student's success in college.⁹ Research shows that students, particularly those coming out of the criminal justice system, require support and personal resilience to persist through the many transitions and stressors along the pathway through higher education.¹⁰ CI was set up to provide this support.

What is less well known is that many of the obstacles preventing people from entering and completing college result from institutional and systemic policies and practices that unnecessarily impede students' movement through key transitions en route to college completion. As CI counselors have learned through experience, at every phase of the process, their students must navigate the requirements of complex educational and criminal justice bureaucracies that often operate in silos and impose conflicting demands. These students must also contend with embedded stereotypes and restrictive public policies that prevent them from persisting in college. CI helps students navigate the personal, academic, financial, and systemic barriers that turn the pathway from criminal justice to college into an obstacle course.

Serving both men and women with a high school diploma or GED, and a criminal justice background as its only requirements for participation, CI has developed a continuum of support services that are student-centered and intensive. The program provides a range of services designed to give people coming out of the criminal justice system the tools, knowledge, relationships, and skills necessary to begin and complete a college education and become gainfully employed, as well as informed citizens and community leaders. CI's services include:

- outreach and recruitment, including on-site presentations at pre-release facilities and coordination with the NYS Dept. of Correctional Services pre-release planning;
- orientation/assessment, including an overview of the program and baseline testing of academic skills;
- academic/social preparation, including tutoring, academic remediation through the College Prep program, financial aid counseling, connection to other reentry services, and peer support; and
- retention, including employment assistance, peer mentoring, connection to housing and public benefits entitlements, and counseling.

Over time, CI has discovered that the need for these intensive services far exceeds its limited staffing capacity. Even though CI's staff has doubled, growing from a staff of 3 in 2002 to 7 in 2010, the organization cannot keep pace with the growing need for its services. The New York State Department of Corrections reports that 5,693 college-eligible individuals are released from state facilities and return to New York City each

year, and an even higher number is released from local facilities.¹¹ CI has also realized that it will never be able meet this need simply by reacting to the recurring crises facing program participants. Because of the prevalence of systemic barriers, the organization realizes that it has to do more than simply increase access to college one person at a time. To achieve the goal of empowering people to move from criminal justice through education into informed citizens and community leaders, CI has developed the capacity to address the multi-level challenges that affect large numbers of people attempting to move from criminal justice into and through college. CI has learned how to take a more systemic approach to its work.

This study documents and analyzes CI's development from an individual service delivery program into what we call a boundary-spanning intermediary, an organization that creates crucial connections between intersecting programs and systems affecting movement from the criminal justice system into and through college. In the process, CI has become a catalyst for broader organizational and systems change. Many of the barriers limiting college access and success of formerly incarcerated people also disproportionately affect low income, minority, and returning students.¹² Experience has shown CI that some of these barriers limiting students' access and success are not inevitable or insuperable. Armed with effective strategies, an inquiry approach, and a systems orientation, CI has begun to play a key role in reducing recurring barriers at the level of practice, policy, and system. CI has also become a crucial connector, bridging key institutional actors and smoothing the pathway from one transition to the next. CI works to effect this change even as it also struggles with the challenges of expanding, or "scaling up," with limited resources and uneven institutional support.

This study finds that CI's capacity to play successfully the role of a boundary-spanning intermediary draws upon its hybrid position within a larger network of individuals and organizations. CI is an independent entity that has formed multiple ongoing relationships with key organizations within New York's higher education system, criminal justice system, and reentry community. CI is integrated into New York City's continuum of reentry services, with close connections to state and local correctional agencies and virtually all of the major nonprofit agencies that serve this population. The organization works extensively with the City University of New York and its network of institutions (which most of CI's students attend), which provides the organization with office space and other support. CI works closely with the Black Male Initiative at CUNY, which is itself an intermediary organization designed to "overcome the inequalities that lead to poor academic performance in the K-12 system, the attendant weak enrollment, retention, and graduation from institutions of higher education, and high rates of joblessness and incarceration" among black males.¹³ CI also partners with the Fortune Society which is a leading reentry organization in New York State; indeed, its main offices are located at Fortune Society. CI has also received grants from local and national funding organizations such as the Gates Foundation, the Second Chance Network, and the Fund of the City of New York. These funding opportunities have connected CI with a national reentry education network.

Our research suggests that these inter-organizational relationships have coalesced into an

ongoing mobilization effort, with shared vision, collective strategies, collaborative leadership, and embedded relationships. CI is part of this burgeoning movement in New York and beyond to mitigate the effects of mass incarceration, and to redirect the “school to prison” pipeline from criminal justice to college.

CI’s story illustrates the broader potential of a multi-level systems approach to advancing full participation in higher education. This report uses an in depth case study of CI to identify the multi-level challenges facing reentry programs and their participants, and to document key frameworks and strategies for addressing them so that individual problem solving can be leveraged to have broader impact. It also identifies institution-level changes stemming from CI’s strategies and frameworks, with positive impacts extending to students and faculty beyond CI’s core constituency. Finally, the report demonstrates that these multi-level frameworks and strategies are integral to the successful expansion and scaling up not only of reentry programs but also of many broader initiatives aimed at increasing access and success in higher education. CI’s story exemplifies the potential of a boundary-spanning intermediary organization to serve as a catalyst for multi-level change at the intersection of multiple institutions, thus enabling fuller participation in higher education for under-served groups and communities.

This study builds on prior research demonstrating the effectiveness of college *in* prison, conducted by the Public Science Project at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia Law School. The Public Science Project conducted a collaborative study with the women in prison at Bedford Hills of the impact of the college-in-prison program at Bedford Hills started there in 1997. The resulting report, *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison*, documented the beneficial effects of college for public safety, community, family and individual growth.¹⁴ CI itself was an outgrowth of the prison-in-college collaborative started at Bedford Hills. The Center for Institutional and Social Change conducted studies of two college-in-prison programs, the Bard Prison Project and Inside Out, which focused on understanding the impact of these programs on the “outside” students, faculty, and higher education institutions. These studies show that college-in-prison programs increase student and faculty members’ understanding of and engagement with criminal justice concerns, and enhance the capacity of participants to act as transformative leaders within their own communities.¹⁵ This collaborative study of CI emerged as a result of relationships developed through this research.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

This section describes: (1) the process and criteria that led to the collaborative research relationship among the Center for Institutional and Social Change, the Public Science Project at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and CI focused on documenting and analyzing CI’s institutional strategies and impact study, (2) the conceptual framework informing that research, and (3) the research methodology.

A. The Context for the CI Institutional Impact Study

The study of CI's institutional strategies and impact was conducted as part of a broader Ford-Foundation funded project of the Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia Law School ("the Center") entitled "Building the Architecture of Inclusion in Higher Education." That project seeks: (1) to provide concrete frameworks and strategies enabling higher education institutions to address the structural dynamics producing marginalization of underserved communities; (2) to refocus diversity efforts toward increasing access and participation for those currently marginalized from high quality higher education; and (3) to reconnect merit to the mission of advancing knowledge and addressing pressing social problems.

As part of this research, the Center conducts collaborative case studies of initiatives that have undertaken multi-level change to advance full participation, with the aim of mapping and analyzing the operative frameworks, strategies, and indicators of institutional transformation (www.groundshift.org). The Center identifies potential action-research collaborators that have undertaken institutional transformation to advance full participation and express interest in a systematic inquiry to understand and increase the institutional impact of their processes and outcomes. We have developed criteria to guide the process of selecting partners in long-term research collaborations, which include initiatives that have:

- 1) an *affirmative frame* guiding the work, aimed at creating contexts that advance full participation in higher education for under-served groups and communities;
- 2) demonstrable evidence of *positive outcomes* at the individual and programmatic levels;
- 3) concrete strategies for moving beyond the individual level to take a *multi-level, systems approach* to advancing full participation;
- 4) participation in *cross-institutional collaborations and networks* aimed at having broader impact; and
- 5) capacity and willingness to engage in *reflective inquiry* about the mechanisms, strategies, and impact.

The Center was approached by Michelle Fine of the Public Science Project and Social Personality Psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York to explore the possibility of undertaking an institutional transformation component to the Public Science Project's Ford-Foundation supported study of CI's impact on individuals and their families. We undertook a preliminary inquiry of CI in collaboration with the Public Science Project, and determined that CI was a robust program linking programmatic and systemic change to advance the participation of a marginalized group. We thus formed a research collaboration with the Public Science Project and CI to document and analyze CI's institutional and systems change strategies and impact. That collaboration emerged from the Center's preliminary assessment, now supported by extensive field research, that CI met each of the Center's five criteria for forming an action research collaboration. This section summarizes the basis for that judgment.

1. CI's Affirmative Frame

CI's approach revolves around instilling a sense of possibility and hope in people who have up to that point been caught up in what Michelle Fine and Jessica Ruglis refer to as "circuits of dispossession".¹⁶ Rather than taking a deficits approach, CI projects a set of positive aspirations and goals, setting high but realistic expectations and employing critical analysis to identify and overcome the individual and systemic barriers in the way of achieving those goals. CI's work aims to empower formerly incarcerated women and men of all races and backgrounds "to become gainfully employed, stabilizing forces in their communities, advocates for change, role models for youth, and engaged citizens working for a safer New York City".¹⁷ In this sense, CI's approach exemplifies what the Center refers to as "institutional citizenship." CI aims to enable people of all races, genders, religions, sexual orientations, and backgrounds to have access, realize their capabilities, and participate fully in higher education institutions and ultimately their communities.

2. CI's Positive Programmatic Outcomes

At the individual and programmatic levels, CI has a track record of enabling formerly incarcerated people to access and persist in higher education. Nearly 2,000 students have signed up for support services with the College Initiative, and almost 150 have participated in CI's college preparation courses or are participating in CI's intensive summer preparation "boot camp" at Hostos Community College.¹⁸ As an analysis of the data from 2007-08 revealed, CI students performed on par with the general CUNY population, and CI students entering with general equivalency diplomas (GEDs) outpaced average CUNY GED earners.¹⁹ During the 2009-2010 academic year, 250 students enrolled in school for both semesters; 229 of these students identified as persons of color.²⁰ In June of 2010, 27 students graduated from associate's, bachelor's, and master's programs;²¹ in 2009, 27 students earned 28 degrees.²² In the five years prior, approximately 39 students earned 49 degrees.²³ The recidivism rate for CI program participants was only 3.2%, far lower than general reconviction rates.²⁴ As these figures show, CI has generated demonstrable positive outcomes for the community that it serves. The narratives of current and former students offered a less numerical but equally important perspective on CI's programmatic impact. The comments of one former CI student are representative of the shared descriptions of CI's impact by program participants:

I think CI's contribution has been great, but it's very intangible; those things that you don't see, a feeling that you get when you walk into a room knowing that you're welcome as opposed to walking into a room and not feeling that welcome or just knowing that it's all about business. . . . That's the feeling that you have at CI. If you bring 100%, they're going to bring 150%. They're going to make sure you get whatever you're supposed to get and then beyond.

