National Transgender Advocacy Convening

November 12, 2013 | New York City
The Arcus Foundation
The Arcus Foundation is a leading global foundation advancing pressing social justice and conservation issues. Specifically, Arcus works to advance LGBT equality, as well as to conserve and protect the great apes.

Purpose and Structure of this Report
This report is a summary of the Arcus Foundation National Transgender Advocacy Convening held on November 12, 2013, in New York City. The report intends to capture major highlights, themes, and next steps for consideration from the convening. The primary audiences for the summary report are convening participants, transgender rights organizers and advocates, and funders invested in supporting the transgender movement.

The report has four sections: 1) Convening Background and Goals; 2) Convening Design and Participation; 3) Convening Approach; and 4) Themes and Next Steps.

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Contents
National Transgender Advocacy Convening Summary Report
By Rickke Mananzala, Convening Facilitator 3

SECTION 1 Convening Background
Goals of Convening 4

SECTION 2 Convening Design and Participation 4

SECTION 3 Convening Approach
What Are the Pressing Issues? 5
Best Practices and Recent Successes 6
Wall of Victory 7
Opportunities for Intervention 7
Movement-Building Approaches 8

SECTION 4 Overall Themes and Implications for Supporting Transgender Advocacy 8

Trans Leaders Gather to Chart Tomorrow’s Direction  By Andrea Plaid 9
Convening Background

The Arcus Foundation held a series of conversations with transgender leaders and activists prior to the convening to learn more about critical issues facing transgender communities as well as successful and potential strategies to address those issues. During these conversations, anti-transgender violence was a consistent theme, with the understanding that violence was a symptom of a larger social problem of stigmatization and discrimination against transgender people. Many leaders noted the value of having a space to discuss these issues and strategies in greater detail. Therefore, the Arcus Foundation proposed to organize a National Transgender Advocacy Convening to identify specific opportunities to increase support and advocacy for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, and to explore ways to draw public attention to the violence and other issues facing transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, in the United States. The convening would also inform Arcus’ strategic grantmaking and leadership in the priorities for transgender communities and issues.

Goals of Convening
- To provide transgender leaders and allies from across the United States with an opportunity to network and engage in critical dialogue about key issues facing trans communities
- To share information, ideas, and research
- To surface strategies and solutions that are ripe for intervention
- To enjoy our time together

Convening Design and Participation

Arcus Senior Program Officer Roz Lee and consultant Rickke Mananzala coordinated the convening design. The agenda was guided by input from an Advisory Group of five people who represented grassroots organizing, research and academia, faith, grassroots fundraising, and media advocacy. The primary purpose of the Advisory Group was to give feedback about the agenda for the convening to ensure that the approach met the stated goals while encouraging meaningful participation among attendees.

The Advisory Group members were:
- Katie Burgess, executive director, Trans Youth Support Network
- Gabriel Foster, cofounder, Transgender Justice Funding Project & Sylvia Rivera Law Project
- Janet Mock, writer, advocate and Arcus Foundation board member
- Chris Paige, executive director, Transfaith Online
- Bamby Salcedo, president, Coalición TransLatin@
- Susan Stryker, director, Institute for LGBT Studies, associate professor of Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Arizona

The Transgender Advocacy Convening had almost 45 participants, including transgender rights organizers, advocates, and funders from across the United States. The participants represented the grassroots, faith, legal, policy, arts/culture/media, philanthropic, and academic sectors, and were diverse in several other ways, including race, ethnicity, and geography. While the Arcus Foundation aimed to have balanced representation, there was acknowledgement that some constituencies were underrepresented at the convening, which Arcus will factor into its next steps from the convening.
Convening Approach

The convening approach covered four major areas through a mixture of small-group activities and large-group discussions. Each area of the agenda was intentionally sequential, building off of the others to connect the important elements of issues, strategies, and movement-building.

- **Identifying the pressing issues:** Participants brainstormed the range of pressing issues facing transgender communities and categorized them into broad issue areas.
- **Sharing recent successes and best practices:** Participants learned about several best practices and diverse strategies to address the pressing issues through an interactive “talk show” panel. Participants also developed a “Wall of Victory,” demonstrating recent victories across the U.S. to further highlight best practices.
- **Exploring opportunities for intervention:** Based on the recent successes and best practices from the interactive panel and Wall of Victory, participants broke into small groups by issue area to discuss opportunities for change in each area.
- **Brainstorming key elements of movement-building:** Based on the issues, best practices, and opportunities, participants brainstormed successful approaches to movement-building to uplift and sustain the work ahead.

