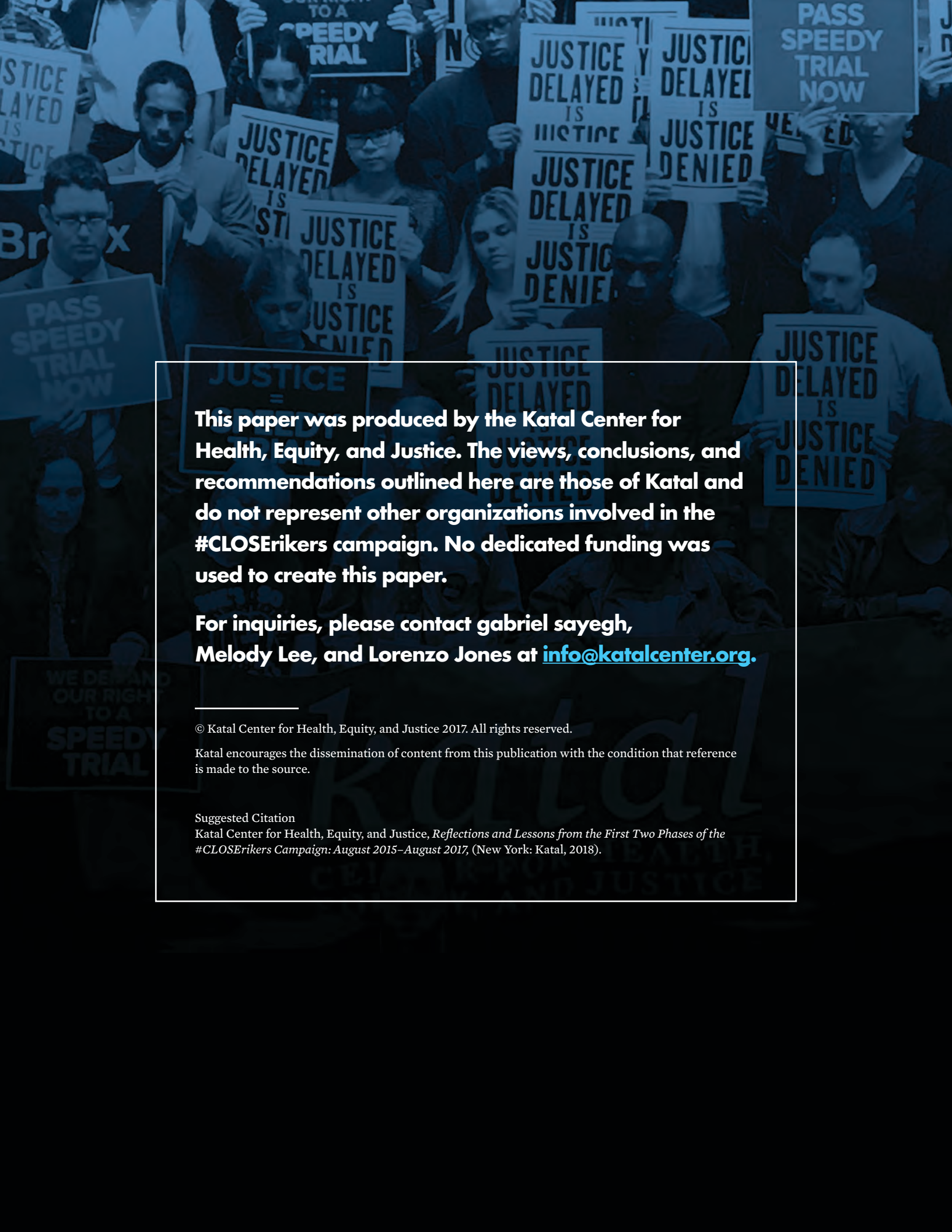


Reflections and Lessons from the First Two Phases of the #CLOSErikers Campaign: August 2015 – August 2017

katal
CENTER FOR HEALTH,
EQUITY, AND JUSTICE



This paper was produced by the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice. The views, conclusions, and recommendations outlined here are those of Katal and do not represent other organizations involved in the #CLOSErikers campaign. No dedicated funding was used to create this paper.

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Introduction

On April 14, 2016, the #CLOSErikers campaign launched publicly, with nearly 60 organizations and 200 people on the steps of New York City Hall calling for closure of the most notorious jail complex in the United States. Almost a year later, on March 31, 2017, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the city would close the facility on Rikers Island, making the campaign's central demand official city policy. Although the jails have yet to be closed, the campaign won a major victory in a remarkably short time, capturing the attention of organizers, advocates, and funders across the country.

What lessons can be shared from the #CLOSErikers campaign? How was the campaign built and how did it function? What was the basis of its apparent meteoric rise and relatively quick success? What aspects and practices of the success in New York City are intrinsic to local dynamics and which are transferable to other jurisdictions? How did the city's already robust justice reform movement shape and affect the campaign? What was the political context in which the campaign operated, and how did that context contribute to the campaign's success? As the campaign grew and finally forced Mayor de Blasio to agree to close the facility, what worked and what didn't? What metrics did the campaign use to evaluate its work?

Two organizations have a unique perspective on these questions. In the summer of 2015, the Katal (pronounced ka-TALL) Center for Health, Equity, and Justice partnered with JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA) and together founded and built the #CLOSErikers campaign.¹ The two groups brought different, complementary strengths to this work. JLUSA works to reduce the U.S. correctional population, in part by empowering people most affected by incarceration to drive policy reform. Katal works to strengthen the people, policies, institutions, and movements that advance health, equity, and justice for everyone. Together the organizations built and directed the #CLOSErikers campaign, elevating and centering the visibility and leadership role of directly impacted people in the campaign, including those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated and their family members and friends.



After the campaign secured Mayor de Blasio's commitment in the spring of 2017, the effort to close Rikers and transform the justice system in New York City moved into a new, more complex phase, requiring a variety of reforms at the local and state level. In light of this, and to adjust for the challenges ahead, in the summer of 2017, Katal concluded its formal organizational partnership with JLUSA and stepped down from its role as a co-leader in the branded #CLOSErikers campaign. Both organizations turned to focus on the phase ahead: full implementation of this new city policy.

For Katal, this work includes municipal-based changes such as advancing pre-arrest diversion in New York City and throughout the state. It also includes passing state legislation to reform bail and speedy trial processes, and advancing decriminalization of certain low-level offenses (like drug possession) and sentencing reform—all efforts to drive down jail and prison populations while protecting public safety. Across Katal's city and state efforts, a common theme emerges: addressing racial disparities throughout the criminal justice system while fundamentally transforming how that system operates. Many of the changes needed at the city and state level were recommended in [the report](#) issued in April 2017 by the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, chaired by former Chief Judge of the State of New York Jonathan Lippman.² (For more discussion about the commission, see "The Demand for Closure Grows," page 21.) While the

campaign did not endorse every recommendation in that report, in many respects it represents a rare alignment of community groups, government officials, business leaders, and researchers, all of whom agree that systems-level change is not only necessary but within reach. The #CLOSErikers campaign played an important role in bringing about this unison.

This paper is Katal's reflection on the #CLOSErikers campaign, from its initial development in the summer of 2015 through the victory of forcing Mayor de Blasio to announce that the city would close Rikers Island.³ The campaign's work is best understood in the historical context in which it emerged and in the context of the local justice reform movement in which it operated. That movement, made up of an extraordinary number of groups and people who have worked for many years to advance justice, became the birthing ground for the campaign and served as its indispensable foundation. Without that broad movement—its organizers, organizations, and other participants, many of whom persevered in this fight for years—the #CLOSErikers campaign certainly could not have gotten as far as it did within two momentous years. (For a list of supporting organizations, see Appendix 2, page 34.)

This campaign summary is intended as a contribution to the field; Katal's hope is that it serves movements in New York City and beyond in the fight to end mass incarceration and build communities.

An aerial photograph of Rikers Island, showing a dense cluster of prison buildings with flat roofs, surrounded by water. The image is in black and white, with a dark overlay on the right side where the text is located.

A Brief History of Rikers and Previous Efforts to Shut It Down

Rikers Island was named after Richard Riker, a descendant of Dutch immigrant Abraham Rycken, who acquired the land during the period of Dutch and English colonization. Richard Riker served as a magistrate in New York City, and, as a supporter of slavery, was notorious for abusing the Fugitive Slave Act by facilitating the kidnapping of free Black people in New York City and having them sent into slavery in the South in return for kickbacks.⁴ Historian Eric Foner notes in his book *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* that abolitionists at the time recognized Riker as a leading member of The Kidnapping Club.⁵ Foner writes: “In accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act, members of the club would bring a Black person before Riker, who would quickly issue a certificate of removal [into slavery in the South] before the accused had a chance to bring witnesses to testify that he was actually free.”

This history is important to our understanding of Rikers Island today, in no small part because of the connections between slavery and mass incarceration and the ongoing, severely disproportionate racial

disparities associated with the justice system. New York City bought the island in 1884, decades after Richard Riker had died. When the city created the Department of Correction in 1897, the DOC was assigned jurisdiction over Rikers Island.⁶ A new jail complex was opened there in 1932 and took the island’s name.⁷ By 1939, a Bronx grand jury assailed the “cramped quarters, insanitary buildings and inadequate facilities” at Rikers.⁸ Additional jails were built on the island over the next 30 years.⁹ In the 1970s, problems like overcrowding and inhumane conditions were well known and regularly reported in the news. A 1975 uprising by people detained at Rikers highlighted these issues as they demanded basics like better medical care and improving visiting hours.¹⁰ The same year, a series of more than 30 lawsuits filed by people in New York City jails about horrific conditions at Rikers forced the courts to pay increased attention to the problems in all city jails.¹¹ The people detained at Rikers and their families, along with advocates, called for the city to shut down the facility.

In the face of crises at Rikers and elsewhere in the criminal justice system, the city government made its first modern effort to close the facility. Ed Koch, elected mayor in 1978, appointed Herb Sturz as Deputy Mayor for Criminal Justice. Sturz—a prominent criminal justice reformer who founded a number of initiatives, including the Manhattan Bail Project and the Vera Institute of Justice—wanted to get rid of Rikers: “We worked on trying to get the city to sell Rikers to New York State,” he said in a 2017 interview. “The plan at the time was for the state to reserve the facilities for city residents convicted of serious felonies, and spare them the need to go to Attica upstate.”¹² Sturz noted in another interview that if New York City had sold the island to the state, the city would have used the funds from the sale to build smaller jails near the courthouses in each of the boroughs. “It was the idea of putting accused persons right near the courthouse, closer to their families, and convicted people also nearer,” he said.¹³ As Sturz explained, however, “The effort failed, and got put on the shelf for a long time.” He told *The Village Voice* that in part, the plan’s failure was perhaps due to concerns about costs and internal politicking among city and state officials.

Through the 1980s and ’90s, the crisis at Rikers only grew, with overcrowding, deaths of people held in

jails, violence against those incarcerated and against corrections officers, corruption, and a population that was increasingly dealing with mental health issues and often insufficiently treated for those conditions. The calls for closure continued—from a broad range of people, including those who had survived being detained on Rikers, some who had worked there as correctional officers, and advocates. It wasn't until the mid-2000s that the city made another effort to shutter the facility.

During Michael Bloomberg's second mayoral term, Martin Horn, commissioner of the Department of Correction, made closing Rikers his principal objective. He sought to shut down the complex and replace it with modern state-of-the-art facilities in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In 2006, as calls for closure persisted, the outlook was promising; community groups and advocates pushed for reform and the administration supported a plan led by Commissioner Horn. But a 2016 article in *The New York Times* details what happened:



“Mr. Horn took his proposal to churches and mosques, community activists, City Council members and leaders of the local political machines. Rikers Island, he told them, could not be fixed. Human waste bubbled into cells; overheated buildings put inmates and officers on edge; gang members broke off pieces of the radiators and sharpened them into weapons.”

At first, the idea of closing Rikers seemed to appeal to people, Mr. Horn said, but when they realized it could mean building jails in their neighborhoods, the mood turned. A fierce grass-roots opposition led by local activist groups like Community in Unity and Green Workers Cooperatives came together to quash the proposal.

“I was buzz-sawed,” Mr. Horn said.¹⁴

The city's effort to shutter the facility was dead. Community groups continued their push, and it would be nearly 10 years before the city government, under tremendous pressure, took up the task again.