3. CI's Multi-level, Systems Approach

Our research revealed that CI's strategies and impact go beyond the level of the individual. CI's approach builds on the insight that the success of formerly incarcerated students depends upon creating environments that enable those students to navigate the transitions, barriers and challenges they will inevitably face. CI has taken on a role as a catalyst of change, at an institutional and systems level, as well as at the level of the individual moving from the criminal justice system into college. CI engages in ongoing problem solving in the multiple arenas that affect the mobility and success of formerly incarcerated students. As a result, CI has begun to enhance the capacity of educational and criminal justice institutions to meet the needs of formerly incarcerated students and to address the problems produced by mass incarceration.

As this report will show, CI has developed transportable strategies, tools, relationships and networks aimed at increasing students' resilience in navigating the barriers and challenges on the pathway into and through higher education. In addition, because the issues facing formerly incarcerated overlap substantially with those facing students transitioning into higher education from other challenging settings, CI's work is facilitating institutional improvements that stand to benefit a broader constituency. In the process, CI is generating and elevating the work of transformative leaders, from formerly incarcerated students to faculty to university and community administrators--committed to building the pathway from criminal justice to college.

4. CI's Cross Institutional Collaboration and Networking

Although CI is an independent non-profit organization, most CI students are enrolled at the City University of New York ("CUNY") or in CI's free college prep program. CI works closely with key people and programs at CUNY, in the criminal justice system, in city government, and in community based organizations to facilitate successful enrollment in college and completion of degrees. This emphasis on network and social capital development can be discerned in the resource maps, toolkits, curriculum, and strategic planning documents that CI has developed for its work.²⁵

CI's impact and potential is rooted in a historical moment and a larger reentry network, one that CI has played a role in fostering. Although this study has focused on CI, the research makes clear that a growing cluster of organizations are engaged in complementary work, and that these groups have coalesced into collaborations and networks that have been crucial to the success and sustainability of CI. Together, these networks and projects are now poised to take on larger policy and systemic issues. Recent legislation such as the Second Chance Act of 2007 and renewed interest in restoring federal funding for education in prison offers concrete occasions for the reentry network to mobilize for change in the policy landscape that will help build the pathways from criminal justice to college.

5. CI's Use of Reflective Inquiry

CI has embraced the challenge of tracking and assessing their processes and outcomes, and reflecting regularly about what works and what does not. This is not an easy task in the contexts relevant to this work. Indeed, the problems with the existing data systems could be understood as artifacts of the kinds of bureaucratic fragmentation, stereotyping, and institutional neglect that CI has undertaken to remedy. When CI entered the scene, much of the underlying data on formerly incarcerated students was not being gathered. Moreover, the process of gathering this data poses some risks to the formerly incarcerated students, and has to be done with sensitivity to concerns about confidentiality. CI, in collaboration with other reentry and transitional programs, has undertaken to collect and analyze data on the movement of CI and other formerly incarcerated students into and through the educational system. It has also built in regular opportunities to learn from the patterns and insights of their many collaborators. Recently, CI has become more systematic about its commitment to reflection, through strategic planning, assessment of its mentoring program, and the development of the Reentry Task Force, along with the Black Male Initiative, College and Community Fellowship, and the Prison Reentry Institute. The research collaboration with the Public Science Project and the Center is an outgrowth of CI's reflective inquiry approach.

B. Conceptual Framework for the Study

This research is grounded in several theoretical frameworks, integrated under the rubric of the Architecture of Inclusion. The *Architecture of Inclusion* offers a multi-level approach to institutional transformation aimed at advancing “institutional citizenship,” developed through the integration of multi-disciplinary knowledge and prior field research. It is intended as a framework that is useful to those engaged in the work of understanding and promoting institutional change toward full participation. Because it is intended as an “action theory” to “organize diagnostic and prescriptive inquiry” for those tackling complex, multi-dimensional problems,²⁶ the Architecture of Inclusion framework integrates theories that combine the “what” (pragmatic vision), the “how” (mechanisms and strategies) and the “who” (change agents).

Several bodies of theoretical work are foundational to the Architecture of Inclusion framework. First, the Architecture of Inclusion employs a normative frame based on the work of Amartya Sen, John Dewey and others who have elaborated an affirmative and pragmatist frame focused on achieving outcomes aimed at advancing well-being, realizing capabilities, and enabling robust social and economic citizenship in specified contexts. It uses this affirmative frame to critically evaluate the participation and status of marginalized groups, building on the work of critical race and feminist theorists.²⁷

Second, the Architecture of Inclusion embraces a multi-level systems analytical frame for addressing complex problems, drawing on the Institutional Analysis and Development framework developed by Elinor Ostrom.²⁸ This work offers a theoretical framework for conducting institutional analysis, from the perspective of a policy analyst seeking to fix problems through institutional change. It provides conceptual tools to define the relevant scope and level for addressing complex problems, the participants operating at different

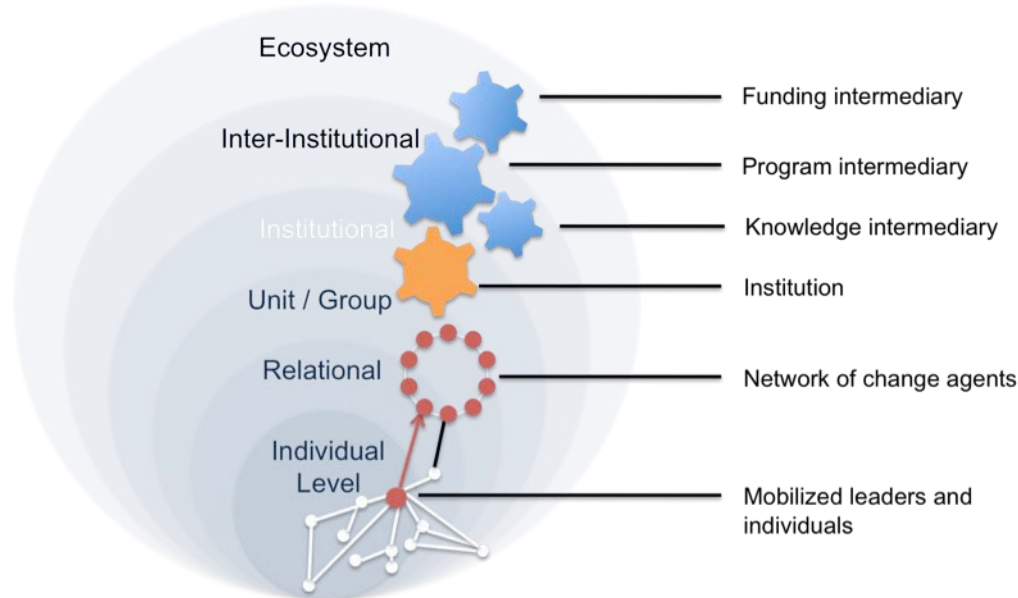
levels whose decisions influence how those problems are addressed, and the underlying rules affecting change agents' choices and constraints.

Third, the Architecture of Inclusion framework draws on the body of work establishing the importance of leveraging social capital and linking opportunity networks.²⁹ Michelle Fine's recent work connects that literature to patterns of marginalization and dispossession perpetuated by public policy and "embodied" in urban youth from communities of color that have been cut off from public resources.³⁰

Finally, a body of social psychological work lays the foundation for understanding how social context affects individuals' experience of "institutional citizenship," as well as for assessing what full participation looks like at the level of the individual. Bonita London, Vanessa Anderson, and Geraldine Downey have examined institutional citizenship through the lens of social psychology. They define an inclusive environment as "one in which all institutional members (particularly those who have been historically excluded and/or marginalized from the institution) are supported and expected to thrive both academically and socially, contributing not only to their individual success but to the success of the institution as a whole."³¹ Building on Claude Steele's work on stereotype threat, they define engagement to refer "not only to the academic investment, motivation and commitment that students demonstrate within their institution (both in and out of the classroom context), but also to the psychological connection, comfort, and sense of belonging that students feel toward their institution, their peers, their professors and administrators."³² The Architecture of Inclusion project recognizes that the success of systems-level changes ultimately rests on whether those changes are experienced by groups of individuals as increasing their engagement and full participation. In this way, the individual level research provides both diagnostics and indicators for systems-level improvement.

The Architecture of Inclusion undertakes to link this literature to questions of agency—how change agents can leverage change to advance full participation in the "action arenas" where they can get traction. Action arenas are defined by a shared, ongoing project involving a set of "repeat players" who interact over time in relation to a common problem or goals. It often operates across formal organizational boundaries. The action arena for CI's work consists of (1) the identified organizations, programs and people operating at different levels and shaping students' opportunity structures, (2) the rules of the game that shape the choices available to those whose decisions influence students' trajectory, and (3) the choice points for those shaping the contexts affecting students' progress from criminal justice to college. The Architecture of Inclusion framework draws on secondary literature and earlier field research documenting and analyzing transformation-in-motion to develop core concepts such as institutional citizenship, intervention at inflection points, organizational catalysts, boundary spanning intermediaries, and indicators of institutional transformation. These linked concepts inform the study of College Initiative and have been elaborated and refined in the course of this work.

The Architecture of Inclusion framework integrates this multi-level knowledge into an analytical framework for identifying the barriers operating on different levels and across different institutional settings, the opportunities for shifts in practice that can have broader and lasting impact, and the agents of change in a position to take meaningful action. This analytical framework is depicted in the following visual representation:



Center for Institutional and Social Change © 2010

12

This multi-level analytical framework fit squarely with the goals of our inquiry about CI's institutional strategies and impact. CI is striving to change the lives of individual students by intervening at the points where the organization can have maximum impact. CI's approach is itself multilevel in its orientation. Starting from the point of first contact, staff and peer counselors intervene at the level of the individual student, to help understand options, form goals, develop a plan of action, identify resources, cultivate relationships, solve problems, and enable follow through. As they provide this individual-level assistance, the staff inevitably confronts barriers and challenges, some of which are rooted in decisions and practices dictated by people higher up in the organization or in other policy positions outside the organization. Many problems presented initially as personal or individual issues turn out to be rooted in policies, organizational practices, or systems affecting broader groups.³³ We observed CI engaging in a form of root cause analysis, aimed at identifying patterns and causal dynamics that were amenable to intervention within the context of the organization or some other domain over which the organization has influence, where the source can be located, at least in part, in malleable rules, practices, decisions, or norms.

