

# TRANSFORMATIVE *fundraising*

WITH SURVIVED & PUNISHED NY'S MUTUAL AID PROJECTS



HOW WE COLLECTIVELY  
SURVIVE AND THRIVE

We offer this toolkit as a resource for people interested in contributing to Survived & Punished NY's mutual aid commissary giving project. This toolkit begins with an introduction to who we are as Survived & Punished and the values that guide our work. It then discusses mutual aid and fundraising, including specific recommendations, tips, and steps for doing grassroots fundraising.

We initially created this toolkit as a guide for people and communities who had reached out to us with an interest in fundraising for Survived & Punished NY's commissary giving project specifically, but we also hope this guide can provide an abolitionist analysis to support the creation of transformative mutual aid projects across many types of communities and movements.



IN LOVE AND STRUGGLE, S&P NY

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# WHAT IS S&P?

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Survived & Punished organizes to decriminalize efforts to survive violence, free criminalized survivors, and abolish gender violence, policing, prisons, and deportations. You can learn more about S&P's analysis [here](#).

## what are the values that guide our work?

### **NO ONE BELONGS IN A CAGE**

We work towards the abolition of all cages, borders, and walls. We know that the state itself - and policing and prisons specifically - is the central organizer and purveyor of systems of racial and gender-based violence. When we fundraise for the incarcerated survivors in our community, we don't throw other incarcerated people under the bus, and we don't leave anyone behind. It's important that our work is always situated within the larger movement to abolish criminalization, the prison industrial complex (PIC) and all other forms of state violence.

### **NO "PERFECT VICTIMS"**

We vehemently reject the racist and cisheterosexist narrative (unattainable by design) that only "perfect victims" are deserving of freedom, safety, comfort and support. As abolitionists, we move in solidarity with all survivors, but especially with those who have been targeted by the legal punishment system. We recognize that prisons and policing are inherently gender-based and racial violence, and at their foundation especially target Black and Indigenous trans people, gender non-conforming people and cis women. By definition, all criminalized and incarcerated people are survivors of violence. We demand the immediate release of all survivors of violence, and a radical redistribution of resources that is not based on a deserving/undeserving paradigm.

### **SELF-DETERMINATION**

S&P centers our incarcerated loved ones, comrades, and friends who are survivors of institutional and interpersonal gender and racial violence. We recognize that our people on the inside know how best to spend and use resources based on their particular needs and circumstances - thus, what we gather and give has no strings attached. We believe strongly in self determination and see giving as not just an act of solidarity, but as an entryway to working together. We believe in giving that is voluntary and reciprocal in the service of supporting all of us in surviving and thriving as best we can.

### **TRANSFORMATIVE GIVING**

Our giving is oriented towards the possibility of creating mutually nourishing connections. Through this orientation, we hope to creatively transform what it means to give. We envision a future that acknowledges the interconnectedness of people which requires us to build structures that are life-affirming. We orient our work in opposition to the harmful individualism and scarcity narrative of racial capitalism. We work from a premise of abundance and build towards a new world where everyone is free and we can all not only survive, but thrive.

# what is mutual aid?

The S&P Giving Circle's mutual aid work is one of the ways we put these values into practice.

Mutual aid happens when people come together voluntarily to share resources, material support, and services, usually centered around political or social justice issues. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha explains in her book, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, ideas about and strategies for engaging in mutual aid have been developed through longstanding practices of collective care in Black, brown and Indigenous communities, and by disability justice organizers and anarchists. The Black Panther Party's "Serve the People" programs, such as their Free Breakfast and free acupuncture programs, are one of countless powerful examples of how social movements have engaged in mutual aid to help their communities survive and also be better prepared to mobilize to confront state violence.

In contrast to charity and government-funded social services, mutual aid projects are based on the principles of solidarity, responsibility, and accountability. Charity and social services reinforce the very hierarchies and oppressive systems that make them necessary and are often a form of social control that forces people to conform to certain standards before receiving support. Mutual aid is also distinct from resources provided within the non-profit industrial complex, where dynamics including paid staff and reporting to funders contribute to a co-dependent relationship between members and organizations. Mutual aid is a practical survival strategy of interdependence based on an understanding that it is the system, not the people suffering under it, that creates poverty, crisis, and vulnerability.

Mutual aid is premised on the idea that people are experts of their own lives and that the intended recipients of material support are the best judges of how, when, and in what form that support should be distributed. The money and labor we put into supporting our incarcerated comrades is not charity towards individuals, but a concrete expression of our solidarity with and responsibility for each other.

Mutual aid means honoring the contributions that each of us bring to the collective, which can take the form of material support, knowledge and experience, advocacy and organizing, storytelling, and emotional connection. In the context of our work, this requires us to name, confront, and work to transform the power imbalance that exists when sharing resources across prison walls. Mutual aid projects provide material support in the present while also envisioning and building networks of safety, comfort, and freedom outside of the state.