Political Context and Local Dynamics

The #CLOSErikers campaign was not an isolated effort. It was born into a movement ecosystem where activists and organizers were working in every borough of New York City on a range of issues, including ending stop-and-frisk; ending low-level arrests for acts such as jumping subway turnstiles or possessing small amounts of marijuana; promoting sentencing reform; kicking U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement off of Rikers; ending the use of solitary confinement for children incarcerated there; and fighting to end racial disparities in policing, court, detention, and supervision practices.¹⁵ At the state level, energetic reform efforts had long been under way on a range of issues. This included juvenile justice reform and Raise the Age, ending solitary confinement, legalizing marijuana, parole reform, discovery reform, addressing prosecutorial misconduct, decriminalization of low-level offenses, and funding public defense statewide. There was also a call to shut down the Attica Correctional Facility—a movement known as Close Attica—that had gained momentum through the work of the Correctional Association of New York under the leadership of Soffiyah Elijah. Altogether New York had a vibrant statewide justice reform movement, built from the ground up.¹⁶ Absent the longtime work of local and statewide activists, organizers, advocates, public defenders, alternative-to-incarceration and reentry service providers, reform-minded actors in city government, and others, the emergence of a robust citywide #CLOSErikers campaign would have probably been much longer in the making and certainly much harder to build.

An overview of the broader movement—with its various groups, issues, and trajectories—is important to understand the context in which #CLOSErikers was born. The following are six factors Katal believes were particularly important to the shaping of the local context for the launch of #CLOSErikers.

Movement to End Stop-and-Frisk and Marijuana Arrests

Discriminatory practices by the New York Police Department (NYPD)—particularly stop-and-frisk and marijuana arrests—had funneled people into the juvenile and criminal justice systems for decades and had grown out of control. The 1990s’ “broken windows” policing strategy pioneered by Commissioner Bill Bratton introduced stop-and-frisk as a crime control strategy. From 1993 to 2011, when use of stop-and-frisk was on the rise, the NYPD made more than 500,000 arrests for low-level marijuana possession arrests alone, mostly of young men of color, even though research shows that young white men use marijuana at comparable rates.¹⁷ (In 2011 alone, under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the NYPD conducted nearly 700,000 stops—as part of stop-and-frisk—targeting mostly young men of color.¹⁸) In late 2010, a campaign led by the Drug Policy Alliance, Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, and VOCAL-NY launched to end these racially biased arrests in New York City and fix the state’s marijuana possession laws. This

work ultimately succeeded in forcing two mayors—Bloomberg and de Blasio—to rein in some NYPD practices.¹⁹ And after decades of police accountability work by groups like the Justice Committee, CAAAV, and Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, in 2012 a powerful new citywide coalition was formed to end the use of stop-and-frisk in the city: Communities United for Police Reform (CPR).²⁰ Led by directly impacted communities,



with longtime organizer Joo-Hyun Kang serving as director, CPR's focused citywide coalition effort quickly catapulted stop-and-frisk reform to the forefront of the local and national landscape. CPR's focused organizing, advocacy, and broad-based coalition building led to the city council passing a group of bills known as the Community Safety Act, successfully overriding Mayor Bloomberg's veto to enact comprehensive reform.²¹ In 2013, CPR member Center for Constitutional Rights won its lawsuit in *Floyd v. City of New York*, which concluded that the NYPD's stop-and-frisk practices were unconstitutional.²²

These campaigns and others ensured that by the fall of 2013, criminal justice reform issues were driving the discourse in the mayoral election, becoming key in each candidate's platforms; 9 of the 10 candidates across major parties said they would end the marijuana arrest policies, and a handful of candidates said they would change NYPD practices, while then–Public Advocate Bill de Blasio said he would end stop-and-frisk altogether.²³ De Blasio even issued a campaign ad starring his teenage son, who is Black, speaking directly about his father's willingness to end those practices.²⁴ City Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito was the primary champion of ending the marijuana arrest practices and played a leading role in the effort to roll back stop-and-frisk policing. Bill de Blasio's election as mayor and Mark-Viverito's ascension as City Council Speaker can be attributed in part to their work on addressing issues like stop-and-frisk and marijuana arrests that had been made relevant and urgent by a reform movement in the city. These issues—and the urgent ongoing work of CPR to advance policing reforms in New York City—created a context that made it possible to pressure the mayor for even more far-reaching change in the justice system.

Police Killings and #BlackLivesMatter

The #BlackLivesMatter Movement was founded in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murder and manslaughter charges for killing 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. The movement's founders—Alicia Garza, Patrice

Cullors, and Opal Tometi—created a “Black-centered political will and movement-building project.”²⁵ Wesley Lowery, writing for Guardian.com, observed that the death of Trayvon Martin was the latest in a string of killings of Black people, mostly by police, which had sparked outrage across the country. In a reflection about the origins of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, Lowery wrote:

Its conception came from the deaths of Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, which mobilised black Americans in a demand for justice. Its grand birth, first in Ferguson and then throughout the nation in the autumn of 2014, was prompted by the deaths of Eric Garner, John Crawford and Michael Brown, the cases that showed justice for those killed by the police was not forthcoming. As the list of names grew, so did the urgency of the uprising that would become a movement. 2015 brought a third wave of anger and pain: Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Samuel DuBose—another round of death in which the pleas for police accountability became demands.

In New York City, marches, rallies, and protests about Eric Garner’s killing on Staten Island reflected the latest uproar in a city where Black people had been attacked, abused, and killed by police for decades. The #BlackLivesMatter movement, led predominantly by Black women, pushed the city and the entire nation into a conversation about the all-too-routine police killings of Black people in the United States. This context shaped much of the discussion about the death of Kalief Browder—a young Bronx man who was detained for three years at Rikers and subsequently took his own life—which intensified the focus on closing Rikers.²⁷



A Scathing Federal Report on Conditions for Youth on Rikers

In August 2014, Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, released his explosive [report](#) about the horrific conditions for young people detained on Rikers.²⁸ *The New York Times* summarized it this way:

In an extraordinary rebuke of the New York City Department of Correction, the federal government said on Monday that the department had systematically violated the civil rights of male teenagers held at Rikers Island by failing to protect them from the rampant use of unnecessary and excessive force by correction officers....

The report, which comes at a time of increasing scrutiny of the jail complex after a stream of revelations about Rikers’s problems, also found that the department relied to an “excessive and inappropriate” degree on solitary confinement to punish teenage inmates, placing them in punitive segregation, as the practice is known, for months at a time.²⁹

Bharara's report, which called out the "culture of violence" at Rikers, triggered far more scrutiny of Rikers and of city government broadly, for its ineffectiveness in managing the problems there.³⁰ The report touched on many of the problems highlighted in a major investigative report by *The New York Times* a month earlier, in July 2014, which focused on mental health issues on the island and found the following:

At Rikers, inmates with mental health problems are especially vulnerable, often the weakest in a kind of war of all against all, preyed upon by correction officers and other inmates. The prolonged isolation, extremes of hot and cold temperatures, interminable stretches of monotony punctuated by flashes of explosive violence can throw even the most mentally sound off balance and quickly overcome those whose mental grip is already tenuous.³¹

The report itself, and the media surrounding it, heightened the urgency about conditions at Rikers for the public and lawmakers alike.

Kalief Browder: Another Rikers Tragedy

In October 2014, in the wake of the U.S. Attorney's damning report, Jennifer Gonnerman's prominent *New Yorker* article detailed how the city's criminal justice system had failed Kalief Browder, centering the violent role that Rikers had played. From being charged as an adult at age 16 to his lack of a speedy trial and his detainment for almost three years—more than two years of that in solitary confinement—the dehumanization and brutalization Kalief endured at Rikers took a tremendous toll on his mental health.³²

In June of 2015, two years after his release from Rikers, [**Kalief Browder took his own life**](#), rattling the city and spurring a national outcry. The tragedy of his death forced not only New York City but the country to contend with a broader sense of complicity. The questions were in the national consciousness: How do we allow for a place like Rikers Island to exist and how long will we allow our failed criminal justice system to continue to destroy countless lives—like Kalief Browder's? Kalief's story and his death laid bare the absolute scandal of Rikers Island and a broken justice system.

Shortly after, activists in New York City, including Akeem Browder, Kalief's brother, launched a new effort, the Campaign to Shut Down Rikers, using direct action and protest to call for the facility's closure. They joined a range of other activist, advocacy, and legal groups, including [**NYC Jails Action Coalition**](#), which for years had demanded reforms on Rikers or its closure, and even abolition of jails and prisons more broadly. Indeed, activists had advocated for Rikers to be closed throughout the years, often in response to scandals at the facility or in the justice system overall. For instance, in February 2013, some New York City activists came together to create the February 23 Coalition to mark the one-year anniversary of the killing of 18-year-old Ramarley Graham by the NYPD and of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in Florida; the coalition organized [**a march through Harlem**](#), which included a call to shut down Rikers.³³

The National Political Landscape: 2012–2016

The #CLOSERikers campaign began its planning phase as the national debate about Black lives, policing, and mass incarceration swelled—and this elevated the urgency of the issues at Rikers and the crises there. The loss of Black lives at the hands of police throughout the United States spurred a national uproar and the genesis of #BlackLivesMatter and the Movement for Black Lives, along with other networks and organizations. This energy coalesced into a movement that took to the streets throughout the country, from Oakland to Ferguson, Missouri, to Baltimore and beyond. In New York City, marches, rallies, and direct actions advanced local reform debates, led by Communities for Police Reform and its member groups, Black Lives Matter activists, and others.



President Barack Obama had made criminal justice reform a hallmark issue during his final two years in office, speaking openly about efforts to end mass incarceration and the drug war as his administration hosted multiple conferences on reform at the White House. Both Eric Holder, the U.S. Attorney General, and Loretta Lynch, who was U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York before succeeding Holder as Attorney General, were champions of reform. Under their leadership, the U.S. Department of Justice oversaw consent agreements in places like Ferguson and Baltimore, to hold police departments accountable. In these cases, the DOJ was finally listening to communities and supporting change.³⁴ Although Congress did not change federal law and policies much during the Obama presidency, the administration's rhetoric and the emergence of more bipartisan alliances fostered a national climate in which reform was not just possible, but politically mainstream. Early in Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, she made a major policy speech about criminal justice reform, demonstrating how the issue itself had become not just commonplace, but was deemed important enough to address by a leading candidate in a tough primary race.³⁵ For New York City, all of this meant that the very issues being confronted locally were now part of a *national* debate, and sometimes even the *subject* of this debate.

Media Focus on the Crisis at Rikers

Through 2014 and into 2015, media reports about Rikers were published almost daily, covering egregious human rights violations and bringing more dangerous and abusive conditions to light. Numerous media outlets published stories detailing the abuses perpetrated by corrections officers and the inhumane treatment and conditions suffered by people detained on Rikers.³⁶ Journalists dug in, producing investigative reports, detailed histories, and personal profiles, as well as covering the latest outrages at the facility. This helped New Yorkers better understand the crisis unfolding in their backyard and the response to it. (Some outlets devoted significant time to the Rikers story, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, the *New York Daily News*, *The Marshall Project*, *The Village Voice*, *City Limits*, *City & State New York*, Politico, WNYC, NY1, DNAinfo, Gothamist, and *The Independent*. As noted above, Gonnerman's 2014 story about Kalief Browder elevated the issue nationally in a new way. And in July 2015, in the wake of Kalief's death—which hit New Yorkers hard—*The New York Times* ran Neil Barsky's poignant op-ed, ["Shut Down Rikers Island."](#)³⁷ The publication of this commentary made clear that people in some elite circles were entertaining the notion of closure. The campaign and its supporters used social media to circulate a broad range of stories that appeared online, in print, and on TV and radio, extending their reach. The media attention to Rikers helped make visible a problem that otherwise was out of sight, out of mind.