We have systematically inquired about how CI participants understand the problems they seek to address, where they focus their energy, who they work with, when they intervene, and whether they connect across levels and institutional arenas. This study was undertaken to build knowledge about how to mobilize individual, programmatic and systems change necessary for higher education to become a venue where people coming

out of the criminal justice system can succeed. How can change agents enlist key allies and institutions in creating an “architecture of inclusion” for those whose lives have been shaped by what Michelle Fine has called “circuits of dispossession?”³⁴ More specifically, the goals of this study were to document how CI has affected, transformed and benefitted not only individuals but also the institutional networks and capacities of collaborating colleges, universities, criminal justice administrations, and prison reform advocacy groups. From these goals, informed by the Architecture of Inclusion framework, we developed the following research questions, through collaborative inquiry meetings among Columbia- and CUNY-based researchers and CI staff:

- **Institutional impact:** What broader institutional impacts have emerged from CI’s involvement in facilitating access and success for formerly incarcerated students? What are the frameworks, strategies, and tools used by CI to facilitate the linkage of individual and systems change? What are the key pressure points for building the capacity to enable the successful participation of formerly incarcerated students?
- **Networks:** How does CI use its role as an intermediary to link and leverage relationships with other individuals, organizations and networks involved in related work?
- **Sustainability and Institutionalization:** What factors influence the sustainability and scalability of a program like CI?

C. Study Methodology

To explore these questions, the research team began with several collaborative inquiry sessions with key participants in CI’s work focused on articulating their conception of CI’s strategies, key program components, primary collaborators, and change theories. Researchers then conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 individuals from the following groups: CI staff, CI alumni, current and former CI students, funders, policy makers, community based organizations, central and college-based CUNY administrators, and faculty members who have been identified as having contact with formerly incarcerated students.³⁵ Participants were selected because of their experience working with CI, with formerly incarcerated students, or with people facing comparable challenges. Referrals from CI staff members provided the initial set of interview subjects, and “snowball sampling”³⁶ was used thereafter to identify additional subjects. Researchers tailored the interview protocol, to the particular knowledge and circumstances of each interview participant. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy.

Center researchers also conducted three focus groups with CI students, reentry organizations working closely with CUNY, and organizations that work with students transitioning to college at CUNY. These focus groups were organized in collaboration with CI and the Black Male Initiative (“BMI”) at CUNY. They focused on mapping the barriers, key relationships, strategic opportunities, and centers of gravity for increasing access and success of students moving from criminal justice to college.

Researchers also analyzed additional primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included grant proposals and reports to funders, CI-produced documentary films (“Re-Imagine the Future,” “Echoes of Incarceration,” a film of the 2009 College Initiative graduation, a video about the process of developing the mentor toolkit, and a taped interview with New York State Department of Correctional Services Commissioner Brian Fischer); raw data from CI’s database to assess retention rates, grade point averages, major and career choice, presence of concurrent jobs, and more; CI-produced materials on its website: <http://www.collegeinitiative.org/>; promotional brochures and fact sheets; mentor toolkit, and mentor program materials such as mentor training syllabus and mentee screening rubric); documents related to partner programs like the summer college preparation intensive at Hostos Community College (Hostos), BMI, and the Reentry Task Force.

In addition, the research team searched for literature and secondary sources addressing issues at the intersection of criminal justice and higher education, and the reentry process. Specifically, this search situated CI in the context of the benefits of college in and after prison, as well as the challenges that individuals coming out of prison face, whether or not they are concurrently pursuing higher education. This literature review expanded on past Center analyses of major studies and reports in the area of educational opportunities and incarceration, and conducting new searches on reentry challenges. To do so, researchers examined films like “The Last Graduation;” reviewed bibliographies that other advocates, reentry organizations, and researchers compiled; and conducted Internet research to uncover academic literature, news reports, and legal materials.³⁷

Finally, researchers observed and analyzed events that were identified by CI leadership as significant or formative of CI’s role. These included attending meetings of the Reentry Task Force and Reentry Education Network, two networks in which CI plays an active role; several events conducted as part of the peer mentoring pilot program and a training session for new mentors; a College Initiative orientation; a planning meeting for the Hostos summer preparation intensive, and two College Initiative graduation ceremonies.

Once the first phase of data gathering was completed, the research team undertook a process of coding and analyzing responses to interview questions about impressions and experiences. Researchers developed an initial set of codes based on the research and interview questions, and then periodically revised the codes as they reviewed interview transcripts and notes. The initial coding list provided the framework for a “Mindmap,” a tool that permits visual representation of research findings, warehousing of data, and linking to online resources and documents. CISC researchers used this tool to organize and review pieces of data. Following the initial coding process, they then analyzed the data, reworking it and developing memos identifying emerging findings, which they shared with CI and CUNY to garner feedback and test the findings’ resonance. From those sessions, they were then able to develop a preliminary set of findings (analytical categories and supporting data), which are reported below.

III. FINDINGS

A. CI's Core Strategies for Promoting Multi-level Transformation

CI is a program with a small staff and an ambitious long-term goal: making college a reality for every GED or high school graduate coming out of the criminal justice system in New York State. The program thus faces a challenge confronted by many service providers working with under-served groups: how can the program expand its reach without dulling its impact? CI's experience has shown that success at the individual level depends upon intensive support enabling people coming into college from a criminal justice background to weather considerable academic, financial and personal challenges if they are to persist and succeed in their studies. Increasing the size of the staff is necessary to expand the organization's ability to meet the growing demand for its services. However, CI does not view organizational growth alone as a sufficient strategy for scaling up. For CI to succeed, the program must figure out how to leverage its impact.

This question about leveraging impact beyond the level of individual service delivery lies at the core of this study. We gathered and analyzed data reflecting CI's strategies for expanding its scope and serving as a catalyst for systems change. That inquiry revealed a set of linked strategies that cut across CI's work and which we identified as central to the organization's capacity to intervene in ways that extended its impact beyond the individual level. By strategies, we mean plans of action and specifications of moves that are put to use by CI's leadership, staff, students, and collaborators to advance shared goals (Ostrom 2005).³⁸ Our research shows that CI developed these strategies from ongoing analysis of recurring situations facing CI students and the "rules of the game" that influence the range of choice. In this sense, CI operates self-consciously as an institutional analyst and strategist with explicit attention to developing and implementing theories of change. This capability is crucial for linking individual and systemic change. This section identifies and illustrates these strategies, and discusses their relationship to multi-level change.

1. Reframing Re-entry

One of the most crucial hurdles facing CI, as described in the interviews of staff, students, and faculty, stems from the need to shift the mindset of students, faculty, administrators, and policy makers about the relationship between criminal justice and higher education. At the level of the individual, prospective students coming out of prison must be able to view college as a legitimate goal if they are to take on the challenges of making that aspiration real. Faculty and administrators who are the gatekeepers of educational opportunity have to accept that formerly incarcerated people belong in college, that education is crucial to their re-integration, and that educators have a responsibility to enable these students to succeed. At a more collective and policy level, institutional change requires bringing together groups of people at the intersection of criminal justice and education, and enabling them to see the connections across these issues.

The data shows that many students, faculty, and administrators do not initially come to the table with this developmental view of formerly incarcerated students and their

relationship to educational opportunity and success. We heard repeatedly from students, faculty, and staff that many people coming out of prison do not believe that they deserve a “second chance” at college, that they belong in college, that the opportunity to go to college exists for them, or that they could actually attend college, graduate, and get a job that builds on their educational success. Many of them lack knowledge about the opportunities that in fact exist and exposure to people like them who have succeeded in the past. Formerly incarcerated individuals have to overcome their own doubts about their legitimacy as students.

Faculty, staff and students consistently reported that students’ insecurities about their status were reinforced by cues from their environment that they in fact do not belong. Staff members and students described numerous interactions with administrators and students at CUNY during which they disclosed their identity as formerly incarcerated students and then received strong cues that they were not welcome. There was also a consensus that many people in key positions have misimpressions about formerly incarcerated people, and that misinformation and lack of familiarity contributes to stereotyping about this group. Data from the interviews and focus groups involving leaders, faculty, and students of reentry programs yielded a widely shared perception that people in leadership positions at CUNY have not assumed responsibility for addressing the challenges facing this constituency comprising their student population.

CI has developed a reframing strategy aimed at shifting how formerly incarcerated students see themselves and how they are seen by others, from the frame of “former prisoner” to that of “student and citizen.” We observed several approaches that aim to increase knowledge and reframe perceptions of formerly incarcerated students in this manner. One strategy uses branding through language choices geared to place education at the core of emerging identity as a device for shifting how formerly incarcerated students are perceived. From day one, CI participants become, and are consistently referred to, as students. Benay Rubenstein summarized a practice we consistently observed:

Once we started writing to people inside or they met us coming out [of prison], that person became a student and was called a student. To this day, everyone we worked with [is a] student... Every single communication to our students was as ...a student and the instructors related to every individual as a student. That was like a minor miracle and a very life-changing experience for many people to now identify themselves as being students.

Another example of this branding strategy for reframing reentry comes from an approach CI learned from the NuLeadership Policy Group, led by Eddie Ellis. NuLeadership initiated a campaign to use the word “people” instead of using language such as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons. This campaign is a part of a broader effort “to assist our transition from prison to communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves.”³⁹ CI adopted this suggestion 6 years ago, when it first came out. Its leadership has seen this language take hold at meetings with New York State agencies.

CI also gives people a vocabulary to describe their histories in a way that minimizes the stigma but also honors their experience and places it in a systemic context. Staff and students have developed a shorthand called “however”, which refers to a strategy for communicating the shift in identity from prisoner to student. As one student shared, “I say that I have a criminal background, “HOWEVER”—as Cheryl would say—I also am a student, and so on.” In the words of another student who became a CI leader, “This is what I was doing when I was a young person. I made some bad mistakes and the court sentenced me. However, this is what I’m doing now.”