**What are the pressing issues?**

Over 150 issues were identified in this brainstorm activity. The following is a summary of the themes that emerged from the key challenges mapped under the broad issue areas. During the observations and large-group discussion, many participants noted how each of these issues often intersects with others, such as the lack of employment leading to criminalization and incarceration. Additionally, it was noted how differences in race, immigration status, class, ability, and other identities shape the experiences of transgender people across these issue areas.

**Violence**
- Violence, stigma, and harassment of transgender people on the streets, in the media, and within institutions
- The need to deal with domestic and intra-community violence without relying on police who are often perpetrators of violence
- Sexual violence directed towards trans women of color

**Employment**
- Employment discrimination
- Lack of employment opportunities, especially for transgender women of color
- Lack of jobs leading to homelessness
- The need for identity documents for employment
- Lack of and/or discrimination in public-benefit access

**Criminalization & Incarceration**
- Profiling and harassment by police
- Disproportionate incarceration and impacts of criminal records leading to barriers in other areas of life
- Lack of traditional legal channels for undocumented transgender people
- Violence within prisons and jails

**Health care**
- Health care discrimination for transition-related care
- Mental health and substance-abuse issues
- Access to emotional and spiritual wellbeing needs

**Other**
- Media representation of transgender people
- Lack of transgender people of color, particularly women of color, in leadership roles in LGBT movement organizations
- Inter-community tensions – racism within LGBT movement
- Trans youth in schools
This past February your organization was a part of a coalition that held off a proposed local ordinance in Atlanta known as the Stay Out of Areas Prostitution proposal, which would have banned sex workers from Atlanta. How were transgender people targeted by this proposal, and what leadership role did transgender people play in the coalition that defeated the ordinance?

What were the successful elements of building a strong, diverse coalition to defeat the anti–sex worker ordinance in Atlanta?

The City of Atlanta has now formed a working group to determine strategies to reduce street-level sex work. With some coalition members on this working group, what are your plans for continuing to ensure that the city doesn’t further criminalize sex workers?

LaGender helped to build a coalition to stop a proposed anti–sex worker initiative known as Stay Out of Areas Prostitution. It worked with the Racial Justice Action Center and the Harm Reduction Coalition among other important community allies. As an alternative to “arresting our way out of the problem,” it got representatives from the police department, public defender's office, Mayor's office, and prosecutor's office to visit Seattle's pre-booking diversion program (LEAD program). The LEAD program includes an emphasis on job opportunities, which the coalition is pressuring the Atlanta mayor to implement. It is also important to expand the limited services available to the transgender community in Atlanta, especially for youth. The service-delivery system set-up results in an incentive to become HIV+ to gain housing and other necessary support and services.

Best Practices and Recent Successes
The best practices and recent successes began with an interactive panel discussion on “What’s Being Done” panel to showcase a few best practices (of many) in transgender advocacy work across a variety of areas. The panel was a launching point for the conversation about recent victories and best practices, which followed the panel. The panel had four participants representing best practices in grassroots organizing, faith, grassroots fundraising, and policy/academic work. The questions each panelist was asked along with the summary of their key points are below.

Please give a brief description of the Transgender Justice Funding Project, including the purpose of and motivation behind launching the project. TJFP received 104 applications from across the United States. Can you give us a brief snapshot of the organizations? What does this information tell you about the growth of the trans movement?

Based on the organizations you supported and/or received applications from, what areas have the greatest need for resources?

TJFP started as a response to the lack of resources to support innovative, intersectional work in the transgender community. It prioritized organizations that had budgets less than $250,000, which did not necessarily have to be 501(c)3s. They intentionally decided to not define a specific funding strategy (e.g., what issues or strategies to support) and to just support the work of the groups who met the basic funding criteria. They supported 22 organizations by distributing grants totaling $50,000 in the first year of grantmaking. All of this money was raised from small gifts from individual community members and allies. The top five areas of focus for those who applied included: public education, cultural work and collaboration, support groups, health access, and wellness. To learn more about TJFP and how to support the second year of grantmaking, go to: www.transjusticefundingproject.org.
providing data for movement work, there is a danger of undercounting and leaving out marginalized sectors of the community by crafting measures that don’t include everyone, such as people who haven’t had surgery. Therefore, we need to be careful about the potential over-emphasis on data. Impactful policy victories are ones that actually improve the material conditions of our lives. Success in our policy work should be measured by quality and longevity of life, not just by legal inclusion.