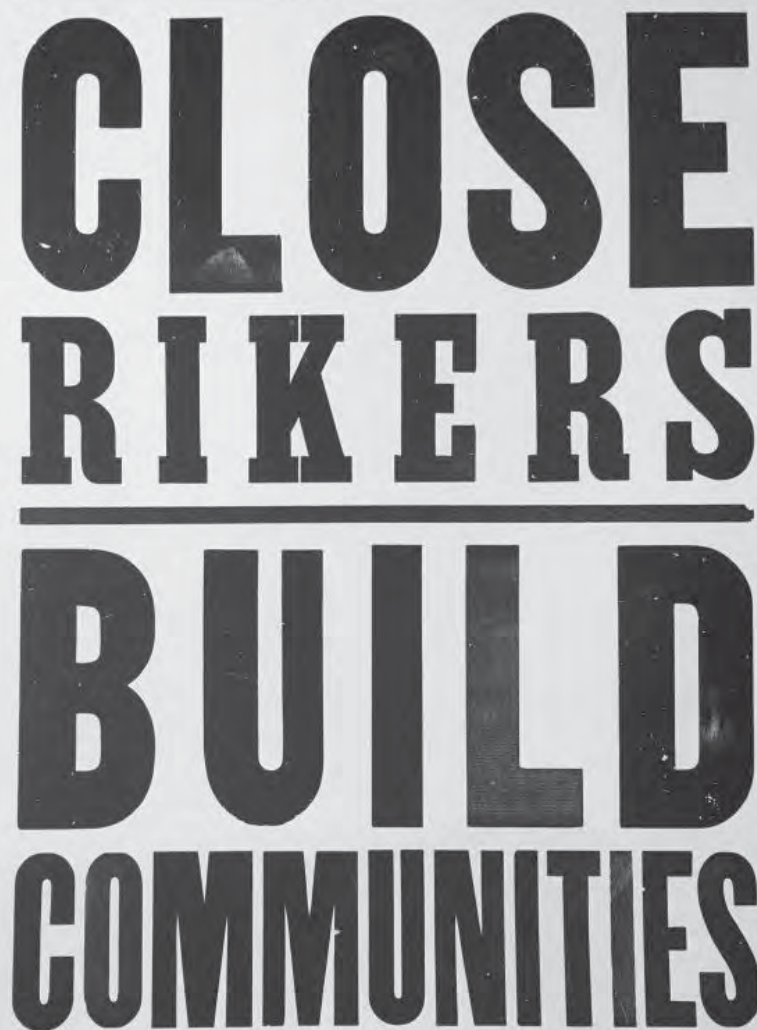
In this context, the #CLOSErikers campaign launched its initial planning phase.

A Strategy to #CLOSErikers

Glenn Martin, president of JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA), and gabriel sayegh, co-executive director of the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, sat down during the early summer of 2015 to discuss building a strong, focused campaign to close Rikers. Martin and sayegh had worked together previously on criminal justice reform efforts. The crises on the island and its history of abuse made it clear that the jails shouldn't keep operating. And the political moment called for dramatic change. As described above, the Kalief Browder story made Rikers a national scandal. Closing Rikers would serve to advance justice and human rights in New York City. As a target for a campaign, the symbolism of closing the nation's largest, most notorious jail complex would likely energize the broader movement to end mass incarceration, not just locally, but across the country.

Some local groups were already working to close the facility, and even more would need to be done to make closure a political reality. In the summer of 2015, even in the midst of the growing crisis at Rikers, closure was far from certain. No citywide elected official had yet come out in favor of that action. Most public officials, along with the powerful corrections officers union and many advocate groups, were calling for reform of the institution, not shutting it down. Mayor de Blasio was an ardent champion of the reform position, holding on to the idea that Rikers could be fixed. And while many community leaders, activists, and advocates had long fought for closure, no major donors had yet stepped forward to offer support for a campaign to close the facility.

And then there were immediate tough questions that arise in the discussion about closing a facility: How could the population be reduced to make closure feasible? If new jails would need to be built, where would they be, and what would be necessary to make sure their footprint and capacity were as small as possible? If in communities and near the courts—as Herb Sturz and Martin Horn had recommended—how would a campaign address potential community opposition? Would closing Rikers open up calls for expanding electronic surveillance or other sanctions,



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and if so, how would the campaign guard against them? What reforms were needed at the state level to reduce the population enough to make closure possible, and how would those be won? What would become of the island or Rikers itself if the corrections facility were to close? These questions and many more loomed.

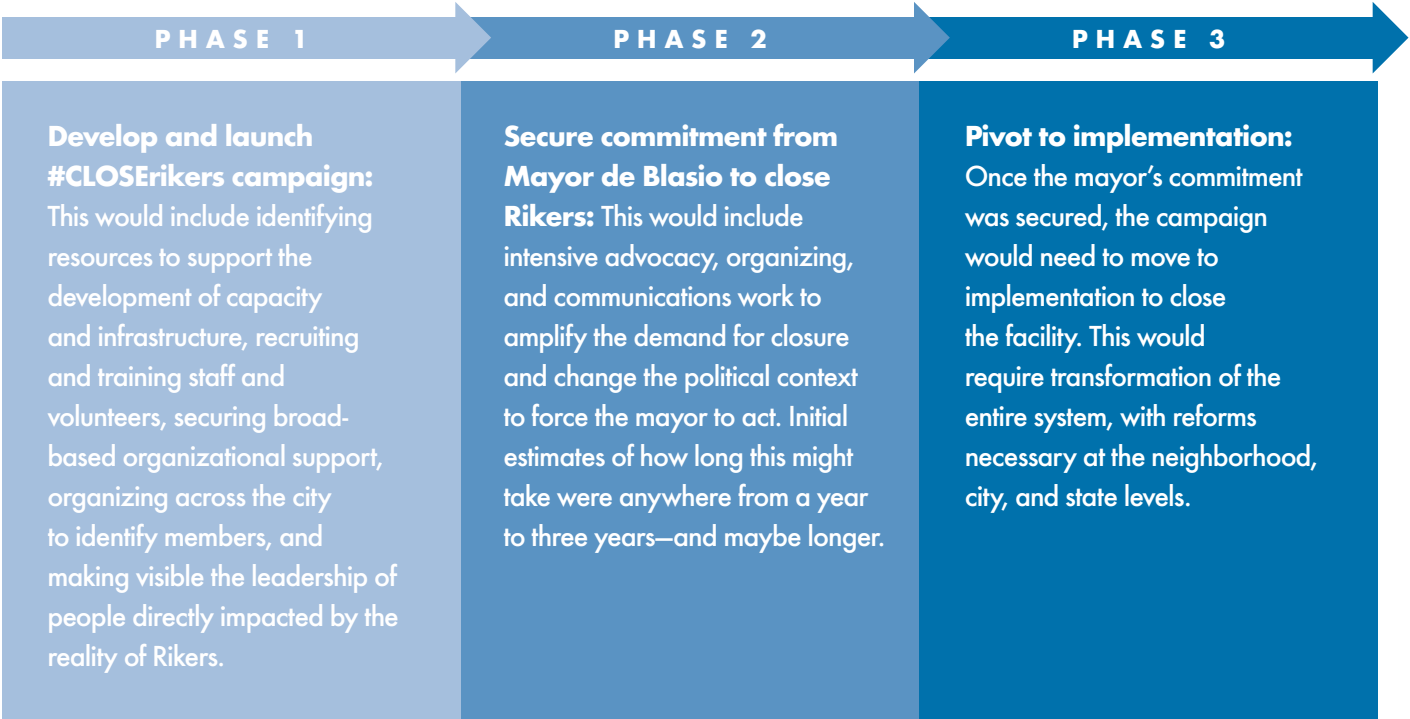
Some questions about closure could be addressed right away. Others, particularly those about “What happens after closure?” were largely hypothetical. But the urgent crisis on Rikers Island and the need for immediate reform were not. Martin and sayegh decided to start by building a campaign for closure without getting delayed by the questions that would arise as a result of reaching that goal, understanding that those open questions would need to be prioritized and eventually addressed.

Based on previous experience, campaign leaders knew that moving Mayor de Blasio and the broader political establishment to the position of closing Rikers would mean making that the only viable option. This

would require efforts including focused advocacy and organizing (including building a base), building a cross-sectoral organizational alliance, managing a smart inside-outside game (working with government officials inside the system while pressuring government from the outside through protest and other activity), and maximizing use of strategic communications. The campaign would need to create a platform accessible to

as many groups and sectors as possible to demonstrate broad-based support and normalize the demand to close Rikers. The campaign would also need to build on and leverage the political power of the criminal justice reform field, which had not only won major victories in recent years but had established itself as a driving, powerful political force in the city (including the support for and election of Bill de Blasio as mayor).

That summer, campaign leaders drafted the first strategy documents, outlining three distinct phases.



The first phase would start in conjunction with the second; while building the campaign infrastructure, the plan was to simultaneously amplify existing calls to close Rikers. Upon its launch, the campaign would move fully into the second phase. The third phase would commence after the completion of the first two, and would require a different approach, as targets would likely shift. The mayor would undoubtedly remain a target, but the actual closure would require the action of additional decision makers at the neighborhood, city, and state level.

Campaign Structure and Development

The phases of campaign development were not entirely separate; of course, even as the campaign was being built, JLUSA and Katal were also focused on getting the mayor to change his position. This section explains how the two phases unfolded and sometimes overlapped.

Phase One: Building the Campaign and Demand to Close Rikers

With these three phases outlined, the campaign embarked on Phase One in the fall of 2015. At this point, the campaign team was small. At JLUSA, it was Martin, with additional support through JLUSA's program staff. At Katal, it was Melody Lee and gabriel sayegh in New York and Lorenzo Jones in Hartford—all three Katal cofounders.

Among the immediate challenges was securing resources; fortunately, this happened fairly early in the campaign. The first and largest donor made a commitment of \$900,000 in the late fall of 2015. These funds allowed staff to immediately focus on developing the campaign infrastructure and doing necessary organizing work rather than only raising money. But it was also the first real, substantial investment in an advocacy effort to close Rikers.³⁸

Through the fall, campaign staff began a series of meetings with criminal justice organizers and advocates across New York City, to discuss the idea of closing Rikers. For Katal staff, this included conducting dozens of one-on-one meetings with organizers, advocates, service providers, and community members throughout the city to discuss Rikers and hear from a cross-section of New Yorkers what they thought should happen. Some wanted it closed; others thought closure might be far-fetched. Everyone believed *something* needed to be done. This consensus about the need for changes at Rikers proved critical, because it allowed organizers to build the campaign in a way that answered that question—What should happen?—with a demand for *closure*, rather than a general call for *reform*.

During this period, Katal and JLUSA worked to elevate Martin's voice in the media debate about the facility, both as someone who had survived Rikers

and to amplify social media activity related to the new campaign hashtag: #closeRIKERS, which soon became #CLOSErikers.³⁹

Early in the fall of 2015, City Council Member Danny Dromm, a progressive leader who closely followed justice issues and met regularly with reformers, was the first public official in nearly 10 years to call for closure of the facility.⁴⁰



Through the fall, news stories were published and aired every day, bringing greater attention and urgency to the crises on Rikers. Then the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School invited Martin to participate in a forum called [“Rikers Island: Reform it—or Shut It Down?”](#)⁴¹ The program would take place in November, include Martin as a speaker, feature many prominent community advocates and government leaders on a panel, and be moderated by journalist Errol Louis, the popular host and political anchor at the news channel NY1. It was among the most high-profile events to date that put forward the “shut down Rikers” angle, and, as such, the campaign promoted it intensively and leveraged it for organizing goals. By the time the

panel convened on Nov. 18, there was a significant buzz about it and registration hit full capacity. The event was livestreamed online, with hundreds more tuning in.