CI also uses the strategy of *reframing* at the level of interpersonal relationships, to encourage a sense of leadership and empowerment among students with initial self-doubts. The CI program enlists formerly incarcerated people, particularly CI alumni who have navigated the reentry process in the first person, as collaborators, mentors, and leaders. When formerly incarcerated students perform effectively and publicly as leaders, they directly challenge many people’s assumptions about the capabilities and contributions of this group. This empowerment strategy reverberates throughout CI’s work, and is widely identified as crucial to enabling the critical shift of identity – from prisoner to student – to occur.

Not only does CI *reframe* students’ identities for themselves and for each other, the program reinforces a public identity shift by consistently representing formerly incarcerated students as successful students and leaders in its public communications. Using videotapes and technologies, CI provides compelling narratives of students, in their own voices, who defy stereotypes and contribute significantly to their communities and fields. In its brochures, videos, and newsletters, CI provides concrete and varied examples of students’ accomplishments. Using their personal experience and expertise, CI students become leaders on criminal justice policy and reform, speaking on panels about barriers, successes, and misinformation to audiences of correctional officials, faculty, admissions representatives, students, professionals, and community based organizations. In this way, CI students embody the shift from prisoner to citizen, demonstrating the capacity of formerly incarcerated people to succeed academically and use their experience to promote positive community change.

At a broader systemic and institutional level, CI emphasizes the need to change the larger context shaping how criminal justice issues are treated. CI staff and participants recognize that indifference, bias, and hostility toward people with criminal justice histories make successful integration more difficult, and that these attitudes stand in the way of assuming responsibility for remedying problems rooted in institutional and social policy. CI uses its position and relationships to shift this public and institutional understanding. In the process, we saw numerous examples of new alliances and relationships emerging from interactions prompted by this reframing strategy.

In order to *reframe* existing ideas about criminal justice and reentry, and to increase understanding about the relationship between criminal justice and education, CI places these issues on the agenda together, and does so in arenas targeting broader concerns,

such as the crisis of the black male or the failure of urban education. Many of the challenges facing CI students are not unique to those coming out of prison, and they are linked to a range of larger problems facing the communities to which many CI students will return. Because it is extensively networked with funders, on-campus programs, and others, CI is able to participate in a range of events that are not exclusively reentry related, raising the visibility of the prison-to-college transition process beyond its core constituency and integrating criminal justice into other public concerns. One important example of this strategy involves its connection to programs like the Black Male Initiative and COPE, which address issues of race, gender, and poverty, all of which intersect with mass incarceration. Through joint events, CI is able to make these intersections explicit, and encourage people like faculty, students, advocates, and administrators to put criminal justice issues on their own agendas, working toward systemic change. This approach of *reframing* through collaborating with other on-campus organizations that are not exclusively reentry related is also an example of the *collaborative problem solving* strategy, which is identified and explained later in this paper.

2. Intervening at Inflection Points

CI aims to have maximum leverage in its work with individual students, and to improve the environments they inhabit so that they, and others like them, will be more likely to persist in college and graduate. The organization has learned that a triage approach—responding individually to urgent needs as they arise—is often too limited and too late to have lasting impact on individuals. An individual-level, reactive approach also puts staff in the position of solving the same problems over and over again. CI has searched for a strategy that would enable the organization to be more proactive, collective, and systemically oriented in its work. Our research has revealed a common practice that has coalesced into a core strategy for leveraging impact, which we call “intervening at inflection points.”

An inflection point is a turning point, a shift in the direction of behavior or performance. It can occur as a result of students’ movement through stages that are structured into the pathway from prison to college. This pathway has been referred to as the “life course” or “the human capital continuum – the developmental pathway that kids and adults travel”.⁴⁰ Over the course of the pathway into and through college, there are key transition points – for example, picking a college, arranging financial aid, signing up for classes, taking exams, finding work opportunities – that demand the capacity to manage different relationships and organizations that do not communicate with each other directly and that impose different and sometimes conflicting requirements.⁴¹ Without sufficient knowledge, support, resources, and capabilities, hurdles that could be relatively simple to navigate turn into major roadblocks that can trigger a downward spiral making students more likely to give up or fail. One former CI student who is currently a CI counselor illustrated a typical challenge facing students left to fend for themselves at one early inflection point within the CUNY bureaucracy—registration for classes:

They take these CUNY aptitude tests and they get their scores. They're given their scores and they're thrown into a room with a whole bunch of computers and they say, "Register..." with no counseling. They just presume that they know what it is that they want to major in, that they know the class codes, that they know the process and so that could be pretty daunting.

In addition to the key transitions built into the educational pathway, inflection points can be triggered by external events formerly incarcerated students face a series of additional environmental stressors.⁴² These stressors stem from a variety of sources, including the criminal justice system, under-resourced families and communities, limited familiarity with preparation for college, housing problems, as well as emotional, financial, and physical challenges. Taken together, these environmental stressors create a constant presence of unpredictable shocks that students must weather. They can also become inflection points in students' development, which can either strengthen their resilience or end their academic career.

Inflection points are not necessarily downward-trending. Events or opportunities can arise which have the potential to catapult students to a higher level of achievement. For example, strategically timed conferences, research opportunities and job offerings in students' area of interest can trigger an upward trajectory placing students at a new level of performance.

CI has focused systematic attention on these inflection points as a target for strategic analysis and intervention. CI has devoted energy and resources to identifying inflection points, and then developing strategic interventions aimed at supporting students at these transition points. CI regularly analyzes the patterns emerging from its collective experience working with students over time, and arranges its support services to maximize the likelihood that someone will be present at pivotal, key transition points in the pathway. CI, in collaboration with its network partners, has developed regular occasions to gather information about the predictable hurdles facing students as they attempt to move through the system.

A coordinated and multi-level support system provides the foundation for this pattern-identification and intervention process. CI has developed and continues to cultivate a wrap-around set of relationships and practices that enable early and timely intervention for a targeted group of students so that they can overcome challenges and embrace opportunities at their inflection points, when they are still manageable and amenable to change. CI leadership and staff cultivate and then link these students to a web of committed trust relationships, operating on many different levels. This web enlists the involvement of people in a variety of positions to spot roadblocks at critical times – whether they are anticipated or not – and to take timely action. In this way, CI leaders, many of whom are CI graduates themselves, provide strategically timed intervention poised to have impact on student retention. Importantly, in addition to the hub of connections among staff and mentors, CI has also cultivated and leveraged a variety of relationships that draw on the commitment, expertise and resources of formerly

incarcerated students, community based organizations, CUNY administrators, and faculty. This multi-layered web of support relationships is deliberately diversified and overlapping. This configuration increases the likelihood that someone with necessary knowledge, persistence and social capital will be in a position to spot problems and opportunities, and to intervene before minor impediments become serious.

CI engages in systematic and ongoing analysis of key transition points, milestones, and stress points with its cadre of collaborators, so that it can enable them to spot trends or developments before they become full-blown crises or before it is too late to take advantage of new opportunities. The staff set up “tickler system”: “when we initially see somebody after orientation, we kind of do an assessment and based upon what a person tells us about what it is that they want to do, we’ll set up another appointment.” Once the staff determine that people are serious about going to school, they create an excel spreadsheet, check up on them at key times, and give out their cell phone number and invite them to call if they have any kind of problem. “Because if I don’t have the answer, I probably know somebody that does so I could just point them in the right direction.”

An example will clarify how CI’s strategy of intervening at inflection points works at the level of individual students. It illustrates the challenges of navigating the registration process for CI students. Although CI knew in advance that John Doe, a student enrolled in their program, would need to register for a remedial math class, CUNY would not allow John to register for this class until he received his test scores. Because of a bureaucratic mistake, John did not receive these scores until the day before classes. As predicted, he had missed the cut-off by a few points, and tried to register for the remedial math course. At that point, he was informed that the class was closed and there was nothing he could do. Faced with an uncooperative bureaucracy, the student decided to give up. Aware that the math scores were due any day, John’s CI counselor called John to see how he was doing. During that call, John apologized to the counselor for “1) not calling me back and 2) for wasting the waiver because he said that he wasn’t going to go to school and that this was probably not for him, that this is the first time in his life that he tried to do something positive and he couldn’t get any help.” At this key turning point, the staff person intervened: “I went to his house the next morning and I picked him up and I took him to Bronx Community and I marched into the dean’s office and we started from there and we just chipped away at the bureaucracy and so I got him into Math-05.” In the words of another graduate, CI was “the glue that kept everything together.”

CI also draws on its cumulative knowledge of transition and stress points to identify cross-cutting patterns and trends. The organization structures occasions for collaborative inquiry, bringing together students, staff, faculty and experts to brainstorm about the patterns they see in their interactions with students and their intervention strategies for addressing these challenges. Tracing students’ developmental pathway in this way enables CI to develop and continually improve knowledge about where inflection points are likely to occur, and how best to be in a position to respond effectively when and where they do. This reflective inquiry approach was used as the first step in a variety of meetings and program initiatives.

Using this approach, for example, CI was able to identify critical junctures affecting students who are just entering college from the criminal justice system, including:

- Filling out financial aid applications, which requires students to contend with questions about their income levels and criminal history;
- Completing online admissions applications and then registering via computer, both of which expose students' inexperience with new technologies as a result of having spent time in prison;
- Taking the required placement examination upon entering CUNY, at which point the "academic gap" becomes apparent and can combine with concerns about financial aid availability; and
- Attending the first week of classes, during which fear of exposure as a formerly incarcerated person, as well as other insecurities and concerns, can arise.

Although CI's support network is quite robust in the area of identifying and intervening at downward-trending inflection points, as a general matter, CI is less systematic when it comes to leveraging upward inflection points. As students succeed academically, they are searching for opportunities to build on that success, to figure out their potential career paths, and to connect with people who can further their development and advance their careers. Like every other students planning their future, CI students require access to social capital—knowledge about how to navigate within particular fields and concrete opportunities for research, professional development, and employment.⁴³

CI continues to struggle in its efforts to develop ongoing collaborations with a wider group of CUNY leaders and faculty in a position to help students take advantage of upward inflection points. CI does provide students with public information about research, fellowship and career opportunities through the CI newsletter, publicizes and celebrates student accomplishments, draws on reentry organizations and graduates to identify job opportunities, and offers jobs within CI to excelling students.⁴⁴ While these supports have created a social capital network for CI students, they do not appear to have been systematically studied, and have yet to extend beyond the reentry-centric safe space that CI has forged. CI currently relies on a small but committed cadre of faculty with a long-term commitment to CI and the constituency with whom it works. One faculty member in particular noted that this approach could pigeonhole students, inadvertently limiting their career options.

