

Community Advocates Project

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why Community “Advocates”? What’s wrong with paralegals?**

Good question! While “community based paralegals” is a worldwide known model, it’s not a one size fits all. In the US, the term paralegal has a very specific meaning, with professional connotations. The *Community Advocates Project* aims to provide individuals the resources to organize and support their community to act on their rights, and focuses on legal skills.

- **Who should apply?**

WJC *Community Advocates Project* seeks to develop new strategies for organizing, engagement and survival. We’re looking for anybody who is interested in engaging and supporting individuals and communities.

There are no prerequisites for age, race, class, education, or background. While we do not have the funds to fully compensate *Community Advocates* for their time, we are working to raise funds for stipends, to make the project as inclusive as possible.

- **How will participants be selected?**

Each interested participant will submit an interest form (available online or in person) and have an in-person meeting with a staff member.

- **What is the time commitment for a *Community Advocate*?**

The process is comprised of skillshare and enhancement workshops, a personal project and engagement. Over the course of a year, we expect to hold 3 weekend workshops (Sat-Sun, 6 hours each day), in addition to monthly sessions (2-4 hours each).

In addition, participants will develop a personal or team project, based on participants’ interests, skills, and time limits. The average project will require between 6-8 hours a week. We expect participants to have varying levels of time and personal resources, and will work with each participant to develop a project to accommodate that.

- **Will *Community Advocates* be compensated for their time?**

We are working on it! We know that too often, non-profit organizations create programs that are prohibitive for individuals of diverse class, race, age, gender, family status and background. We value your time and talent, and are working relentlessly to raise the funds to compensate participants for their time and work, so they can further develop and hone their skills and abilities, while leading strong, stable lives.

More particularly, if you are interested in the project but find it prohibitive due to lack of funds, transportation, childcare, or any form of accommodation, please tell us when you submit the form or in person. We’ll do our best to resolve any issue.

- **What topics will the curriculum cover?**

The curriculum aims to share, enhance and develop skills required to increase access to justice through restorative justice practices, system navigation, legal literacy, access to resources and referral networks.

In addition to topics such as movement building and organizing strategies, circle keeping, the curriculum will address basic legal skills like navigating systems and processes, legal observing and reporting, documentation and evidence gathering, and legal research and writing. We will also cover topics of legal literacy such as re-entry and barriers to survival, access to public benefits, education and health, and criminal records relief.

- **What kind of projects will participants engage in during the practicum?**

Projects will be developed by participants and WJC team, and will take into account each participant's interests and passions, as well as their schedule and capacity.

WJC projects focus on improving access to justice and supporting individuals and communities. Participants can engage in WJC current programs, including direct services and individual advocacy, Know Your Rights workshops, legal and justice literacy development, policy initiatives, and the Movement & Justice Gallery, or initiate and develop new and exciting projects!

- **I'm already a seasoned organizer, is this program for me?**

If you want it to be. The curriculum does not require any preliminary knowledge or experience, so some of the discussions might address issues you have worked on before. The curriculum centers leveraging legal skills and spaces for mutual support and movement building. We are eager to meet the participants, and learn about your interests, passions and experiences. We hope to create a collegial, collaborative process, where everyone can participate in various ways and positions, as a speaker, a first time listener, or a facilitator.

- **I'm not from the Westside, can I still participate?**

While we work with individuals from across Chicago and Cook County, WJC works primarily on the Westside. As such, the projects participants will work on will target the Westside. Interested individuals are welcome to apply.

- **I'm interested but I'm not sure I can commit for a whole year. Can I still participate?**

Let's talk! This is a pilot project. We are counting on you to help us design the process, the content and the projects. We aim to craft a collegial, collaborative process to fit participants' resources and overcome restrictions.

- **I'm interested but cannot participate at this time. How can I get involved and support the Westside Justice Center?**

There are many ways to get involved with our work! Ask us about volunteer opportunities, come to our community events, or help us spread the word by telling others about WJC. Follow us on social media or send an email to info@westsidejustice.org to join our mailing list.