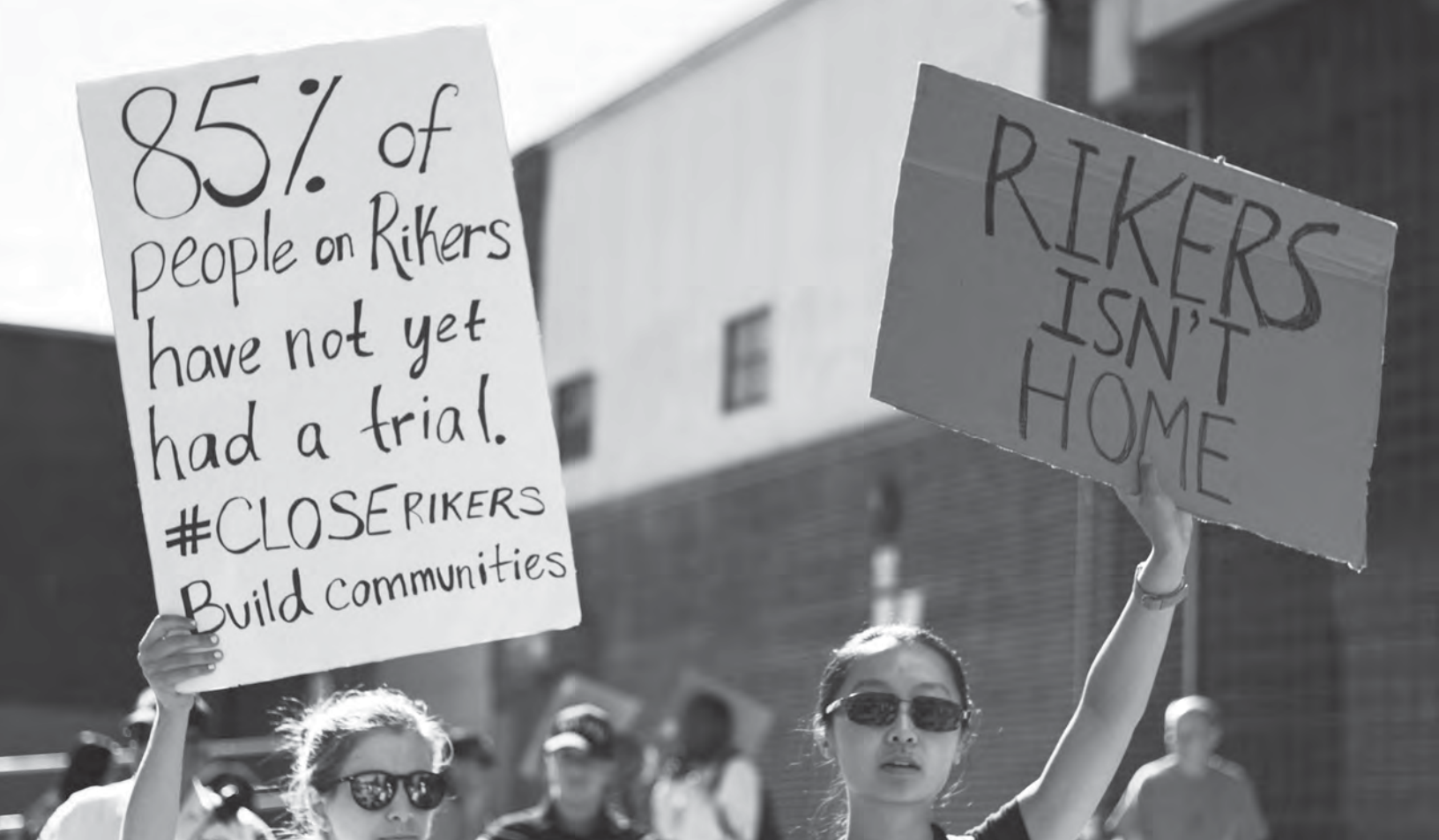
New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer chose the sold-out event as a platform to declare his support for closing Rikers Island, becoming the first citywide official in a decade to do so publicly. This changed the dynamic. Stringer, a champion of progressive politics, was articulating a closure position and was issuing reports from the comptroller's office to make his point. A new door had opened.

By the end of 2015 the uproar against Rikers had reached a fever pitch. This long-overdue attention to the

jails' problems—and critical action to address them—had altered the discourse about the institution. Five months before the public launch of the #CLOSERikers campaign, journalist Ed Morales, in “Closing Rikers,” his [four-part series](#) for City Limits, wrote:

The constant drumbeat of Justice Department reports, screaming headlines and impassioned editorials bemoaning the out-of-control violence and close to inhuman conditions on Rikers Island have been with us for over a year now. U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara's report, issued in August 2014, dispassionately capped its central finding—that there is a “pattern and practice of excessive force and violence” at the city's go-to holding pen for pretrial detainees and short-term inmates—with a foreboding conclusion: “Rikers Island is a broken institution. It is a place where brute force is the first impulse rather than the last resort.” The case of Kalief Browder, who spent three years at Rikers without being charged with a crime only to commit suicide last June, months after his release, seemed to bring to a tipping point the question of Rikers' role in the city.⁴²





First Citywide Campaign Meeting

By the beginning of 2016, discussion about closing Rikers was even more prominent in the media and in policy circles. The campaign's first major funding had come through and plans were under way to expand staff and capacity. In mid-January, the campaign convened its first citywide meeting. More than 40 justice reform advocates and leaders were invited to meet to discuss closure and how to make it happen. Campaign leaders made sure to invite groups with a mix of perspectives—some who believed Rikers should be closed, some who were skeptical about the likelihood of closure or the strategic utility of that demand, and some who considered reform the best course of action. The guest speaker was Michael Jacobson, the former commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction and of the Department of Budget under Mayor Rudy Giuliani; Jacobson had also served as president of the Vera Institute of Justice, and has been executive director of the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York since 2013.

Although Jacobson did not explicitly endorse closing Rikers at the meeting and was not there as a supporter of such action per se, he walked the group through the data on Rikers and what it would take to get the population down far enough to make closure feasible. He noted that the pretrial justice population on Rikers was so large that without reducing it, it would be difficult to shrink the city's overall detention footprint, even if Rikers *were* closed—making bail reform and speedy trial reform essential to any reasonable plan for closure. Jacobson's presentation outlined a viable pathway to closure, while sharpening people's thinking about what the legislative agenda in Albany would need to look like. Jacobson was clear with the group that closing Rikers would be a huge, fantastically difficult task with dozens of moving parts, but that it was possible. His presentation was data-driven and politically informed. Precisely because he is not an activist, his remarks had the effect of turning some skeptics in the room into believers that closing Rikers would be possible.

After this first citywide meeting, armed with a clearer understanding of the pathways ahead at the city and state level, campaign staff set out to plan what would become the campaign's public launch in April.

Completing Phase One and Preparing for Phase Two

From January through the public launch in April 2016, JLUSA and Katal developed the remaining pieces of the campaign. Staff were hired, including Janos Marton, director of policy and campaigns at JLUSA, who joined Lee, Martin, and sayegh on the leadership team. Communications functions were expanded, including the build-out of the #CLOSErikers [website](#).⁴³ A field team began to take shape. And the group's leaders made the following decisions about how organizations would sign on to the campaign and how the campaign would function:

- ➔ **A campaign, not a coalition.** Led by a partnership between JLUSA and Katal, the #CLOSErikers campaign would operate with decision-making centralized between the two organizations, to help keep up with the rapidly evolving issues. Thus, there was no *formal* process for other groups to weigh in on strategy or direction; the campaign did not adopt a coalition structure, which often includes more consensus-oriented decision-making processes. As such, #CLOSErikers was intentionally called a campaign and not a coalition. This was the primary structure from launch through the summer of 2017.
- ➔ **The internal process.** JLUSA and Katal were in active daily contact as they managed the campaign. The organizations also held regular weekly conference calls with all campaign staff, consultants, and key partners to plan for the week ahead. Internal memos defined operational protocols and processes. Campaign leadership—Martin and Marton at JLUSA and Lee and sayegh at Katal—met in person regularly to address organizational questions and issues. In addition to shared core campaign functions, JLUSA took the lead on coordinating social media and branding, and Katal coordinated strategy and the associated statewide reform agenda. Martin and sayegh managed high-level relationships and political developments and served as press spokespeople, with Martin as point person. He had served time on Rikers many years prior and was intimately familiar with its violence; his personal experience enriched and animated campaign communications.

Lee played a unique role in the campaign, managing day-to-day field operations including the activities of the field team, made up of staff from both organizations. She drove the campaign staff development processes, including the weekly training and accountability meeting for the field organizers. She worked with Marton to ensure that as the field team grew, its daily activities stayed aligned with broader campaign objectives. And she managed the statewide advocacy work on speedy trial reform, work that essentially constituted a related but separate campaign.

- ➔ **Formal campaign sign-ons: “One No, Many Yeses.”** After the first citywide meeting, the campaign started asking organizations to join the #CLOSErikers campaign by endorsing a sign-on letter calling for closure of the facility. Those that signed were then counted as a campaign member organization.

Although many groups agreed that closing Rikers was the right step, there was far less consensus about what should happen after the facility would close. Opinions varied greatly about timelines, strategies, and demands. For instance, some proposed smaller facilities in the boroughs. Others demanded no jails at all, asserting an abolitionist position. Trying to parse these differences at the front end would have made building a broad-based consensus much more difficult, limiting the campaign's ability to build a united front. Thus, the campaign drew from a principle that had shaped the global justice movement in the late '90s and early 2000s: “One no, many yeses.” The sign-on letter, as with the campaign, was values-oriented and intentionally did not outline what would come *after* the closure of Rikers. Campaign leaders organized to strengthen and expand the consensus on closing Rikers, and left questions about “What comes next?” for open discussion in the future. This also served the campaign strategy; no one had to answer that question, because the first and second phases were to build the campaign and then focus, like a laser, on getting the mayor (primary target) and influencer organizations/people (secondary targets) to agree to close the facility. Questions about the future would be more urgent during Phase Three.

➔ **Build with groups across issue areas and methodologies.** The campaign reached out beyond reformers of the juvenile and criminal justice systems to other sectors like housing, health, education, and transportation. The campaign also engaged groups that use different types of social change methodologies, including activism/advocacy, organizing, labor, arts and education, impact litigation, social services, and electoral work. This cross-sectoral, multi-method approach strengthened the campaign and extended its reach.

➔ **Bimonthly campaign meetings.** After the first meeting in January 2016, the campaign hosted meetings every two months, facilitated by JLUSA and Katal. The meetings were structured around updates from the campaign, updates from directly impacted community groups about related issues, and a core discussion topic concerning the effort to close Rikers. These were not decision-making meetings; they served as informational updates and a clearinghouse. The March 2016 meeting served as a way to prepare for the public launch of the campaign, in April, at a rally at City Hall. Future meetings would include discussions about immigration detention, risk-assessment instruments, juvenile justice, LGBTQ people on Rikers, women on Rikers, crime survivors, policing reform, and more.

➔ **Metrics.** Katal used the metrics framework developed at the University of Southern California with support from the Ford Foundation: [**Transactions—Transformations—Translations: Metrics that Matter for Building, Scaling, and Funding Social Movements.**](#)⁴⁴ The framework distinguishes “transactional” metrics from “transformational” metrics. *Transactional* metrics are those that are immediately quantifiable, such as the number of media hits, the passage of a bill in committee, the number of formerly incarcerated leaders recruited and trained, and the number of new members. *Transformational* metrics are more qualitative, demonstrating how the field, organizations, and individuals are changed through the campaign effort, such as deepened understanding of the issue among constituencies, strengthening of relationships, or seeing members of the media adopt the campaign narrative. Both metric standards are important and in combination can help define and account for indicators critical to overall movement-building goals.

Additionally, to promote and ensure sustainability, Katal identified 10 factors from the sustainability tool kit produced by the New York State Health Foundation that staff used to guide campaign development: perceived value; monitoring and feedback; partners, shared models; leadership; spread; community fit; funding; staff; and government policies. (See [**Sustaining Improved Outcomes: A Toolkit.**](#)⁴⁵)

An aerial photograph of Rikers Island, showing a dense complex of industrial and institutional buildings, surrounded by water and some greenery. The image is in black and white, with a blue overlay on the right side containing text.

First #CLOSErikers Sign-on Letter

FOR CAMPAIGN PUBLIC LAUNCH
APRIL 2016

Rikers Island has been a cauldron of despair for decades. The brutality is endemic, and today violence is up even as the detainee population is down. Every day thousands of people are held in pretrial detention simply because they cannot afford bail, leading to a litany of tragedies, such as the terrible death of Kalief Browder. Racial disparities are a hallmark of both Rikers Island and the broken criminal justice system it represents. Horrific media stories and damning government investigations have become commonplace. There is no dispute that the Rikers Island Correctional Facility jails are dangerous, isolated, and woefully inappropriate for human beings. With all that we know about the human suffering on Rikers, the biggest scandal is that Rikers continues to exist at all.

As our nation finally confronts the error of mass incarceration and the failures of the war on drugs, communities across the country—including New York City—are rethinking policies to ensure public safety and health. A growing number of New Yorkers have come to a simple conclusion: Rikers cannot be reformed; it must be closed. That is why two previous mayoral administrations have tried to close it. Those previous efforts stalled. Today, however, with growing momentum in New York City and around the country to fix our shameful, broken criminal justice system, the time is now for real solutions—it is time to finally #CLOSErikers.