CI's limited success in cultivating relationships with CUNY faculty and administrators may result from the shared perception that faculty remain uninterested in or even hostile toward work with formerly incarcerated students. That perception has been amplified by the recent refusal of Medgar Evers College's president to certify the NuLeadership Institute as a CUNY center.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding the push back experienced by CI staff and allies at CUNY, our research has identified untapped opportunities for CI and other reentry organizations to link with CUNY faculty who are independently doing work to support students with criminal justice backgrounds or conduct research relevant to CI's constituencies. While CI is well known in some CUNY circles (especially those working

on issues of criminal justice and reentry),⁴⁶ it has not fully networked with faculty as sources of social capital so that students can access a wider range of resources and relationships. Faculty members who work closely with formerly incarcerated students report that these students bring a level of drive and focus to their academic and professional development that distinguishes them from many traditional college students. These faculty members offered accounts of students whose lives were transformed by opportunities afforded by relationships with faculty, administrators, and professionals who provide opportunities to cultivate leadership and advance careers. CI students who develop successful relationships with professors provide opportunities, incentives and encouragement for faculty to work with future reentry students. Indeed, many faculty interviewees knew of formerly incarcerated students in their classes, but did not even recognize the name “College Initiative” per se. As one professor noted, “the more we know, the more we can help.” Several students described experiences in which faculty members sent students to CI, insisting that their willingness to work with CI depended upon CI’s involvement.

It is also important to note that CI does not currently have sufficient resources to provide individual, wrap-around support to many of the students who need it. We heard many reports that CI could not meet the current demand for its services, and that the staff was holding back on some of its active recruitment work because the organization does not currently have the resources to respond to the need that is typically generated from these events. CI is actively pursuing funding opportunities to expand its small staff, alone and in collaboration with other reentry education organizations working with CUNY students, such as the College and Community Fellowship. Even with adequate staffing levels, however, a model focused purely on service delivery, without producing systems change, would fall short of CI’s goal of enabling every eligible person pursue college. For this reason, CI is using its knowledge of inflection points to guide the development of a strategy designed to have broader impact.

The identification of inflection points has enabled CI to organize more collective responses to predictable transitions and stressors. For example, CI has formalized the role of peer mentoring by developing a peer mentoring network that matches more experienced CI students who have been successful at college with students who have been identified as people who would benefit from a peer mentor. Interview data showed a broad consensus about the value of this peer network. “When you know other people are carrying your same burden, it’s not as heavy,” one student said, “If I was trying to go to school all on my own, I probably would have dropped out a long time ago. But, seeing other people strive through the same dilemmas and hardships, it’s encouraging.”

CI involved the peer mentors in a process of identifying and developing shared solutions for common obstacles facing students. Its analysis provided the knowledge needed to develop a mentor “toolkit,” which contains a guide for mentors, a timeline for when challenges are likely to arise, and a resource map for the various systems with which formerly incarcerated students come into contact. The program equips mentors with the ability to serve students not only at key transition points but also at points when they could reasonably anticipate students would need guidance or support; the timeline, for

example, primes mentors to think about times during the academic year when environmental stressors are likely to arise.⁴⁷ The mentoring program self-consciously aims for peer mentors to act as CI's eyes and ears, as well as the first line of defense for students experiencing challenges, giving staff members the space to think systematically about how to improve access at the institutional and policy levels, and to develop a clearer division of labor among themselves. The mentoring program also uses a rubric to identify students who could most benefit from having mentors. Significantly, CI has built in structured occasions for reflection, using its mentor training course as an opportunity to expand and revise existing resources.

There is also evidence that CI is attempting to address this challenge by mobilizing change at a more systemic level (in addition to seeking additional resources to expand its own bandwidth). CI is developing institution-wide programs that can help a broader range of students at points of predictable stress or transition. One such program is providing comprehensive college preparation courses, both at the Fortune Society and through its new Hostos-based summer intensive course, which CI aims to scale outward to other college campuses this year. Systems change is pursued by combining strategic intervention at inflection points with a broader strategy of collaborative problem solving.

3. Systematizing Multi-level, Collaborative Problem Solving

The previous section documents how CI, along with other reentry organizations, has developed ongoing collaborations with other CI staff, students, and re-entry partners to identify the “critical indicators” of ongoing problems, and to locate systemic roots of these patterns.⁴⁸ That process has made it clear that the same barriers surfaced over and over, and that responding to individual crises would overwhelm CI's capacity unless problems could also be addressed at a more collective and systemic level. Other service delivery programs have come to recognize the systemic underpinnings of their clients' individual challenges. Yet, many have found it difficult to move beyond individual-level triage. Organizations that do focus on policy or systems change frequently lack day-to-day involvement with the individuals who experience these system failures. As a result, policy based institutions may lack the context-specific understanding required to develop strategies that will work in practice.⁴⁹

CI has developed strategies aimed at bridging this gap between individual and systemic problem solving. CI is a repeat player, interacting frequently with the same sets of actors within criminal justice, higher education, and reentry. As such, it is positioned to observe cross-cutting patterns, aggregate knowledge, and leverage its relationships to solve recurring problems. This collaborative problem solving approach has built CI's capacity to intervene simultaneously at many different levels of practice. This section analyzes CI's multi-level problem-solving strategy, using examples of systemic analysis and intervention moving from individual students to groups of students to academic offices to the college-level to the ecosystem.

From individual to collective intervention: the example of peer mentoring

The evolution of CI's mentoring program illustrates its use of collaborative problem solving to move from individual to collective intervention strategies. Mentoring has been a cornerstone of CI's work from its inception. Benay Rubenstein, CI's founder, modelled a strategy of forming relationships of trust between CI and its clientele and then doing "what-ever-it-takes" to enable CI students to succeed. This hands-on relationship building approach was built into the culture of the organization. As students developed self-efficacy and resilience, they were encouraged to become the supporters for those following in their footsteps. This one-on-one strategy proved successful for those who had the benefit of CI's hands-on support. But the need outstripped the organization's bandwidth. The organization's self-analysis revealed a pattern of success at recruiting people into college and effectiveness in intervening at the level of the individual case, but mixed results in supporting students who did not ask for help and in meeting their goals for student retention. One obvious strategy was to expand the size of its staff, and CI has embarked on that strategy as well by increasing and diversifying its funding base. But CI recognized that if it sought to increase its long-term scope and impact it had to figure out how to reach beyond the individual.

CI's peer mentoring program grew out of this intention to broaden the program's impact and enable broader systemic change. The project "began with a set of statistics." As Michael Carey, CI's director noted, 'we have had a drop out rate historically of around 50 percent after the first semester. But if a student makes it through the second semester the drop out rate is about 15 percent.' CI determined that they should focus on how to get students through that second semester, and that they couldn't achieve this by relying on counselors alone. At the same time, CI realized that it had cultivated a group of students who were now in a position to play a central role in expanding the program's capacity. CI had already produced over 70 graduates, providing "a great body of students with a vast amount of experience who have faced the problems that incoming students face now." Research and experience showed that people who have successfully navigated the move from prison to college bring credibility and commitment to their mentoring roles. Research also showed that students benefit from regular interactions with a cohort of peers facing similar challenges.

Based on this research and self-analysis, CI enlisted groups of people with different strengths to develop a peer mentoring program. The planning process brought those students together with CI leadership, leadership from other reentry programs with successful practices, identified a set of criteria for successful mentors, and then invited a group of former CI students to collaborate in the process of designing the peer mentoring system. From the beginning, the process was designed to be evidence-based and fully collaborative. It began with a systematic analysis of "critical indicators" of success or struggle, and the points at which those indicators become visible. The group then gathered and analyzed the available strategies for intervening at these inflection points, using both a systematic inquiry of students' experience and the insight of re-entry program leaders who had designed successful mentoring programs. CI also enlisted the collaboration of program designers from the Parsons school, to help facilitate the

collaborative design process and to translate their ideas into tools that would be user-friendly and portable to different settings. They contracted with the Vera Institute as a program evaluator, to ensure that they would identify their logic model and evaluate their success over time in relation to their stated goals.

With the support of these collaborative designers, other reentry program leaders, and CI staff, the group designed and implemented a peer mentoring program and toolkit. CI has now recruited and trained its first cohort of peer mentors. It has identified a group of students based on who will benefit most from a peer mentor, and have matched peer mentors and mentees. The tools are now featured on CI's website. The problem solving strategy used to develop the mentoring program and tool will also be used to monitor its progress and learn from its successes and failures, and expand its use. Other academic success and reentry programs are using CI's tools to redesign their mentoring approach. This program will also enable CI to systemically collect data about *why* students are dropping out, which it can apply not just to improving individual-level service but also to developing solutions at other levels of the system.

From recurring individual problems to unit- or program-level solutions

CI also links its analysis of recurring individual problems to more systemic interventions aimed at improvement in institution-level practices affecting formerly incarcerated students. Through its repeated interactions with key personnel at CUNY and in the criminal justice system, CI has accumulated knowledge of recurring bureaucratic delays and conflicting requirements that prevent formerly incarcerated students (and others transitioning to college) from succeeding. When the opportunity arises, CI develops more global solutions that eliminate bureaucratic red tape and reconcile competing demands for all CI students. It accomplishes this program or unit-level change by cultivating long-term relationships with strategically located personnel in different offices, particularly those who share a general commitment to providing access for and addressing the needs of formerly incarcerated students. These allies collaborate to come up with collective solutions to problems brought to their attention through their interactions with CI.

For example, CI staff and students identified a recurring problem of mismatches between CUNY's fixed and often rigid deadlines and CI students' more fluid and unpredictable timetables. As one CI leader described the problem, "[I]t's really important when someone comes home and they're in a relatively stable . . . and they have the intent to follow higher education to engage immediately, and this is impossible when CUNY has a deadline in the first week of February." To address this challenge, CI has "worked out on campus-by-campus basis relationships with different admissions officers that allow us to work with the time tables." A similar dynamic is evident in CI's effort to address another problem that surfaced as a result of repeat interaction: students are charged small administrative fees for various steps in the process that they cannot afford. CI, in collaboration with other reentry organizations, has worked out a variety of fee waivers for their students, through their collaboration with key allies within the CUNY system.