Wall of Victory

Building off of the interactive panel discussion “What’s Being Done” (See page 6) convening participants mapped up local and national successes. The vast majority of the victories and impact were local and state-based, indicating the need to continue focusing on these incremental, local efforts rather than solely emphasizing federal policies and strategies.

Opportunities for Intervention

Participants broke into small groups by issue areas (violence, criminalization and incarceration, health care, and employment) to explore potential opportunities for change, guided by the following questions:

- Considering the recent victories, best practices, and useful models from the “Wall of Victory,” what opportunities exist to address the various challenges facing transgender communities in this focus area?
- What factors and resources (human, financial, etc.) will help make these opportunities achievable?

The following is a summary of the key themes from each group’s discussion:

Violence: Focus on three broad areas: 1) Shifting attitudes about and behaviors toward transgender people; 2) increase protections for transgender people; and 3) increase self-acceptance, serenity, and peace. Shift focus from transgender women as victims to the reasons why they are targeted for violence. Work with women’s groups on transgender cultural competency so that support services for violence and self-defense can be more inclusive.

Criminalization and Incarceration: Determine strategies to decrease entry points into the criminal justice system, such as the decriminalization of sex work. Re-entry services geared toward transgender people are lacking and need to be expanded, particularly housing. There are models to build from, such as Philadelphia’s Morris Home specifically for transgender people in recovery.

Employment: Increase support services for the unemployed and underemployed; ease access barriers (e.g., state-issued IDs) that prevent people from entering the workplace; increase educational opportunities; build media advocacy to shift public perception of transgender people.
**Health Care:** Expand available research (e.g., how hormones affect us, quality of care issues, aging issues); expand insurance access (public and private insurance); train providers and medical students on serving the transgender community; integrate wellness and healing into our advocacy work; increase public education to deal with stigma about health care needs; know our health care rights; build community healing to encourage people to seek care; obtain funds for individuals to train health care providers.

**Approaches to Avoid**
- Avoid becoming a large, top down, legal inclusion-only-focused movement disconnected from the needs of the most marginalized in our communities.
- Don’t focus on narrow, single-issue campaigns that drain resources from other important areas of work.
- Don’t water down the changes we’re advocating to make them more palatable. This often leads to excluding the people facing the greatest challenges and potential for harm.

**Movement-Building Approaches**

In small groups, participants explored the following questions:
- What strengths and limitations does the transgender-rights movement have?
- Who are our key allies (other types of organizations, communities, etc.)?
- What movement-building approaches do we want to emphasize, and what approaches do we want to avoid?

Below is a summary of the key themes from the small groups on movement-building approaches:

**Strengths**
- Community resilience
- Relatively young movement so we can still shape the agenda and movement trajectory
- Experience and expertise among community members

**Challenges**
- Lack of resources
- Geography (location) impacts access
- Isolation and significant life challenges facing community members

**Key Allies**
- Reproductive justice groups
- Disability rights groups
- Sex workers rights groups
- Immigrant rights groups
- Economic justice groups
- Kink and leather communities
- Health care rights/access groups
- Harm-reduction groups

**Approaches to Emphasize**
- Engage in purposeful coalition building. We are not a big enough group to do anything by ourselves. Focus particularly on coalition building with groups organizing around racial justice, immigrant rights, and economic justice issues.
- Adopt a multi-issue and multi-strategy approach, particularly linking strategies such as organizing, legal/policy change, media advocacy, and services.
- Ensure that transgender-led groups define movement priorities.

**Overall Themes and Implications for Supporting Transgender Advocacy**
- Resources are most impactful to organizations working across a variety of issues, using multiple strategies. As one participant noted, the transgender movement strategy “Has to be a multi-approach strategy. There is no ‘greatest need.’ This is how the GL [gay and lesbian] movement came to focus on marriage and the military. We should not replicate this model.”
- Support transgender-led organizations with diverse leadership. It is strategic to support these groups because they are the best positioned to define and lead an inclusive transgender movement agenda.
- Focus on supporting organizing and policy work at the local level where there is the greatest potential for change. As one participant suggested, “Seed the grassroots, let a thousand flowers bloom. Don’t create a Big Trans Inc. through funder favoritism.”
- The issues to prioritize should be the areas where transgender people are facing the most harm; particularly criminalization and incarceration, poverty and homelessness, health care access, violence, and access to employment.