Closing Rikers will not be easy, but we know that it is possible and necessary, and that New Yorkers are up to the task. During his inauguration, Mayor de Blasio declared, “Our city is no stranger to big struggles—and no stranger to overcoming them.” As New Yorkers we must tackle this big struggle and reimagine what a modern criminal justice system should look like, where justice and fairness is attainable to all, and where we heal the harms caused by a broken-system by supporting the communities most impacted by its years of abuse.

The Demand for Closure Grows

As the campaign was moving to complete its Phase One development, a major political turn occurred. On Feb 11, 2016, more than two months before the public launch of the #CLOSErikers campaign, New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, in her State of the City Address, announced her support for closing Rikers Island. The second most powerful citywide public official made closing the facility her principal criminal justice reform goal.

But Mark-Viverito took it a step further: She appointed former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman—someone with a strong track record of commitment to justice reform—to create [a special body](#), the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform (also known as the Lippman Commission), to review the city's justice system and contemplate the potential closure of Rikers.⁴⁶ Lippman explicitly stated that the commission's job would be to study the problem, and that he did not have a preconceived position that Rikers must be closed. (Lippman brought in staff of the [Center for Court Innovation](#), [Latham & Watkins](#), the [Vera Institute of Justice](#), the [CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance](#), [ForestCity Ratner](#), and the [Global Strategy Group](#) to support the commission's work through research, legal counsel, communications, and other efforts.)

Mark-Viverito's announcement of her stance and creation of the Lippman Commission would prove to be another turning point in the effort to shutter Rikers, and gave invaluable momentum to the campaign that was about to launch. Public demands to close Rikers had been expressed for years and had grown much louder since the death of Kalief Browder. Activists had been protesting by the Rikers Island Bridge in the summer and fall; Stringer had come out for closure at the New School forum; and now the city council speaker was moving to action with the former chief judge of the New York Court of Appeals, the highest court in the state. The city council was now engaged through Mark-Viverito's leadership and the "inside game" was fully under way.

The speaker's announcement was momentous for a few reasons: First, she became the second citywide official to endorse the closure of Rikers, and, because of her position, improved the political viability of closure and put additional pressure on Mayor de Blasio.

Second, by appointing Judge Lippman to head the commission, she relieved an immediate pressure that otherwise would have been on the campaign. If the commission could be moved to support closing the facility, it would also likely take up the tough questions about what would happen afterward. It was not clear at that time whether the commission would eventually support closure, but the possibility brought new opportunities (as well as challenges).

Third, because the speaker was a strong ally of the mayor, her speaking out exposed an important split between the two, affording the press an opportunity to report on it. This brought more attention to the issue of closing Rikers and opened an avenue for the governor to weigh in on the issue. Governor Andrew Cuomo, who had said nothing about closing Rikers, now spoke up, aiming barbs at Mayor de Blasio and exacerbating their often-adversarial relationship.

Days after Speaker Mark-Viverito's announcement, Governor Cuomo was quoted as saying, "Rikers is a big problem and the council president, when she talks about closing Rikers, that's a big solution....[You only solve a big problem with a big solution.](#)"⁴⁷ Two days later, Mayor de Blasio said closing Rikers is "[a noble concept](#), but one that will cost many billions of dollars, and we do not have a viable pathway to that at this point."⁴⁸ He argued that the idea was impractical and that the focus should be on investing in reforms to the jail complex. His position was now set.

In a curious turn, only one day after Mayor de Blasio's comments, the New York *Daily News* quoted his wife, Chirlane McCray as saying that [closing Rikers was "a great idea."](#)⁴⁹ The mayor's office quickly downplayed the difference between de Blasio and McCray, but the political tension was laid bare: There was now a clear public demand by high-level officials, community groups, and the mayor's spouse for closing the facility, and the mayor was a visible outlier. (Joseph Ponte, then

commissioner of the city’s Department of Correction, was one of the few other vocal proponents of trying to fix Rikers.)⁵⁰

In the month following Mark-Viverito’s announcement, Judge Lippman was assembling his commission. Martin was appointed, giving the campaign a unique inside-outside position as it built toward the public launch. In February and March, the campaign continued its growth and development as more groups signed on. The field staff grew, as did the communications team.

By the time the #CLOSErikers Campaign launched on April 14, 2016—fully eight months after drafting the first campaign strategy documents—the stage was set:

- ➔ Activists had already staged numerous protests against Rikers, including marches clogging the streets in front of the Rikers Island Bridge.
- ➔ Lawsuits had been filed; a U.S. Attorney had issued a scathing report 20 months prior.
- ➔ The call to #CLOSErikers was already endorsed by the speaker of the New York City Council, the comptroller, many other city officials, and the governor.
- ➔ A commission—led by a highly respected former chief judge and impaneled with leaders across business, real estate, philanthropy, research, and beyond—was taking up the study of New York City’s justice system, including the question of what to do about Rikers Island.
- ➔ Nearly 60 organizations had signed on to the open letter to #CLOSErikers, including criminal justice reform groups, public health groups, and faith groups.
- ➔ The #CLOSErikers hashtag was being widely used on social media.
- ➔ The demand to #CLOSErikers had been normalized, and the campaign’s primary target—the mayor—was already isolated in his “reform, don’t close” position.

The campaign’s public launch brought more than 200 people to the steps of New York City Hall. In another helpful turn of events, the first meeting of the Lippman Commission would be a day later. Its work therefore commenced in the wake of a major protest calling on the mayor to shut down Rikers, covered by local and

national media and shared widely on social media, with the campaign’s message spreading far and wide while striking a chord close to home.

Phase One was complete and Phase Two was fully in play. The campaign was now focused on building the pressure necessary to get the mayor to agree to close the facility. There was an outside game—the public #CLOSErikers campaign—and an inside game, with many elected officials now calling for closure and the prominent Lippman Commission exploring the issue. The campaign could manage its actions on the outside game but could only hope to influence the commission’s direction.



From Launch to the Mayor's Announcement

Once the campaign formally launched, it operated as the centerpiece of the outside game. It's important to repeat that many groups—Shut Down Rikers, Jails Action Coalition, legal groups, and others—had long been working to shutter the facility. What #CLOSErikers did was focus much of that energy into a clear, singular demand the campaign could amplify with strategic communications. Robust funding made this possible and a tested strategy made it real. The effort expanded and concentrated in the following ways:

- ➔ **The campaign scaled up with staff.** Scaling up allowed the campaign to do the advocacy and organizing work necessary to build support for closure, normalizing the demand. The campaign stopped using the initial sign-on letter shortly after the launch, and pivoted to ask groups simply to sign on to the demand to #CLOSErikers. By the end of 2016, 100 groups had signed on, and by the summer of 2017, more than 150 groups had done so. All of that took dedicated relationship building and networking. In addition to the leaders mentioned above, staff who worked on the campaign during the period from the launch through Mayor de Blasio's announcement included Katal staff Imani Brown, Mo Farrell, Myaisha Hayes, Valdez Heron, and Libbie Pattison, and a number of dedicated JLUSA staff. Numerous other members, consultants, interns, and volunteers also contributed to the effort.
- ➔ **The campaign involved directly impacted people.** The field team was focused on organizing directly impacted people to participate and play leadership roles in the campaign. This proved incredibly important. Community leaders like Mallah-Divine Mallah, Mr. Outtasite, Anna Pastoressa, Darren Mack, K-Born Rivers, Herbert Murray, Marilyn Reyes, and others played key roles in advancing the campaign and elevating the attention on directly impacted people and communities. Campaign member organization [VOCAL-NY](#), a membership-led base-building organization in Brooklyn, also became a core partner in the campaign. As such, VOCAL-NY turned out its members for events, actions, and protests, expanding the number of directly

impacted people involved in campaign activities. Campaign and VOCAL-NY members met with elected officials, testified at hearings, spoke with reporters, presented on community panels and forums, turned out for actions, and more.

- ➔ **The campaign built a strong communications apparatus.** This included staff, as well as communication firms and consultants (some supervised by JLUSA, some by Katal), who enhanced the campaign's ability to establish its profile, respond to near-daily stories about the crisis at Rikers, and elevate the profile of Martin, who served as principal spokesperson. And precisely *because* Rikers was in the news every day, opportunities repeatedly arose to generate earned media. Staff got #CLOSErikers into story after story this way, heightening the call for closure and the campaign's profile. The campaign also generated media opportunities by promoting its direct actions, such as the 1,000-person march to Rikers, and applying political pressure along the way. For example, the campaign released a television ad targeting Mayor de Blasio that aired on NY1 for several nights.⁵¹ The campaign also organized several social media days of action, resulting in tens of thousands of people engaging online and using the #CLOSErikers hashtag, often directing it at the mayor.
- ➔ **#CLOSErikers stayed focused on the mayor as the primary target.** The campaign remained focused on Mayor de Blasio as the person responsible for deciding to close Rikers. The campaign also worked to influence, organize, and disrupt the secondary targets (such as the mayor's donors, city commissioners, and city council members) who could influence the primary target (the mayor). To build public tension, the campaign used old bird-dogging tactics to make sure the mayor couldn't go anywhere in the city without being confronted about Rikers, and intensified these efforts as election season began in early 2017, when the mayor was switching gears. The campaign even sent staff—Katal lead organizer Myaisha Hayes and JLUSA community organizer Brittany Williams—to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to protest Mayor de Blasio at the inaugural Obama

Roosevelt Legacy Dinner, a major Democratic Party fund-raiser, speaking directly with the mayor (an action that generated more earned media).

- ➔ **The campaign leveraged the growing momentum in the city to drive statewide reform efforts in Albany.** In early 2016, Katal began leading efforts on Kalief's Law, a measure to reform New York's broken speedy trial law. The effort was not branded as the #CLOSErikers campaign because the strategy in the legislature required a statewide focus. Kalief's Law—sponsored by Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry and State Senator Daniel Squadron and supported by groups like the Legal Aid Society and the Bronx Defenders—aimed to ensure that defendants weren't waiting months for their day in court. The focus on this bill catalyzed momentum in Albany and gave the campaign a statewide focal point. With a hired lobbyist and focused staff work, Katal organized near-weekly lobby and lawmaker education days in the New York State Capitol with dozens of directly impacted people and organizations. The groups worked closely with public defenders to score an early victory when the State Assembly passed the measure 132 to 2. But the State Senate never moved the bill out of committee, effectively blocking it.

The campaign and its partners came back with a stronger version of Kalief's Law in 2017, along with a larger coalition of support. Governor Cuomo then put the issue into his 2017 State of the State Address. And through relentless pressure from the campaign, the bill passed in the Assembly again, this time unanimously. Although the Senate again blocked the measure, this effort gave the campaign footing at the state level and allowed staff to begin building ties with groups upstate on other issues of common concern.

- ➔ **Rikers is known throughout the country.** While the number of news reports about Rikers increasing during the early 2010s, a series of major media developments during the campaign helped make the subject of Rikers a national discussion. In July 2016 HBO aired a new fictional miniseries, *The Night Of*, which explored the intricacies of the justice system in New York City through the experience of one protagonist detained on Rikers.⁵² Though fiction,

the show illustrated many of the problems at Rikers; it became a critical hit and won five Emmys, with *The New York Times* calling it a “cab ride to hell.”⁵³

In November 2016, renowned journalist Bill Moyers released his new documentary, *RIKERS: An American Jail*. The official website describes the film's aim:

*...to bring viewers face to face with men and women who have endured incarceration at Rikers Island. Their stories, told direct to camera, vividly describe the cruel arc of the Rikers experience—from the shock of entry, to the extortion and control exercised by other inmates, the oppressive interaction with corrections officers, the beatings and stabbings, the torture of solitary confinement and the many challenges of returning to the outside world.*⁵⁴

The film was aired by PBS affiliates and available online, and the Moyers team hosted numerous public screenings of the film in New York City.

Also in the fall of 2016, rapper JAY-Z announced that he was producing a documentary series called *Time: The Kalief Browder Story*.⁵⁵ JAY-Z's national profile, unparalleled music success, and legitimacy in the hip-hop world and beyond ensured that the series gained wide viewership. The series aired in March 2017 on Spike and was met with critical acclaim.⁵⁶ (Netflix has since made the film available.)