CI's multi-level strategy has proven helpful in navigating between the demands of confidentiality and disclosure of students' criminal justice backgrounds. For some students seeking to integrate into the college culture, it is important for them to be able to interact as students, not formerly incarcerated students. Many of them have had the experience of disclosing past incarceration as part of seeking help, only to face hostile reactions and closed-off opportunities. In addition, some students seek to leave their criminal justice histories behind, and thus want to avoid disclosure wherever possible. At the same time, non-disclosure makes it difficult to obtain resources and assistance needed to address special challenges facing formerly incarcerated students. Moreover, some formerly incarcerated students view disclosure of their identity as a crucial step in their own reintegration and in the integration of criminal justice concerns into the university's work. For instance, students reported using their experience in criminal justice to disrupt others' perceptions of criminal justice-involved persons, drawing on their life experience in seeking graduate school admission, illustrating a concept in the classroom through describing an encounter they had in prison, and educating peers about issues of public concern.

Without some mediating mechanism, students find themselves caught on the horns of what Martha Minow calls "the difference dilemma".⁵⁰ Students experience problematic exclusion if they draw attention to their formerly incarcerated status *and* if they fail to identify as formerly incarcerated students so that their special concerns can be addressed. CI uses its multi-level role to enable the needs of formerly incarcerated students to be met without necessarily requiring individual students to reveal their criminal justice histories in their day-to-day interactions. Its ability to aggregate students' experiences enables CI to bring problems in need of solution to the attention of institutional actors without requiring any particular student to serve as the miner's canary bearing all the risk. One staff member described addressing a student's problem resulting from interactions with an inexperienced administrator unfamiliar with challenges facing formerly incarcerated students. Instead of addressing the issue individually and risking alienating or stigmatizing the particular student, the CI counselor met with and trained all the admissions directors in the relevant office. Though CI undoubtedly engages in individualized troubleshooting, its position as a repeat-player enables it to present concerns in ways separate from the individual student experiencing the problem. In addition, by labeling itself both a reentry and an education program, CI develops currency in both worlds, as well as the ability to put its students' concerns in terms each set of actors understands.

These relationship-based solutions enable CI to address needs at a more general level, even when there is insufficient support at a high level for developing a more system-wide solution. They work well for as long as their inventors remain in their positions, but are vulnerable to elimination when there is a leadership transition. Unit-level solutions developed with strategic allies enable collective action to solve problems beyond the individual and programmatic level, but do not necessarily improve the problem at the level of organizational policy. The need for organization-wide policy change emerged strongly in interviews with CI staff as well as in focus groups with other re-entry organizations. Many of these organizations identified similar experiences with barriers

that could easily be remedied if there were a commitment from high level leadership to address problems at an organizational level. It was this perception that gave rise to the Re-Entry Task Force at CUNY, which is discussed further below.

From individual problems to organization-level intervention: the example of Hostos

CI has recently linked its individual-level problem identification with organization-level innovation. CI has developed a collaboration with Hostos Community College, resulting in the creation of a Summer Boot-Camp for entering students that has been developed and implemented at Hostos and opened to the entire CUNY campus. Again, the intervention began by identifying a recurring problem at the level of the individual student: gaps in academic preparation particularly for students coming into college from the GED. Like other programs working with students transitioning into college, CUNY learned that the academic requirements for the GED do not match those for success once students enter CUNY, particularly in math. CI also learned that CUNY's existing programs were not sufficient to meet the demand. Moreover, CI's analysis of its experience with CUNY's existing academic preparation programs revealed mismatches between those programs and the needs of formerly incarcerated students. For example, CI identified a few programs with strong track records, particularly the College Transition Initiative at Kingsborough Community College ("CTI"), but determined that CTI's intensive program imposes requirements that do not mesh with the constraints facing formerly incarcerated students, such as parole reporting requirements and jobs. In addition, CI has learned that most students have to take out loans for remedial education courses, which are non-credit bearing, and this early debt becomes an impediment to obtaining financial aid for credit bearing classes.

Instead of scrambling individually for each of its students, CI embarked on developing a solution that would begin to solve this problem at a more institutional level. Through connections formed with the help of the Black Male Initiative at CUNY ("BMI"), CI formed a collaboration with Hostos Community College to develop a Summer Institute that would aim to address the CUNY-wide academic preparation needs of formerly incarcerated students. CI identified Hostos as a strong institutional collaborator, because of its commitment to building the capacities of people from underserved communities, its location on a college campus, and its strong and committed leadership at the presidential, faculty and administrative levels. The collaboration builds on the successful track record of other programs at CUNY and nationally, and leverages the resources and expertise of CI's mentors and counsellors. The CI summer preparation intensive involves "a 10-week pilot that integrates practices from existing transition-to-college models for under-served populations with aspects of support, counseling and peer mentoring services . . . [and] addresses the specific needs of this population in a responsive and holistic way."⁵¹

CI is also positioned to scale the program outward within Hostos to apply to other students facing parallel challenges, and to share the model with other campuses and reentry programs that are interested in developing a similar program. The program was explicitly designed so that it could be used effectively in new settings. Applying the "inflection points" strategy, CI created a capstone program which matched peer mentors

with graduates of the Summer Intensive at Hostos. By designing the program with the active participation of formerly incarcerated students, staff, faculty, administrators, and reentry leaders, CI cultivated a group that is in a position to facilitate wider use of the program. The strategy includes careful attention to assessment, dissemination of outcomes, and network development to enable the workshop to have maximum impact for both formerly incarcerated students and students returning to college who are veterans, returning students, on public assistance, and/or facing a range of other challenges. CI has also been transparent about the process, and has developed tools and a video that can be used to develop peer mentoring programs based on this model. The program itself has generated considerable excitement and enthusiasm by those who participated in its development and implementation, including leadership within the City and Hostos. It has been described by a variety of key stakeholders as a model that can be scaled on a national level. CI's position within a larger grantee community of Fund for the City of New York, the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, the Second Chance Act and Gates Foundation provides the organization with networks to disseminate the program on a city-wide and national scale.

4. Creating and Connecting Transformative Leaders

For a growing group of successful CI students, their role in CI does not end with graduation. As they progress academically and personally, they also assume increasing responsibility for enabling the success of those following in their footsteps. Over time, they have the opportunity to develop a sophisticated analysis of the organizational barriers preventing students' access to and graduation from college. They also figure out how to navigate within the existing system on behalf of CI students, and to mobilize improvements of that system when the opportunity arises. They do this work in collaboration with other students, faculty, administrators and activists. With CI's encouragement, CI graduates become transformative leaders.⁵² They become engaged with and responsible for bringing up the next generation, and for helping to build environments enabling formerly incarcerated students to realize their full potential.

The emergence of this leadership role is not unique or accidental. It follows from CI's strategy of cultivating a diverse group of transformative leaders in a position to engage in problem-solving in many different arenas and at the intersection of the criminal justice and educational systems. Drawing on lessons learned from other reentry organizations such as NuLeadership on Urban Solutions at Medgar Evers College, the empowerment of people with the capacity to facilitate movement from criminal justice to college has become a cornerstone of CI's work. CI identifies potential leaders, brings them together, provides them with information and tools, and offers concrete support for their leadership activities. This strategy is designed to leverage the impact of a small organization like CI so it can reach a broader group of students and have system-level impact.

CI students form the nucleus of this leadership development ethos. The organization identifies students with leadership capabilities, empowers them to navigate the barriers to students' access and success, and creates opportunities for them to participate as mentors, activists, and advocates. CI's leadership development strategy is evident in its peer

mentoring program, its involvement of students on panels and other educational venues, and its facilitation of students' participation in criminal justice reform activities. Formerly incarcerated students have also assumed formal leadership roles within CI, as counsellors and administrators.

In addition to empowering students as leaders, a broader leadership development strategy has emerged. Because CI has no formal position within either the higher education or criminal justice system, it depends upon leadership from within these systems to have any long-term impact. It has facilitated informal leadership roles among a network of administrators, government officials, faculty, and advocates who have demonstrated commitment to addressing the challenges facing formerly incarcerated students. This group includes faculty members with a track record of actively mentoring formerly incarcerated students, criminal justice researchers, administrators who assume responsibility for solving problems unique to people coming out of prison, and government officials willing to put criminal justice concerns on the public agenda. CI works closely with a small but active group of leaders, and provides public recognition of their contributions. Research suggests untapped opportunities for connecting a larger group of faculty and administrators in a position to support students, conduct policy-related research, and promote needed change.

5. Leveraging Multi-level Networks

Finally, CI uses a strategy of creating and linking networks of people and organizations with shared goals and varied resources to advance systems change. CI self-consciously builds on its position within multiple networks to connect people occupying key positions in the overlapping systems that affect the choices of formerly incarcerated students so that they can develop collaborative solutions that change the landscape in ways that increase opportunities and reduce barriers. This network-leveraging strategy flows from CI's position in the network. CI is both independent and embedded in long term relationships with people within the higher education system, the criminal justice system, and the reentry network. It thus occupies a pivotal location enabling the organization to facilitate and strengthen the capacity of networks to pool their knowledge, resources, and social capital so that change can occur. CI's capacity to play this role is both a product and a precondition of its position within multiple networks relating to reentry and higher education.

In addition to its position as a hub within multiple networks, CI's problem solving approach also permeates its network leverage strategy. CI and the reentry network in which it sits brings people and organizations together around identified problems, defines shared goals, and then figures out how to use the resources around the table to have maximum effect. Several examples illustrate this strategy. CI, along with the Black Male Initiative, the Prisoner Re-entry Institute at John Jay, and College and Community Fellowship, has created a CUNY reentry task force. The task force brings together administrators, staff, faculty, and students who work with students enrolled at CUNY and seek to increase CUNY's commitment, capability, and resources focused on formerly

incarcerated students. CI was also a key participant in the formation of the Reentry Education Network. This network brings together leadership from the New York City Department of Education, the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, the network of reentry organizations, the NYC Department of Correction, and Center for Employment Opportunities to increase the visibility, resources, and success of higher educational opportunities for people with criminal justice involvement. A third network configuration results from CI's recent successful grant applications to local and national funding organizations such as the Second Chance Act, the Gates Foundation, and the New York City. Through these funding intermediaries, CI has become part of a local and national network of organizations pursuing common goals. Interestingly, CI is the only reentry organization in the national networks focused on reducing recidivism, and the only criminal justice organization in the national network focused on transitions to higher education for underserved communities. As a result, CI is in a position to play a crucial role in linking criminal justice and education in both domains.