**Resources**
*For more information consult the following:* [http://www.arcusfoundation.org/sosocialjustice/newsroom/all_news/transgender_resources_support_better_inclusion_and_collaboration/](http://www.arcusfoundation.org/sosocialjustice/newsroom/all_news/transgender_resources_support_better_inclusion_and_collaboration/)
Trans Leaders Gather To Chart Tomorrow’s Direction

By Andrea Plaid
he T is usually silent in LGBT,” said Kevin Jennings, Arcus Foundation executive director—quoting journalist and Arcus board member Janet Mock—as he launched a daylong convening of transgender activists and underscored the meeting’s purpose.

Making sure that the trans message isn’t lost among other agendas was a refrain often heard among the trans leaders present at the November 12, 2013, meeting. “We want to make your agenda our agenda,” Jennings said. “We owe you a debt for making the movement more just due to your leadership.”

Participants included organization founders and directors, grassroots advocates for prisoners and sex workers, creative artists, faith leaders, attorneys, academics, and others. The goals of the New York City convening were to provide them and their allies with an opportunity to network and dialogue about key issues facing trans communities; to share information, ideas, and research; to surface strategies and solutions; and to enjoy time together.

Roz Lee, Arcus’ senior program officer for racial and gender justice, affirmed Arcus’ intention to keep gender identity in the mix as it has done for sexual orientation. “We need to put the money at the root of stigma and discrimination,” she said. She, along with Jennings and Arcus’ Jason McGill, vice president of the Social Justice Program, articulated not so much an “a-ha” moment at this historic point in the queer and trans movements, but an “oh yeah” realization: that there are many issues aside from marriage and military equality that other cis people and some trans and gender nonconforming people of various sexual identities deem important.

Before launching into the first discussion—What Are the Pressing Issues?—facilitator Rickke Mananzala, a consultant and former executive director of FIERCE, instructed the participants to write their ideas on sticky notes, to be placed on a flip board. Tynan “Ty” Power, co-coordinator of the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity, peeled off idea after idea from his pad.

Five major headings emerged: Health Care, Violence, Employment, Criminalization/Incarceration, and Other. As an indication of the volume of issues and inability to separate them into neat categories, most of Power’s notes fell under Other: lack of records on trans murders from many parts of the world, immigration obstacles, conflicts/lack of understanding within trans communities, and Islamophobia in trans and cisLGB communities.

The discussion raised still more issues: Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor noted a lack of intersection of trans issues and others, like disability. Bamby Salcedo, president of TransLatin@ Coalition, pointed to a lack of access to services for trans Spanish speakers. Reverend Louis Mitchell, Transfaith’s community engagement liaison, mentioned the lack of a mentoring culture, saying: “We need to pass that from the older to the younger generations, especially around issues of ‘passing.’” Some of the leaders took issue that race and racism were put under “Other” when, they counter, it’s common to all of the topics.

Speaking to the “othering” of racism, Ashland Johnson, policy counsel with the National Center for Lesbian Rights, later brought up the school-prison pipeline and employment—where racism adds to the discrimination. Added Kylar Broadus, senior policy counsel at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and director of the Transgender Civil Rights Project, “[I]n the movement we talk about how oppressed trans people are—and it’s true. But then we marginalize within the marginalized group, which generally [means] people of color…. [Race] needs to be talked about at every event and it needs to be led by people of color, not by white people for people of color.”

The lack of data on trans lives arose repeatedly during the discussion, yet, responding to the suggestion that a census
of trans people is necessary, Broadus cautioned that many people would be left behind in such a survey:

“People of color are not even included or counted because they’re afraid to come out….they feel that they’re not being represented, there’s nobody doing the work for them, and they feel like they’re being sold out when they do come forward.”

After a morning break, panelists for What’s Being Done? (See page 6) assembled at the front of the room. Mananzala called on Gabriel Foster, a staff member of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project and cofounder of the Transgender Justice Funding Project. The funding project came together last year, he said, as sort of a “cash van” to raise support for trans-led and trans-centered groups around the United States. Trans groups are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to fundraising because of their high levels of un- and underemployment, said Foster, so “we went rogue,” funding groups that weren’t 501(c)3 because a lot of people are working out of their living rooms.

The funding project received applications from 104 organizations, many of them concerned with public education, cultural production, and community service work in the South. “We have no idea of the depth and breadth of organizations across the country, but we are also about connecting trans groups across it,” Foster said.