These television and documentary depictions of Rikers brought greater local and national attention to the crisis in New York City.

- ➔ **The Trump presidency begins.** The election of Donald Trump shocked a lot of New York City, a progressive bastion within a changing nation. Trump even campaigned on creating a national stop-and-frisk program.⁵⁷ The outcome helped draw distinct political lines about what was progressive, in a city whose mayor prides himself on being a guardian of progressive values. This created an easy target for the #CLOSErikers campaign, criticizing Mayor de Blasio, linking his opposition to closing Rikers with the values of the newly elected president, and contrasting those positions with what the campaign defined as the city's real progressive values.



Closing Rikers as City Policy

On March 31, 2017, less than a year after the campaign launched, Mayor de Blasio announced that the city would close Rikers Island jails. The mayor outlined a 10-year timeline for the process, but provided no details about how it would be done. He made this announcement just two days before the Lippman Commission released its exhaustive report, which called for closure of the facility within 10 years and outlined a road map for how to get there. The mayor knew the Lippman Commission report was about to be published and that it included a 10-year timeline for closure. By making his announcement days before the release of the report, the mayor avoided many potentially tough questions about why the Lippman Commission—and its members who were political, business, and civic leaders in the city—had gotten out in front of him. With the mayor's announcement, the commission report, and the campaign's focused message and actions, a political consensus had been built and firmly established that closing Rikers was the only solution.

The campaign had played a critical role in getting the mayor to agree to close the facility. From the public launch through Mayor de Blasio's announcement about closure, the #CLOSERikers campaign was covered extensively in the press; the campaign's media announcements and social media posts, along with news

stories from this period, constitute vital documentation of many campaign activities. (For a timeline of select campaign activities from the launch through August 2017, see Appendix 1, page 32.)

Although the #CLOSERikers campaign played an important role, it did not act alone, nor was the campaign alone responsible for changing the mayor's mind. And those who say that the campaign won a major victory in less than a year are overlooking that it took eight months to build it out—behind the scenes, with dozens and dozens and dozens of meetings, on top of research, planning, strategizing, and organizing. The campaign also launched and ran at a political and historical time when justice reform issues were among the most urgent in the country—on the nightly news, on the front pages of papers every day, and discussed over kitchen tables.

What's more, the #CLOSERikers campaign could not have run without all of the organizations and community members—activists, public defenders, advocates, elected officials, and others—who organized and did the movement-building work that made it possible to generate momentum. The campaign was born in a context, it played an important role, and at its best it served the movement by focusing energies and attention on the modern crisis that is Rikers, contributing to Mayor de Blasio finally agreeing to shutter the facility.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

What can organizers and advocates in other cities and states learn from the #CLOSErikers campaign? Can the #CLOSErikers effort be replicated elsewhere, and if so, how? It's possible to glean some lessons from the campaign. This section summarizes what worked—and what didn't work so well—in this effort. The hope is that reformers, organizers, and funders can learn from the experience of the #CLOSErikers campaign and its story.

WHAT WORKED

➔ **Make efforts to secure a major investment.**

The major initial investment by a major funder was incredibly helpful to the campaign in New York. It served as an accelerant, enabling the campaign to scale up quickly and thereby capitalizing on the organizing opportunities associated with the unfolding crises at Rikers. Absent that major funding at the start, the campaign surely would have taken much longer to get under way and may not have been able to capture the momentum behind the political crisis surrounding Rikers or to capitalize on the impending mayoral election. To the extent that an effort like #CLOSErikers can be replicated, the most important thing may be for funders to make significant investments in *local* advocacy and organizing. As with most work of this nature, the local groups on the ground in an area are best suited to direct such efforts. And regardless of whether funders are supporting a specific campaign for jail closure, supporting *local* reform work—particularly organizing—can serve to strengthen the movement infrastructure that is essential for large-scale campaign work.

➔ **Build on and draw from social movements.**

The #CLOSErikers campaign benefited extensively from a strong existing reform movement in New York City. From activists on the street to service providers and public defenders, from advocates to community organizers to impacted people in neighborhoods across the city demanding change—there was (and is) a robust reform ecosystem to work within. The campaign would not have had such a rapid rise without starting out on the rising tides of a movement that was already transforming the justice system in New York City. The crises at Rikers are not unique to Rikers; they

exist throughout the country, and movements are building throughout the country too, as people build their own local campaigns to tackle closure of a jail or related issues.

➔ **Center the experience of people who have been directly affected by the justice system.**

The campaign recruited a number of directly impacted people as members and offered trainings in speaking to the media, meeting with lawmakers, presenting at forums, and commenting at hearings. These leaders shared their powerful personal accounts of their time on Rikers or in supporting their loved ones there, and these stories made a huge impact on the people who heard them. By building a platform for these voices and these stories, the campaign sought to anchor its work in the experience, knowledge, and lives of those most directly impacted by the scandal of Rikers Island.

➔ **Build strong partnerships.** The #CLOSErikers campaign was built by a partnership of JLUSA and Katal, and the two groups directed the campaign until Katal stepped down in the summer of 2017. The organizations brought different assets to the mission and their combined skills became a powerful force, building a campaign that could catalyze the energy surrounding Rikers. The partnership planned, jump-started, and organized the #CLOSErikers campaign and secured a major victory, but that doesn't mean the partnership was easy. Like any other partnership, it was constructive in many ways and had its own set of challenges and complications. Partnerships are often hard and require a great deal of each partner's energy and time. But partnerships can also produce bigger outcomes than what might otherwise be achieved.

➔ **Enlist a strong, effective staff person to direct field operations.** Having an effective point person to direct the field operations of the campaign was essential. As part of the core leadership team, Lee served this role and was the behind-the-scenes manager who trained and directed the campaign staff of both organizations in advocacy and organizing. Certain actions and events—like the 1,000-person march to Rikers in September 2016, numerous rallies, and the relentless series of lobbying days in Albany—may well have been failures instead of successes if not for her leadership. Tracking and coordinating activities of a growing field operation across two organizations in the midst of a busy campaign cannot be left to chance or junior staff. Without Lee’s steady hand, the internal development of the campaign would have surely suffered.

➔ **Capitalize on local context or change it—and leverage national context.** The local context around Rikers—from the daily crises to the tragic story of Kalief Browder to the local demands animated by local movements—played an important role in the effort to build and advance the campaign. The local context was particularly advantageous to the campaign for the reasons described above. Even so, the campaign didn’t control the national context, but could influence it. This will look different in different places, but the old saying “All politics is local” may be a reminder that we can often change or otherwise influence and leverage local dynamics if we build power. The national context is not as responsive to local fights. The #CLOSERikers campaign was built in the final year of the Obama Administration, amid growing national support for justice reform, a burgeoning public debate about the value of Black lives, and on the eve of profound political change with the election of Donald Trump. The national context is now radically different. There are new lessons to be learned.

➔ **Focus relentlessly on the primary target.** The New York campaign didn’t waver from its laser-like focus on Mayor de Blasio as the target. When needed, campaign staff did answer questions like “Where will all the people go after Rikers closed?” But that was never the central focus of the campaign through its first two phases. Instead, staying focused on the mayor ultimately helped get

him to say “Close Rikers.” Campaign leaders picked a primary target—the person who could give us what the people wanted; identified the secondary targets who could influence the primary target; and stuck with it until the mayor conceded. That’s an old organizing rule the campaign followed with religious fervor.

➔ **Make the most of the election cycle.** The campaign strategically created an echo chamber so that the mayor was forced to take a position on the issue and that the pressure to do so would only escalate as we moved closer to the next mayoral election in 2017. By engaging with city council members, showing up at fund-raisers, and targeting the mayor’s donors the campaign increased pressure on the mayor. The campaign created an unavoidable media presence and organized many visible actions, rallies, and events. People showed up at his campaign events to ask him about Rikers. Campaign leaders secured the support of surrounding system actors, including working to ensure that the Lippman Commission’s final report included the voices and reflected the demand of thousands of New Yorkers.

➔ **Try to identify and leverage an “insider” vehicle.** For the #CLOSERikers campaign, the Lippman Commission was convened at exactly the right time and by exactly the right person: A respected former chief judge was appointed by the speaker of the city council. In retrospect, this couldn’t have been better if campaign staff had scripted it. When the commission was convened and began its work, it was not clear that the group would recommend closure. In fact, the campaign spent the entire year working to make sure that the commission could conclude nothing *but* closure. #CLOSERikers turned out people for every one of the commission’s public hearings; stories from campaign members—about their experiences on Rikers, about the harms they had survived—made it into the commission’s final report. The campaign succeeded in centering directly impacted people, even in a body beyond its control. These are examples of how the campaign’s influence was formidable. Although the commission could have muddied the waters or been used for years by the mayor to delay any real decision about closing Rikers, the commission instead became an asset to

the campaign, especially when the commission's members decided unanimously upon closure as their position. Staff were able to pressure the commission while benefiting from the resources invested in it, including high-level research that supported the argument to shut down the facility—research that was credible and external to the campaign. (Much of this research was produced for the commission by the Vera Institute of Justice and the Center for Court Innovation [CCI], which played important roles to ensure that the data and policy analyses in the report were clear and reliable.) The campaign could thus refer questions about “What comes after closing Rikers?” to the commission and its research affiliates like Vera and CCI.

The campaign organized to help make sure the commission came out on the right side of the issue. And though campaign leaders didn't agree with every recommendation in the Lippman Commission's report, the overall narrative of its findings was shaped by the campaign's work and the growing consensus in New York City that closing Rikers was the only real option. Convening a commission (or funding a study) for a reform effort is not always the right course and is often the wrong one. But this group proved to be an essential piece of a larger puzzle. In the end, the commission and the campaign were largely on the same page, creating a unified demand of the mayor. If the commission had recommended *reforming* Rikers, Mayor de Blasio almost certainly would have used that as cover to continue to oppose closure. If a study or commission is proposed—whether in other jurisdictions or for other campaigns in New York City—be prepared to invest significant time and energy into shaping the outcome.

➔ **Develop a multipronged, multiphase strategy.**

From the beginning, campaign leaders recognized the need to develop a multipronged and multiphase strategy to achieve the closure of Rikers. By using tactics such as an inside strategy for advocacy, external grassroots mobilization, and clear, definitive communication, the campaign developed a machine that was well coordinated and equipped to tackle points of opposition. It also allowed staff to be nimble and prepared to pivot and adapt as circumstances evolved, often due to effective agitation of the status quo.

➔ **Maximize the value of social media and earned media.**

The campaign benefited from the fact that journalists reported on problems at Rikers nearly every day. As such, the scandal of Rikers was always there for campaign spokespeople to respond and react to in the press and on social media. The campaign effectively harnessed the power of social media through its #CLOSERikers hashtag, and leveraged the value of earned media by aggressively seeking to respond to stories about Rikers, actions by the mayor, and related activity. From the summer of 2015 through the mayor's announcement about closing Rikers, the campaign secured hundreds of media hits, and conditions at Rikers showed up in thousands of articles and reports. During that period, the #CLOSERikers hashtag was used nearly 80,000 times on Facebook and Twitter.⁵⁸ (For more information, see Appendix 3: Social Media and Press Coverage, page 36.)

WHAT COULD HAVE WORKED BETTER

The campaign in New York City had its strengths, but of course not everything worked well or as expected. The following recommendations are intended to help people working on similar efforts in other jurisdictions avoid mistakes the #CLOSErikers campaign made—or at least improve on things that could have gone better.

➔ **Strive to make all campaign leaders and their strengths visible.** In the partnership with JLUSA during the campaign's first two phases, Katal strategically played a “behind the scenes” role for two key reasons: First, Katal committed to supporting the leadership and profile of directly impacted people—those at the core of JLUSA's leadership training program. As a new organization, Katal was just beginning to build its own membership—including directly impacted people—and was focused on uplifting JLUSA and the campaign brand. So even when members or leaders Katal recruited and trained *did* get a public profile, they most often did so as a #CLOSErikers member rather than as a Katal member. Second, campaign leaders knew the fight with the mayor would require a straightforward narrative to seize the attention of busy New Yorkers, dominate discussions about local criminal justice reform, and illustrate clearly the stakes of the fight. For the most part that narrative was built around Glenn Martin vs. Bill de Blasio. In addition to his leadership role in the campaign, Martin was an effective spokesperson, protagonist, and a foil for the mayor.