This network linkages strategy is crucial because direct interaction among key stakeholders provides a way to understand and address many of these challenges resulting from the interaction of policies and practices systems and venues that do not normally interact directly.⁵³ In addition, CI has found that the concerns of those with criminal justice involvement are not often a priority, and without a sustained focus are likely to be ignored or given short shrift. CI uses its extensive network of relationships as a springboard for developing ongoing, collaboratively-run working groups with concrete goals. CI quite explicitly leverages and supports the social capital of other groups that have adopted a similar strategy.

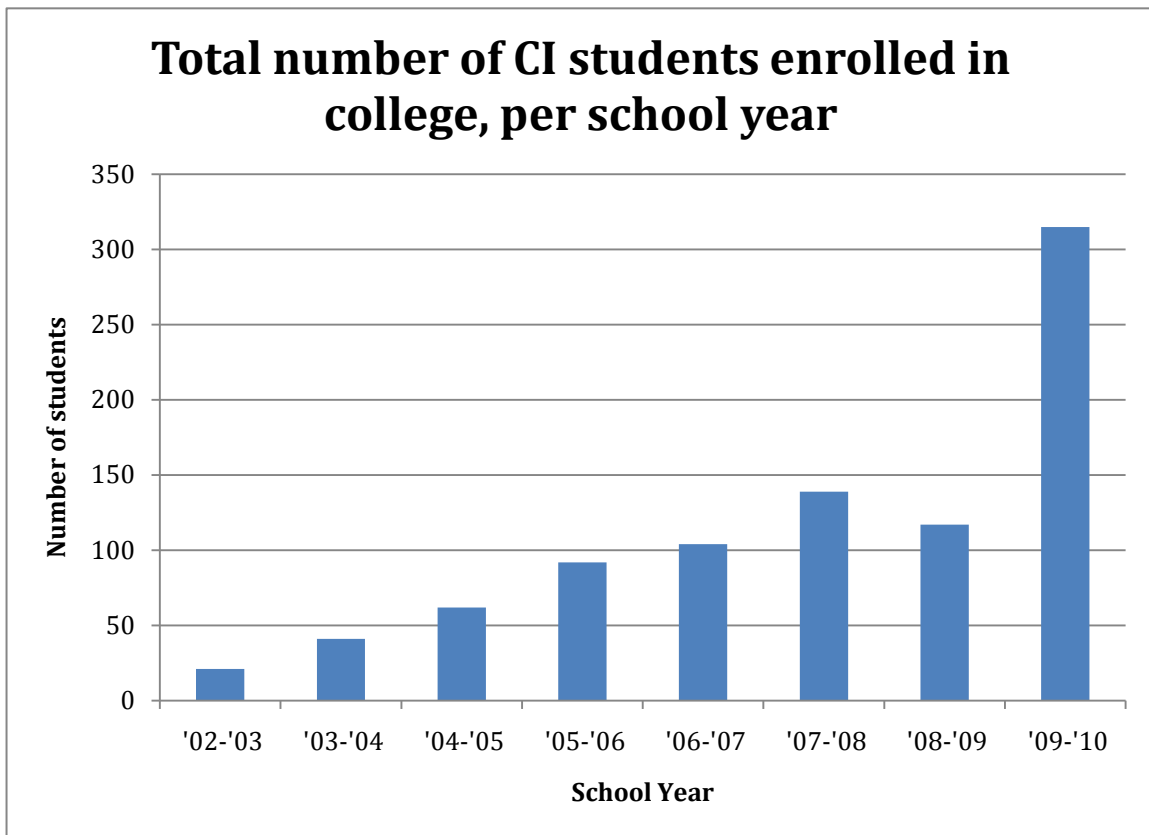
B. Multi-Level Indicators and Outcomes

From its analysis of the data, Center researchers identified five indicators of multi-level change for which there is concrete evidence of improvement resulting from CI's strategies. These include: (1) Increased participation relative to staff capacity by students and the supporters of their access and success, (2) Structural or systemic impact beyond the programmatic level, (3) Demonstrated visibility of issues at the intersection of criminal justice and higher education (4) Institutional capacity to intervene at multiple levels, and (5) Increased number and involvement of cross-cutting networks. The first three of the indicators track outcomes reflecting movement beyond the programmatic level toward systems change. The last two track changes in the activators of change that we see as having ongoing and reverberating impact. By identifying and tracking outcomes and progress, this research makes it possible to name, assess, and prioritize the process and outcomes marking scalable change.

1. Increased participation relative to staff capacity

CI has dramatically increased the number of people served and the number of individuals enrolled in each year notwithstanding small increases in staffing and limited resources.

CI expanded from 2 people on staff in 2002 to 5 people on staff in 2008, and in that time, CI reached an enrollment of 139 students in one given year, compared to the 21 in the year it began. During the latest 2009 to 2010 school year, CI had a record of 315 total number of individuals enrolled, and a record breaking 149 new CI students have applied for the upcoming Fall 2010 semester. In addition to serving the students enrolled in college, CI also helps students applying to college (103 students enrolled for Fall 2010 and 46 on the CUNY waitlist for Fall 2010), and gives orientation sessions to those who have not yet applied but are getting ready to do so (CI served 206 individuals in this pool in 2010). During the 2009-2010 academic year alone, CI answered 574 letters from incarcerated individuals in state and federal prisons. Furthermore, as it has expanded, CI continues to provide a consistent quality of service to its participants; its retention rates from 2002 and 2008 are comparable if not improved. Meanwhile, the program continues to improve its services with peer-mentorship and an intensive pre-college preparation summer camp. The retention results reported here do not reflect the results of these recent efforts to improve the retention rates of CI students. To date, CI has served a total of 685 individuals. CI's ability to reach great numbers of students despite limited resources and staff has been an outgrowth of its multi-prong strategies that have enabled the organization to leverage knowledge, resources and relationships.



It is also noteworthy that CI brings in substantial numbers of black males and GED holders, when both groups are on the decline in higher education. A preliminary study conducted by the Public Science Project at CUNY Graduate Center showed that CI

students are more likely to be African American and male than students enrolled in the entire CUNY system.⁵⁴ A comparison between the 203 CI students enrolled in CUNY colleges and the 232,960 students enrolled in the CUNY system in the Fall 2007 revealed the following results:

College Initiative	CUNY System
55.2% identified as Black	27.1% identified as Black
20.9% Latino	25.7% Latino
7.5% White	31.2% White
2.2% Asian	15% Asian
79% male	39.1% male
17.9% female	60.9% female

2. *Structural and systemic improvement*

The strategies section of this report documents a set of strategies aimed at linking individual problem solving with systemic change. If these strategies are robust, then we should observe evidence of problem solving that produces changes in practice beyond the individual level. We observed two types of systems-level shifts, in decreasing order of prevalence: (a) creation of what Elinor Ostrom refers to as “collective choice situations” that enable groups to change practices within their own arenas in ways that enable student success at key inflection points, and (b) mobilization of a diverse community of common interest to produce discrete changes in formal public or institutional policy, which decrease barriers or increase access of formerly incarcerated students.

CI’s most palpable institution-level impact involved the mobilization of collective action among people in a position to have a direct impact on the environment affecting formerly incarcerated students. In a variety of contexts, CI was pivotal in prompting people in a position to reduce structural or policy barriers to students’ access or participation. By mobilizing these relationships to respond to patterns of institutional dysfunction (identified through root cause analysis and intervention at inflection points), CI demonstrably reduced concrete barriers to participation. CI also produced concrete changes in practice that increased the flow of information and resources to groups of CI students. CI effectively mobilized communities of problem solvers to produce collective solutions to problems for which a more formal policy solution could not be achieved. These changes occurred both within CUNY and the criminal justice system

Several examples illustrate CI’s impact at the level of collective action creating collective solutions. Through their work with students, CI learned that students could not afford the application fee that CUNY charged to class registration, and that this modest fee prevented some students from enrolling. CI did not have the resources in-house to cover

these fees for large groups of students. Instead, CI identified several people in relevant offices who were in a position to reserve a set of waivers for formerly incarcerated students.

Through ongoing interaction with formerly incarcerated students, who tend to enter college with GEDs (primarily earned in prison, where the quality of secondary education programs varies widely), CI staff members observed that these students frequently had to take non-credit, “remedial” classes that depleted their financial aid. As many respondents observed, insufficient financial aid placed students at risk of leaving school. CI was not only able to diagnose the problem (insufficient financial aid) and its source (the academic gap that GED programs often created) but also to begin designing solutions with impact beyond an individual student by collaborating with the intensive summer preparation course at Hostos. CI has also mobilized collective action to address problems stemming from bureaucratic insensitivity or lack of knowledge. For example, CI has created organized regular information and training sessions for groups of people who operate as gatekeepers for CI students at key transition points, such as financial aid, and then followed up individually with key individuals to sustain the momentum generated at the training sessions. These group-level interventions provided concrete information about the situations facing students coming out of the criminal justice system, and enlisted a group of CUNY insiders and community partners to reconcile the competing demands of parole and higher education.

A similar dynamic producing collective action and resulting tangible change was observable in CI’s interactions with the criminal justice system. For example, CI learned that many people in prison did not know that they could go to college, get financial aid, or work in fields such as social work. CI formed relationships with the relevant leadership in the department of corrections, transitional services, probation and parole. This relationship started a dialogue and presentations, which resulted in weekly presentations about the College programs for both incarcerated people and staff. The Department of Corrections contributed funds for the production of a video about CI and the availability of college for people coming out of prison, which CI students played a big role in producing. That video has become part of the regular presentation to people in New York State prisons.

These examples exemplify a broader dynamic we preliminarily observed. CI identified and cultivated groups of people in administrative positions in CUNY and the Department of Corrections, enabling these allies to figure out workable solutions to students’ challenges. This collaboration then used information and relationships to create the urgency and opportunity to take collective action. The result was a growing list of situated policy solutions that enabled larger groups of students to overcome bureaucratic barriers that otherwise prevented students from persisting.