**WE WORK TOGETHER TO HELP EACH OTHER SURVIVE TODAY, AS WE ALSO WORK TO CREATE A TOMORROW WHERE ALL OF US ARE TRULY FREE.**

# why fundraise for commissary?

Incarcerated people know best how to navigate the many challenges of life behind bars. That is one of the reasons we raise funds for commissary -- so that our loved ones, comrades, and friends inside have the agency to buy things they need to make it through, without judgment or strings attached.

We also give commissary funds to reduce the harm caused by the isolation, abuse, and exploitation that is inherent to the prison system. It costs a lot of money to survive in prison. Prisons do not provide incarcerated folks with adequate food, toiletries, stationery, or contact with the outside world. In the facility these can only be purchased through the prison commissary store, and are usually low quality and subject to extreme markups. Paired with the exploitatively low wages paid to incarcerated people, (when we surveyed our contacts at Bedford Hills, they reported wages between 10 and 34 cents an hour) it can cost as much as 6 hours of labor to buy a stamp to correspond with a loved one. Acts like sending commissary and letter-writing can also reduce the chances our loved one, comrades, or friends will be harassed or abused by correctional officers (COs). Commissary giving and letter-writing let prison staff know that our comrades inside have the support of people and collectives beyond the walls who are paying attention, and who remain vigilant and concerned for their well-being.

Another option for supporting your loved ones, comrades, and friends on the inside is sending care packages. You might want to do this because they need something commissary doesn't stock, you don't want the prison to profit from the markups, or money deposited in their account is being garnished by the state to pay restitution or court fees. However, prisons usually make this prohibitively difficult with complex and restrictive rules governing what people inside can and can't receive in a package. These rules, from value limits to weight restrictions, are arbitrary, wide-ranging, and vary by facility even within the same state. They are inconsistently enforced and applied differently to packages that are mailed, brought in person, or sent from a vendor. Therefore, before mailing, ordering, or bringing anything to prison, take extra caution to know what rules might apply to the contents of your package or the person or facility the package is being sent to. Assume that COs may use policies to keep anything they wish to, and stay in touch with your loved one about what they do and don't receive. The best starting place for information about prohibited items is the [NYS DOCCS Directive 4911](#).

## how do we send commissary funds?

Many jails and prisons in the US have recently contracted with privatized commissary systems, using exploitative companies - such as JPay - that engage in extreme price gouging to process commissary accounts, email, and video chat services. In many states, JPay or another company has a monopoly, and is the only option for people who are locked up to access commissary, and providing access to music, video games, movies, and email. These companies are in the business of collaborating with other actors and institutions in the prison industrial complex to profit off of those inside and outside of prison walls, exploiting our collective needs and desires to be connected with our loved ones.

Survived & Punished NY uses a mail-in money order to send commissary funds to our comrades' accounts (which is quicker than a personal check). There is no fee when sending through a money order, which means the company profits less off of people on both sides of the walls if you send commissary this way. The money order can take up to a few weeks to enter the account, so if you send commissary via money order it's important to maintain a consistent schedule and to communicate with your comrades and loved ones inside about when they can expect the funds to be deposited into their account. If your comrade or loved one needs to receive the money into their account as quickly as possible, it is also possible to send via JPay online at [jpay.com](http://jpay.com). Fees for sending JPay online vary depending on the amount.

**FOR MORE SPECIFIC, DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO SEND COMMISSARY MONEY THROUGH A MONEY ORDER OR CHECK THROUGH JPAY, CHECK OUT OUR [RESOURCES PAGE](#) TO FIND A GUIDE.**

## why do we use a grassroots fundraising model?

We believe that using a grassroots fundraising model, or a model in which donations come from individuals across our various networks, encourages us to remain accountable to our communities rather than to foundations or corporations. We view fundraising as a form of relationship-building and envision giving commissary as a way for folks on the outside to support and connect with our community members on the inside. Sustaining the commissary fund through grassroots fundraising helps prevent us from compromising our values in order to meet the demands of funders. The work we do is ultimately for the people so it should also be funded by the people.

**GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING IS ALSO ORGANIZING!** Through fundraising campaigns we raise awareness and provide people with an immediate opportunity to be in solidarity with incarcerated comrades. This helps build the broad base we need for the long-haul work of creating a world without police, prisons, and surveillance.

## what are the fundamentals of grassroots fundraising?

A note about asking for money under racial capitalism: It can be uncomfortable, triggering, or even scary to ask people for money, especially for those of us who are poor or working-class. In order to justify exploitation and violence, racial capitalism tries to convince us that we “earned” and “deserve” whatever access or lack of access to resources we have. In order to maintain and obfuscate that unequal distribution of resources, racial capitalism tries to convince us that asking for money is a burden on others. Those of us who are managerial or owning class may face our own struggles in asking for money based on our socialization to hoard wealth, think individualistically, and not be explicit about the resources we have access to. Grassroots fundraising is an opportunity for us to work together to subvert racial capitalism by pooling our collective resources, working towards radically redistributing them, and transforming ourselves in the process.