As a result of this approach, Katal intentionally did not appear as frequently in the press or profile of the campaign. But as a collateral effect of that strategic choice, Lee's leadership role, and the work of other women, particularly women of color, were almost entirely obscured. Inadvertently, that decision made invisible the critical contributions of women of color who played key leadership roles in the campaign. Too often, leadership points accrue to those who are most visible, especially men; thus, Martin and sayegh got a lot of attention, but Lee and other women on the campaign did not. In the next phase of its work, Katal is striving to strike a principled balance with regard to visible leadership and the organization's frequent behind-the-scenes role.

➔ **Decide what structure would best serve your work—such as a campaign or coalition structure—and when.** #CLOSErikers adopted a campaign approach prior to its public launch and ran with this model through the mayor's announcement of the decision to close. As noted, this was a strength of the campaign. After the mayor's announcement, the campaign had to transition into a new phase, with many reforms needed—and different primary targets—to make closure real. The campaign was not as effective in preparing for this transition as it might have been, which slowed the ability to pivot into a new phase. If a campaign will have discrete phases, consider what structures will be best suited for each phase and prepare for them as early as possible.

➔ **Strike a balance between focusing on advocacy and developing a viable base.** Katal distinguishes between advocacy, activism, and organizing; they are different methods. One is not necessarily more important than the other, but understanding how they are different is important to understanding when to use one method or another. The campaign did more advocacy than organizing in its first year. Although this work was quite effective at times, the campaign could have been more effective in using the basic practices of community organizing for base-building. Considering the pace and speed at which the campaign developed and drew attention to the issues—with nearly daily media coverage and frequent actions—it's understandable that the campaign mostly emphasized developing spokespeople (an advocacy method) over developing a base (organizing). This is hard to see from the outside, because it appears to observers that there was a huge community surge of support to #CLOSErikers—and there was. But the campaign necessarily capitalized on a tide that was rising before the launch and seized a political moment. Staff did not necessarily need to build a robust membership base during that first year. This left the campaign less equipped to address the challenges in the third phase, when neighborhood-level organizing would be essential.



An aerial, black-and-white photograph of Rikers Island, showing the sprawling prison complex with numerous buildings, courtyards, and surrounding infrastructure like roads and rail lines.

Conclusion

More than 60,000 people cycle through Rikers Island every year, as the Lippman Commission noted. Almost 80 percent of those who are detained there are being held pretrial; most simply can't afford bail.⁵⁹ Violence is commonplace and the roots of the island reflect a racist colonial history. In the words of former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, it is a "dysfunctional apparatus," a "19th century solution to a 21st century problem."⁶⁰

Rikers is a dark symbol of mass incarceration. Teenagers and adults detained on Rikers, their families and communities, and those who participate in movements for justice in New York City have long known that it is a disaster. Being out of sight—on an island that doesn't even appear on the subway map—it remained out of mind for many New Yorkers who have never had to experience its horrors. But during the past four years, public attention was focused squarely on the notorious jail complex. Among the #CLOSErikers campaign's most significant accomplishments was to keep a spotlight focused on Rikers, to sharpen and intensify it—and connect the outrage over the scandal of Rikers to the demand on the mayor to shut it down.

The story of the #CLOSErikers campaign is the story of movements in New York City and statewide. The people who build and work in those movements are part of the story about the push to close Rikers, even if their names don't surface publicly in the news.

Although the campaign achieved a great success by making the closure of Rikers the official city policy, the facility is still open, still functioning. Implementing the new city policy—making closure real—will be even more complicated and time-intensive than the effort to get the city to make closure official policy. To close this facility, the entire justice system in New York City must be overhauled, transformed, reimagined. That is the task ahead. It is Katal's hope that this paper serves that imperative.

Appendix 1

TIMELINE OF KEY CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

APRIL 2016—AUGUST 2017

April 2016 – June 2016

#CLOSERikers leads statewide advocacy for speedy trial legislation. Katal staff leads the campaign's first round of efforts for statewide speedy trial reform, advocating for Kalief's Law, sponsored by Assembly Member Jeffrion Aubry and State Senator Daniel Squadron. Recognizing that pretrial justice will be critical to reduce the population on Rikers in order to close it, the campaign lays the groundwork to achieve such reforms.

April 2016

Campaign expands staffing with organizers and policy staff at JLUSA and Katal. Katal begins advocacy and organizing training sessions for #CLOSERikers staff. Campaign co-leader Melody Lee begins facilitating weekly field team meetings.

June 1, 2016

Kalief's Law passes in New York State Assembly. After organizing nearly two dozen weekly lobby days with directly impacted people and advocates—educating elected officials and their staff in Albany—and elevating the state's broken speedy trial process in the media, Kalief's Law passes in the Assembly by a vote of 138 to 2.

August 29, 2016

Campaign convenes advocates and community organizers for "scenario planning" meeting about bail reform in New York State.

October 5, 2016

Lippman Commission holds first community roundtable at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. The commission hosts the first of a series of community roundtables in all five boroughs to hear from community members citywide about Rikers. Comments shared and submitted in each of the forums help inform the commission's findings. The campaign actively mobilizes dozens of directly impacted individuals and other community members to attend every roundtable.

December 4, 2016

Campaign organizes Faith and Family Vigil at Gracie Mansion. Nearly 200 directly impacted people and members of the faith community turn out for a powerful candlelight vigil outside of the mayor's residence at Gracie Mansion. The event highlights voices of family members unable to spend time with their loved ones during the holidays because they are detained on Rikers. Faith leaders citywide stand in solidarity, pointing to the moral imperative for the mayor to close Rikers without delay.

December 5, 2016

Lippman Commission holds community roundtable at Borough of Manhattan Community College. The campaign packs the room and campaign members ask commission panelists numerous questions, raising the profile of the #CLOSERikers movement.

July 2016 – August 2016

Campaign staff meets with hundreds of organizations citywide. The campaign holds meetings with people from more than 125 organizations about #CLOSERikers, recruiting some to the campaign, learning about concerns, and developing a deeper understanding of the dynamics surrounding this issue among grassroots groups, social service agencies, advocates, and others.

July 6, 2016

Campaign participates in tour of Rikers Island. The campaign tours Rikers with staff from Mayor Bill de Blasio's office and City Council Member Rafael Salamanca from the Bronx, and again with members of the **Lippman Commission**, to continue drawing attention to the facility's egregious conditions.

July 20, 2016

Mayor's office announces plan to move 16- and 17-year olds off of Rikers Island. Given that legislative efforts to Raise the Age failed again in the 2016 legislative session, the campaign works closely with the mayor's office to plan the process for moving young people to a dedicated jail for adolescents in the Bronx. This includes coordinating with advocates in the field and securing local buy-in from the community and elected officials in the Bronx to support these efforts.

September 24, 2016

Campaign leads historic march and rally to Rikers. Almost 1,000 community members, including directly impacted people, young people, representatives from dozens of community organizations from across New York City, celebrities, and numerous elected officials, join in a march through Astoria, Queens, to the foot of the Rikers Island Bridge. Participants march and demand that the mayor commit to closing Rikers.

November 1, 2016

PBS airs Bill Moyers's RIKERS documentary. Bill Moyers releases a powerful film that highlights the voices of people who have been detained on Rikers. The documentary becomes a vehicle for education and cultivating awareness in New York and nationwide.

November 14, 2016

DOC announces that construction of new Rikers jail is on hold. After extensive pressure from the campaign, New York City Department of Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte states at a city council hearing that previous plans to construct a 1,500-bed jail have been put on hold, due to the pressure from the growing movement to #CLOSERikers.

November 28, 2016

City Comptroller Scott Stringer releases report highlighting violence on Rikers. Comptroller Stringer, the first elected official to publicly support closure of Rikers, publishes a **timely report** finding that violence in city jails continues to soar, as costs climb and the incarcerated population drops.

April 2016 – December 2016

Campaign meets with members of the New York City Council. The campaign meets with nearly every member of the city council, providing information and resources and generating public support from members.

January 9, 2017
Campaign organizes protest in Brooklyn at mayor's first fund-raiser of the year. More than 40 people protest in frigid weather outside a brownstone in Park Slope where the event is held. Directly impacted people speak with donors who share their progressive values, encouraging them to ask the mayor to include closing Rikers in his upcoming election platform. #CLOSERikers members speak directly with Mayor de Blasio as he arrives; he states that he remains focused on reforming Rikers, not closing it.

January 9, 2017
Governor Cuomo's State of the State Address highlights speedy trial and bail reform. Although the governor provides no details of a reform plan, advocates welcome his focus on these issues.

January 11, 2017
Campaign protests at mayor's second fund-raiser. Campaign members speak to potential donors outside of the event, encouraging them to ask the mayor to close Rikers. Campaign staff speak with the mayor and he encourages them to continue their efforts.

January 25, 2017
Lippman Commission hosts community roundtable at Hunter College in Harlem. The campaign again packs the room and members ask questions of commission panelists.

March 1, 2017
Lippman Commission hosts community roundtable at the Andrew Freedman Home in the Bronx. The campaign packs the room again at the fourth such event; campaign members ask numerous questions of the commission.

March 4, 2017
Campaign protests in Fort Lauderdale at Broward County Democratic Party fund-raiser. The campaign sends organizers Myaisha Hayes and Brittany Williams to Florida to organize a protest against Mayor de Blasio at the Obama-Roosevelt Legacy Dinner. They organize local groups, students from Miami Dade College, and allies from local reform organizations such as the ACLU, SURJ Miami, and Black Lives Matter Alliance of Broward to join in a collaborative action to protest the mayor outside of the prominent fund-raiser. They speak with many of the progressive donors entering the Hyatt Regency and directly with the mayor as he arrives. He says that "This campaign is making a difference."

March 6, 2017
Lippman Commission hosts community roundtable at LaGuardia Community College in Queens. Again the campaign packs the room, with members speaking.

March 9, 2017
Campaign protests at Mayor de Blasio's Town Hall in Brooklyn. Dozens protest outside of the mayor's town hall event in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Members of the community and of local Community Board 3 note that the chants from outside can be heard echoing inside.

March 15, 2017
Lippman Commission hosts community roundtable at College of Staten Island. The campaign again shows up to testify at the public hearing.

March 15, 2017
Campaign members question Mayor de Blasio in Manhattan. Dozens of #CLOSERikers members and other supporters participate in an event at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, calling again for the mayor to close the facility.

March 21, 2017
Campaign releases "Rikers: The Case for Closure" series. The campaign releases the first of four briefs, each one outlining the case for closing the facility. The topics are the [isolation of Rikers](#), [the violence of Rikers](#) (released March 28, 2017), [the deprivation of Rikers](#) (April 4, 2017), and the [health hazards of Rikers](#) (April 11, 2017).

March 29, 2017
Campaign pressures the mayor at public announcement in Queens on criminal justice reform. After learning that Mayor de Blasio will make a surprise announcement at the Fortune Society offices in Long Island City, campaign members and other supporters turn up, hoping to ask questions about his program and demand closure of Rikers. The mayor avoids the protesters by entering the building through a back door. #CLOSERikers staff learn that the announcement is focused on reentry programs, like those at Fortune. The campaign issues a statement in response and local media cover the #CLOSERikers presence at the event.

March 30, 2017
Campaign learns of the mayor's upcoming announcement about Rikers. Reporters call the campaign with questions about the mayor's decision to close Rikers; this is not public and reporters are seeking confirmation.

March 31, 2017
Mayor de Blasio announces his support of closing Rikers. The mayor holds a press conference to announce his new position, officially supporting closure of Rikers and making it the official policy of New York City. Dozens of supporters gather outside City Hall in the rain but are refused entrance despite security staff having said that the public could attend. At the hastily organized event, the mayor outlines a 10-year timeline for closure.

June 22, 2017
Mayor de Blasio releases "Roadmap to Closing Rikers Island." The document reinforces the mayor's 10-year timeline for closure but includes little about process or next steps. The campaign criticizes the publication for its lack of vision, urgency, and community input.

June 30, 2017
Campaign members confront Mayor de Blasio at Park Slope YMCA. Several #CLOSERikers members and supporters gain access to the mayor's gym in Brooklyn, and member Darren Mack confronts him about the disappointing "Roadmap" as Mayor de Blasio works out. Video of the interaction goes viral on social media.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

February 13, 2017
#CLOSERikers campaign releases TV ad. The campaign releases a hard-hitting [TV ad](#) coinciding with the Mayor's State of the City Address. The ad airs during prime time on news channel NY1 for four consecutive nights.