Discussion of job discrimination led to a focus on sex work and the issues that it can lead to, such as incarceration and illness. Dee Dee Chamblee, executive director of LaGender Inc. spoke of her past life as a sex worker and how her organization recently coalesced with SWOP (Sex Workers Outreach Project), SNaP Co (Solutions Not Punishments Coalition), and the Racial Justice Action Center to stop Atlanta from driving out sex workers. SWOP and the Racial Justice Action Center raised funds to take a delegation, including activists, police and attorneys, from Atlanta to Seattle to observe that city’s diversion program to keep sex workers from going to jail. Chamblee, whose groups work with women who want to get off the streets, said: “Some of the girls have degrees, associates and bachelor’s. But the job discrimination is so they can’t get jobs. Even I had to catch HIV/AIDS in order to get any income, to get housing. And what I have to tell the youth is that unless you contract HIV, I have limited to no funds for you. And it’s a horrible message to give to the young people.”

The last speaker on the panel, Dean Spade, assistant professor of law at Seattle University, echoed concerns about the limits of research, saying, “The best scholars and scholarship comes from activists…. It can be really meaningful if trans people inside our own communities generate our own research about our communities’ needs.” He mentioned studies like Amnesty International’s Stonewalled and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project’s It’s War in Here, on the treatment of transgender and intersex people in New York City men’s prisons. “That kind of work gets deep, textured, useful information….I think we need to push those who continually try to ask for that data in order to verify our struggles to instead recognize that we know what’s going on.”

He pointed out that trans individuals are visible, if not acknowledged, in prisons, soup kitchens, and on the streets. “I think people already know this… because their image of a trans person is the image of a very poor person with mental health needs. Even the stereotypes do tell us something about the realities of trans life and the levels of battles people face.”

Still, Spade underscored the risks of movements that focus primarily on seeking state recognition and legal equality, with an assumption that when it’s over, problems will be resolved.
“The central example [of] this,” he said, “is …where supposedly anti-Black racism is resolved by civil rights gains, yet we see the conditions for Black people worsen with growing criminalization, poverty, wealth divide, income divide, etc. But you can [also] see that around disability, women’s rights, etc.”

Post-lunch, Mananzala started the discussion Recent Best Practices and Successes by asking for sticky notes listing wins for trans and gender-variant rights and placing them on a United States map. The northeast and west coasts had green victories falling into the oceans. The green papers scattered farther south and into the Midwest and the mountain states. With those victories in mind, participants divided into workgroups to discuss the themes that had emerged earlier in the day.

One critical issue that arose again was the stigma of having a criminal record—a serious difficulty for trans people who have engaged in sex work. Reverend Mitchell talked about the movement to “ban the box”—to stop employers from asking job applicants to check a box if they have been convicted of a crime (especially a felony). Facing the dilemma of whether to be honest when the possibility of employment is at stake, Mitchell says, is very problematic for “someone’s faith journey through their dealing with issues of integrity.”

Other activists chimed in with additional needs for those who are, or have been, incarcerated, such as health care access while in jail, welfare justice for those who cannot get public assistance because of their criminal records, and emergency funding for those returning to their old neighborhoods so they don’t fall into the same situation(s) that put them in jail in the first place. “What about skill building [for future job hunts] and ‘getting stable’ on hormones?” one participant asked. “A person can’t think about the former without doing the latter.”

“And we can’t forget that there are trans people trapped by ICE and immigration detention and deportation centers,” Salcedo said.

The ideas kept coming. Chamblee and Janetta Johnson, program coordinator for the Transgender Variant Intersex Justice Project, brought up prison-visit advocacy, namely getting trans people to visit those in jails and prisons. Johnson explained: “Everyone in jail knows if you have people who care about you to visit. When they know a trans person doesn’t have anyone, then they know that person will do anything for some cigarettes and some soap. Trans people without people visiting them are being left to sexual peril due to that knowledge.”

As Salcedo summed up, the priorities with regard to the criminal justice system were identified as: decriminalizing sex work; health care—especially gender reassignment surgeries and hormonal treatment—in prison; work with the youth justice system; building bridges with prison-abolition organizations; and the Lorena Borjas Community Fund, a bail-funding option specifically for trans people.

As the discussion moved to Opportunities for Intervention (See page 7) and The Movement We Want to Build, participants addressed various approaches to movement-building, with which to identify, and the potential for connecting with people on issues such as prison reform and reproductive justice without losing the trans identity.

Not surprisingly, the issue of race emerged again: It wasn’t discussed separately because it was assumed that it would come up in all discussions. “Then I suggest from now on,” Mitchell said, “taking race… and telling people to figure out where to put race regarding the other categories.”

After singing “Happy Birthday” to Johnson—the Stevie Wonder version—the convening ended with a wild rush of announcements and reminders and samples of chocolate… and an even-clearer understanding of what needs to be done to fortify trans people’s rightful places in this society.