3. Visibility of issues at the intersection of higher education and criminal justice.

CI's work, in collaboration with allies, individuals, organizations, universities, other reentry programs and public officials, has put issues at the intersection of higher education and criminal justice on the agenda. CI regularly and systematically makes presentations in a wide variety of venues. Interviews from students, public policy leaders, faculty, and reentry leaders indicated that these presentations are providing increased visibility and emphasis on these issues. Students described having these issues come up in class for the first time, that these events have heightened awareness of the connection between criminal justice and education. Because it is extensively networked with funders, on-campus programs, and others, CI is able to participate in a range of events that are not exclusively reentry-related, raising the visibility of the prison-to-college transition process beyond its core constituency and integrating criminal justice into other public concerns. One important example of this strategy involves its connection to programs like BMI and COPE, which address issues of race, gender, and poverty, all of which intersect with mass incarceration; through joint events, CI is able to make these intersections explicit. Another important anecdote reveals how CI not only highlights linkages but also how it engages people not exclusively focused on reentry or criminal justice, engaging those beyond its core constituency in the struggle of formerly incarcerated individuals to transition into higher education:

CI had a collaboration event with New York Cares and there was a reentry panel discussion. . . . Glenn Martin was on the panel . . . and that's where he had made the statement that "Normally at these events, you see the same usual suspects," but this time it was different. You had lawyers. You had people from the mental health field and people from foster care. Everybody came in and the subject matter touched them so much that people started saying, you know, they wanted to know more, "When was the next event?" and "How can I get involved?"

4. Increased capacity through leadership expansion, long-term partnerships, transportable tool development, and best practices work

CI has produced a variety of concrete tools and resources that result from the 5-prong strategy described above. CI's self-consciousness about expanding its scope and producing resources that will catalyze change in new locations prompted CI to produce tools that will be usable by others both within reentry and elsewhere. These tools include:

- An orientation packet and video, usable to introduce formerly incarcerated students to higher education as a concrete opportunity;
- A mentoring toolkit, including a training curriculum, mentor and mentee selection rubrics, a time line, and a video
- A summer academic preparation program, including a curriculum and teaching strategies, building on the best practices of other programs

These tools have been identified by funders and other reentry organizations as models for both reentry and adult education. They have been slated for use by other reentry organizations, by the City for its transition to education programs, and by CUNY educational institutions such as Hostos' academic learning program. CI has concrete plans to use these tools to expand the mentoring and academic preparation programs to at least two other CUNY campuses this academic year.

Another indicator of increased capacity for institutional change involves the emergence of a variety of long-term partnerships between CI and key organizational actors. These partnerships have leveraged the resources of both partners. These collaborations have been unusual in their effort to minimize unnecessary duplication of effort, to create synergies among organizations with different strengths and constituencies, and to link efforts to have greater voice and impact. They include partnerships with:

- The Fortune Society that includes space sharing, referrals, policy collaboration, and linkage of Fortune's wrap around reentry and basic education programs with CI's college prep, entry, and retention programs
- College and Community Fellowship, including joint policy and funding projects
- COPE, including a collaborative grant to pool resources and create synergies between a transition to college and a criminal justice-to-college program
- Hostos Community College, which has created a summer intensive program that is now in a position to be expanded to two other campuses and used to improve the academic transition programs as Hostos for a wider group of students in transition

5. The proliferation of interlocking networks

Finally, CI's strategies have fostered the development of interlocking networks of activism in the educational, criminal justice, and reentry arenas. CI has become a crucial hub, along with several other organizations, of action-oriented networks. Those networks have enabled regular and focused organizational collaborations bringing together sectors that typically do not interact. CI's position within multiple networks, along with its singular focus on linking criminal justice and higher education, has yielded a series of focused initiatives linking these networks around action projects. Organizations within these different networks have also supported CI and other members of the reentry community in their efforts to obtain grants from funders that favor programs with the potential to scale up. CI, along with the reentry network, has been able to be at the table for crucial institutional and policy discussions. It has used its relationships and problem solving capabilities to pool knowledge from other organizations, assess performance, and learn from practices identified as effective and transportable. In the next phase of this research, the Center will more precisely document the convergences and relationships among these networks, and map the overlap between the need for systems change, the opportunity for mobilization, and the activators of change.

Next Steps:

This is an interim report setting out CI's core strategies and providing a preliminary assessment of institutional impact. The final draft will more fully detail and analyze the multi-level impacts of CI, and its relationship to a broader reentry network locally and nationally. Greater emphasis will be also be given to CI's impact on the criminal justice system, which we were not able to analyze fully in this draft due to delays in obtaining research access. The final report will also place CI in the context of a broader set of innovative institutions using comparable strategies to advance systems change. It will make explicit CI's importance not only as an example of an effective reentry higher education program, but as an exemplar of how a boundary-spanning institutional intermediary can serve as a catalyst for systemic change through root cause analysis, collaborative problem-solving, and interlocking networks. We will also include a comprehensive bibliography reflecting the theoretical and empirical foundations for this research.

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⁵ Fine, M. et al. (2001) *Ibid.*

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⁷ Baer, D. et al. (2006) Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center; Travis, J., Robinson, L., & Solomon, A. (2002) Prisoner Reentry: Issues for Practice and Policy. 17 Criminal Justice 12, 12-19.

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- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Bowen, W., Chingos, M., & McPherson, M. (2009) Ibid.; Bowen, W., Tobin, E. & Kurzweil, M. (2006) *Equity and Excellence in American Education*. Continuing Education Review, 70, 2006, 191; Charles, C. et al. (2009) Taming the River. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- ¹³ CUNY Black Male Initiative. (2010) Black Male Initiative. Last visited August 9, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/bmi.html>
- ¹⁴ Fine, M. et al. (2001) Ibid.
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- ¹⁶ Fine, M. and Ruglis, J. (2009) Ibid.
- ¹⁷ The College Initiative. (no date) Our Mission. Last visited August 5, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.collegeinitiative.org/ci/about/mission_statement/
- ¹⁸ Data retrieved from CI's final report to the Black Male Initiative (BMI) in May 2010.
- ¹⁹ Data retrieved from CI's interim report to the Ford Foundation.
- ²⁰ Data retrieved from CI's final report to the Black Male Initiative (BMI) in May 2010. Further, as a 2007 comparative analysis of CI students relative to the general CUNY population revealed, 55.2% of CI students identified as African-American, whereas 27.1% of CUNY students did, suggesting that CI students were more likely to be members of a group historically excluded from higher education. More information contained in CI's Ford Foundation proposal.
- ²¹ CI's Graduation Program, 2010.
- ²² CI's Graduation Program, 2009.
- ²³ The College Initiative. (no date) CI: At a Glance. Last visited August 9, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.collegeinitiative.org/ci/about/glance/>
- ²⁴ For example, one report collected data from three studies showing reconviction and parole violation rates hovering between 22% and 32% within the first six-13 months of release; Baer, D. et al. (2006) Ibid.
- ²⁵ CI's Mentoring Toolkit 2010, Resource Maps 1 and 2
- ²⁶ Ostrom, Elinor. (2005) Understanding Institutional Diversity. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- ²⁷ Sturm, S. and Gadlin, H. (2007) Conflict Resolution and Systems Change. Journal of Dispute Resolution 1, 2007, 1-63
- ²⁸ Ostrom, E. (2005) Ibid.
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- ³⁴ Fine, M. and Ruglis, J. (2009) Ibid.
- ³⁵ Researchers also sought permission to speak with Department of Correctional Services staff to obtain information on the impact on one piece of the criminal justice system. As of the date of this report, approval is still pending.

³⁶ This method of sampling involves asking key informants to recommend additional respondents. Researchers continue this process throughout the study, asking each respondent for referrals; Department of Sustainability and Environment, State of Victoria. (July 2007) Tool – Snowball Sampling. Last visited June 14, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/LinkView/D340630944BB2D51CA25708900062E9838C091705EA81A2FCA257091000F8579/>; Although researchers have not yet had the opportunity to contact every possible respondent because of time constraints, they have kept a chart documenting all recommended interviewees and their positions within the network surrounding CI.

³⁷ For an overview of the laws affecting those with criminal convictions, see: The Legal Action Center. (2004) After Prison: Roadblocks to Reentry: A Report on State Legal Barriers Facing People with Criminal Records. New York, NY: Legal Action Center; The Bronx Defenders. (2004) The Consequences of Criminal Proceedings in New York State: A Guide for Criminal Defense Attorneys and Other Advocates for Persons with Criminal Records. New York, NY: Bronx Defenders; Despite the stated policy of nondiscrimination and of promoting reintegration of those with conviction histories, see *Eiseman v. State*, 70 N.Y.2d 175, 191 (1987), legal hurdles persist. See, e.g., 42 USC § 1437d(l) (permitting evicting those with certain convictions from public housing).

³⁸ Ostrom, E. (2005) Ibid.

³⁹ Eddie Ellis, An Open Letter to Our Friends.

⁴⁰ Pettit, B. and Western, B. (2004) Ibid.; 2Revolutions. (2009) 2Revolutions. Last visited August 9, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.2revolutions.net/>

⁴¹ Kezar, A. (2001) Understanding and facilitating organizational change in the 21st century. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, 28, 4, 147

⁴² CI Mentor Manual; Fine, M. and Ruglis, J. (2009) Ibid.

⁴³ Research has established the importance of access to faculty mentors, research opportunities, and other forms of social capital to student success; Higgins, M. and Thomas, D. (2001) Constellations and Careers: Toward Understanding the Effects of Multiple Developmental Relationships. Journal of Organizational Behavior 22, 3, 223-247

⁴⁴ One former student said, “College Initiative also recognized your benchmarks [I]t wasn’t just the graduation rate. Because there were people in that room that had been working for five years on a two-year degree so it wasn’t only if you graduated I was always pleased to see other people getting that kind of recognition as we moved along.” A CUNY administrator actively involved with CI described the role modelling component of this strategy:

[T]hey had all of the students come together and it was a celebration of achievement where students would in fact get acknowledged for their exceptional grade point averages. It was a way . . . those who were just coming into the program would see those who were currently in the program and exiting the program and returning to give their feedback.

⁴⁵ Tarleton 2010.

⁴⁶ For instance, 24 organizations submitted letters in support of recent CI grant applications. It also has worked closely with members of the New York State Division of

Parole, the Department of Correctional Services, and other state agencies; and with a handful of allies within CUNY like COPE, BMI, and CTI.

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⁵⁰ Minow, M. (1990) Making All the Difference. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

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⁵³ Ostrom, E. (2005) Ibid.

⁵⁴ Source: Rebuilding Urban Communities and Families through Higher Education: A Proposal to Research and Document the Economic, Educational and Civic Impact of Post-Prison College on Adults and their Children, p.4.

Building Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College:

College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual
and Systemic Change

Susan Sturm, Kate Skolnick, and Tina Wu

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