# AS MARIAME KABA HAS WRITTEN:

**Think about the people you are raising funds on behalf of and with.** Keep them centered.

**It can also help to depersonalize it and make it easier to ask.** If you make fundraising all about you (your feelings, your insecurities, yourself), you won't be good at doing it. When you depersonalize it, you don't take it personally when people say no. Asking for resources and money is just an invitation. You are inviting people to contribute to a cause, a vision, an idea, to people. When it's not compulsory, then it's actually a gift to offer people a way to join in something.

**When you ask and someone declines to give, they are saying no (for now).** It isn't a permanent no. There are all kinds of reasons why people don't and can't give. This doesn't mean you can't come back and ask again the next month, year, etc.

**What we know about fundraising is those with the least give the most.** That makes sense because they have a direct idea about what it means to struggle. An important lesson I learned is that you should ask everyone. Don't take away people's agency by making assumptions about whether or not they can or want to give.



# a step-by-step guide to grassroots fundraising

*Adapted from the Philadelphia Community Bail Fund*

**SET A FUNDRAISING GOAL AND ALWAYS ASSUME SOME PEOPLE WILL SAY**

**NO!** Your fundraising goal can be any amount that feels meaningful to you. *We especially encourage people who are white and have access to personal, family, community, or institutional wealth to aim high!*

**CREATE A CONTACT LIST.** Make a list of the communities and networks you are a part of, and then, within each, make a list of the specific people you're in community with that you want to reach out to.

**CONTRIBUTE FIRST IF YOU ARE ABLE!** Either way, frame your ask as an invitation for people to join you in supporting something you care about.

**MAKE YOUR ASKS!** See next page for tips.

**SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** Share posts on facebook, twitter and instagram. Try making a personal post sharing your fundraising goal, and tag people. You can also share graphics here.

**BUMP UP YOUR ASK!** Use your judgement about whether it makes sense to send a follow-up message if you haven't heard back from the person you made your ask to.

**SHOW YOUR GRATITUDE!** A short, personalized thank you lets people know that their contribution was meaningful to the movement.

**UPDATE CONTRIBUTORS:** This is just as important as thanking donors. After your fundraising drive (ideally within a month), let people know how much was raised collectively, how their contributions were used, how many people were supported, and/or any other details you feel moved to share.

# general tips

**All of your asks should be intentional and related to both the cause you're fundraising for and the person or people you're looking to engage:**

- Think about who you're asking, what it is they care about and how that knowledge can connect to your ask.
- Share your own story and connection to the work or why it's important to you. People are more likely to give when they know why YOU believe in this work.
- Phrase your request as an invitation. Ask people to join you in supporting a cause or organization. This is more impactful if you donate as well!
- Include specific amounts with a deadline like "Join me in giving \$35 by Monday at midnight."

## IN PERSON

Be transparent about making an ask. If you want someone to donate money, ask them if they'd be willing to have a conversation about donating in a way that is comfortable for both of you. This might mean over a meal, a meetup for coffee, or a side conversation at an upcoming social event.

Answer any questions they have to the best of your ability, but don't promise anything you don't know for certain.

## BY EMAIL

Draft a general email that is still personalized to you - feel free to use the enclosed template to start. Edit the template with anything that makes it clear that you took the time to reach out to an individual personally, as opposed to through a mass message. See our resources folder [here](#) for a template email you can use for fundraising!

\*See [this resources folder](#) for tips on hosting a fundraising and letter-writing event, a template fundraising email, a sample flyer, a sample social media graphic, and additional materials and resources to support you in your grassroots fundraising!\*

# appendix

## **ADDITIONAL READING (MUTUAL AID)**

[Big Door Brigade- What is Mutual Aid?](#)

[Dean Spade- Mutual Aid Syllabus](#)

[“Moments of Contingency.” September 26, 2019. Episode of Delete Your Account podcast with Mariame Kaba and Dean Spade](#)

[“BAR Abolition and Mutual Aid Spotlight: Ejeris Dixon.” April 15, 2020](#)

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. 2018. Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice (book)

Alondra Nelson. 2011. Body and Soul (book)

## **ADDITIONAL READING (JPAY AND EXPLOITATION)**

[Captive Audience: How Companies Make Millions Charging Prisoners to Send An Email](#)

[The Hidden Costs of “Free” Prison Tablets](#)

[Lawsuit reveals how tech companies profit off the prison-industrial complex](#)

## **ADDITIONAL READING (GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING)**

[Introduction to The Revolution Will Not be Funded](#)

[Thoughts for Foundations and Major Donors](#)

[Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training](#)

[Grassroots Fundraising Guide for Students on Campus](#)

[Vanguard Public Foundation: Grassroots Fundraising Guide for Social Justice Organizations](#)

[Resource Generation \(for young people with access to wealth/class privilege\)](#)

**PLEASE REACH OUT WITH ANY  
QUESTIONS, FEEDBACK OR JOY SHARING AT**

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