February 13, 2017
Campaign protests at mayor's State of the City Address. Hundreds of directly impacted members, organizational allies, and other supporters protest outside the historic Apollo Theater during the mayor's annual State of the City Address. They march through the streets of Harlem, calling on New Yorkers to become part of the growing chorus of voices demanding justice.

February 15, 2017
Kalief's Law passes again in New York State Assembly—this time unanimously. Kalief's Law is included in a package of key criminal justice reform bills pushed by Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, passing by a vote of 130 to 0: a rare demonstration of unified bipartisan support for criminal justice reform. Katal also succeeds in getting the assembly to include Kalief's Law in its budget proposal, pushing for speedy trial reform to be part of final budget negotiations.

April 2, 2017
The Lippman Commission releases its report. The commission hosts a press conference at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, officially releasing its report after more than a year's worth of meetings and research. [The report](#) includes the commission's final recommendation to close the Rikers complex, along with a suggested 10-year timeline. New York City Public Advocate Tish James, Bronx County District Attorney Darcel Clark, New York County District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. (Manhattan), and Kings County Acting District Attorney Eric Gonzalez (Brooklyn) express their support for closure. Three campaign leaders join the commission onstage during the press conference, including campaign co-leader and commission member Glenn Martin.

April 24, 2017
Campaign holds one-year anniversary rally at City Hall. The campaign marks the anniversary of the public launch on the steps of City Hall. The rally focuses on demanding that the mayor expedite the 10-year timeline for closure and calls on him to act immediately on justice reforms within his power. Approximately 150 organizations have signed on to support the demand for closing Rikers and reimagining New York City's justice system.

May 8, 2017
#CLOSERikers hosts "Power of the People" event featuring John Legend. The campaign hosts a discussion at the New School, moderated by Fordham University Professor Christina Greer and featuring John Legend, Glenn Martin, New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, and #CLOSERikers member Darren Mack reflecting on the campaign's significance to date and its next steps. More than 50,000 people view the Facebook Live video of the event.

August 2017
Katal steps down from formal #CLOSERikers campaign leadership and ends partnership with JLUSA.

January 2017 – June 2017
Advocacy continues on state legislation for speedy trial reform. Katal continues to lead efforts to push for reform statewide and builds more demand, including successfully pushing for speedy trial practices to be debated during the budget cycle.

April 27, 2017
Governor Cuomo says he would support a three-year plan for closing Rikers. The governor states that he would support then–State Senate candidate Brian Benjamin's proposal for a bill that would [close Rikers within three years](#) rather than Mayor de Blasio's 10-year plan. (Benjamin won a special election in May 2017 and represents Harlem in the State Senate; in June 2017 he introduced a bill with a three-year timeline for closure.)

Appendix 2

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE #CLOSERIKERS CAMPAIGN

The 58 groups that signed joined for the launch of the #CLOSERikers campaign in April 2016 are indicated with an asterisk (*). The rest of the groups subsequently joined. As of the mayor's announcement in March 2017, nearly 125 organizations had signed on; many more subsequently joined.

ACLU	Connecting the Dots*
ALIGN	Corporation for Supportive Housing*
Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)	Correctional Association of New York*
American Friends Service Committee – NY	Couture for a Cause
Anti-Racist Alliance*	Cre8tive YouTH*ink
Arab American Association of New York	DriveChange*
Ash-Shifaa Inc.	Drug Policy Alliance
Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325)	Education from the Inside Out Coalition*
Beyond Attica	Enlace*
Black Latino Male Initiative (Brooklyn College)	Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.*
Black Lives Matter NYC	Exponents*
The Bronx Defenders*	Faith in New York*
The Bronx Freedom Fund	Federal Defenders of New York
BronxConnect*	First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn
Brooklyn Community Bail Fund*	The Fortune Society*
Brooklyn Defenders Services*	Friends of Island Academy
Brooklyn Movement Center	Gangstas Making Astronomical Community Changes (G.M.A.C.C.)
The Brotherhood/Sister Sol*	The Gathering for Justice/Justice League NYC
CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities*	Grand St. Settlement
Campaign to End the New Jim Crow – NY	Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral of New York
Campaign to Shut Down Rikers*	Greater NYC for Change (GNYCFC)
CASES*	Greenhope Services for Women*
Center for Community Alternatives*	Harlem Historical Society
Center for Constitutional Rights*	Harm Reduction Coalition*
Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions*	Housing Plus Solutions*
Citizen Action of New York	I Am My Community
Citizens Against Recidivism Inc.*	Immigrant Defense Project*
Co-Dependents Anonymous*	Incarcerated Nation Corporation*
College and Community Fellowship*	The Innocence Project
Community Connections for Youth*	Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing*
Community Voices Heard	

Jews for Racial & Economic Justice*
 Justice Strategies
 JustLeadershipUSA*
 Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice*
 LatinoJustice PRLDEF*
 Legal Action Center*
 Legal Aid Society
 Make the Road NY
 Malcolm X Grassroots Movement – New York Chapter
 Mekong NYC*
 Middle Collegiate Church
 Milk Not Jails
 Million Hoodies*
 Movement of Rank and File Educators
 National Action Network – NYC Chapter Second
 Chance Committee*
 National Association of Social Workers – New York
 City Chapter*
 National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly
 Incarcerated Women and Girls
 National Judicial Conduct and Disability Law Project
 National Lawyers Guild*
 National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)
 Neighborhood Benches
 Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
 New Day United Methodist Church
 New York Academy of Medicine
 New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated
 Confinement (CAIC)
 New York City Jails Action Coalition (JAC)
 New York Civil Liberties Union*
 New York Communities for Change (NYCC)
 NYC Together
 New York Harm Reduction Educators (NYHRE)

One Thousand Arms*
 Osborne Association*
 Park Avenue Christian Church
 Picture the Homeless*
 The Precedential Group*
 Queer Detainee Empowerment Project (QDEP)
 Refoundry
 Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP)*
 Retrospection Inc.
 ReThinkNYC
 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
 STEPS to End Family Violence
 Students for Sensible Drug Policy
 SURJ-NYC
 T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
 Teachers Unite
 Green Party of Brooklyn
 The Ladies of Hope Ministries
 The Micah Institute at New York Theological Seminary
 Theater of the Oppressed NYC
 Urban Justice Center*
 Village Zendo
 VOCAL-NY*
 Washington Heights CORNER Project
 WBAI's *On the Count**
 West Side Commons
 Women & Justice Project*
 Women's Prison Association*
 Working Families*
 WORTH (Women on the Rise Telling Herstory)*
 Youth First Initiative
 Youth Represent*

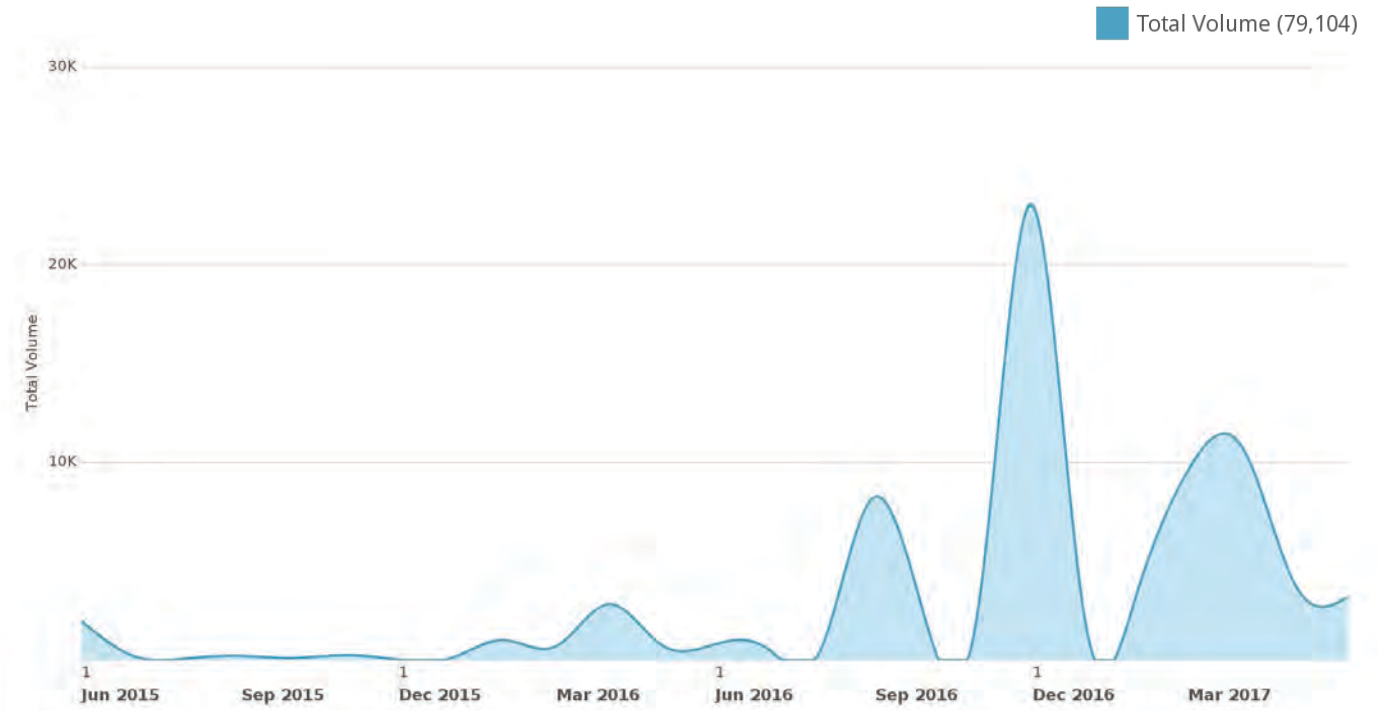
Appendix 3

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PRESS COVERAGE

News articles that mention “Rikers Island Jail”, January 2013 – August 2017



#CLOSErikers social media coverage from June 2015 – June 2017



End Notes

- ¹ The Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice officially launched in February 2016. In the summer of 2015, Katal's cofounders—Lorenzo Jones, Melody Lee, and gabriel sayegh—were starting to build the organization that would become Katal as they were also building what became the #CLOSErikers campaign.
- ² Jonathan Lippman, Richard M. Aborn, Juan Cartagena, et al., *A More Just New York City*: (New York: Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, 2017), <http://www.morejustnyc.org/the-reports/#the-commissions-report>.
- ³ While Katal and JLUSA worked in partnership for nearly two years, this summary represents Katal's views only.
- ⁴ Brentin Mock, "The Dark 'Fugitive Slave' History of Rikers Island," CityLab.com, July 23, 2015, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/07/the-dark-fugitive-slave-history-of-rikers-island/399440>.
- ⁵ Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: 2015, W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), 52. <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=4294985268>.
- ⁶ The Greater New York charter: submitted to the Legislature of the state of New York, February 20, 1897, by the Commission appointed pursuant to chapter 488 of the laws of 1896, Chapter XIV, "Department of Corrections," 324-336, <https://archive.org/stream/greaternewyorkch00newyrich#page/324/mode/2up>.
- ⁷ In June 2015, Harlem Historical Society director Jacob Morris started a petition to change the name of Rikers Island. He told DNAInfo that Richard Riker was the "spider at the center of the web" who facilitated stealing Black people from New York City and sending them into slavery in the South. See Eddie Small, "Petition Seeks New Name for Rikers Island Over Historic Ties to Slavery," DNAInfo.com, July 22, 2015, <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20150722/hunts-point/petition-seeks-new-name-for-rikers-island-over-historic-ties-slavery>.
- ⁸ *The New York Times*, "Grand Jury Scores Prisons of City: Finds Quarters Insanitary—More Guards Asked," April 1, 1939, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9B07E5D6133CE73ABC4953DFB2668382629EDE>.
- ⁹ There are many great histories written about Rikers. Two particularly good articles are by John Surico, "How Rikers Island Became the Most Notorious Jail in America," Vice.com, January 11, 2016 (which includes links to many source materials), https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/dp59yq/how-rikers-island-became-the-most-notorious-jail-in-america; and by JB Nicholas, "A History Of Hell: How Rikers Island Became a Modern Municipal Abomination," *The Village Voice*, April 11, 2017, www.villagevoice.com/2017/04/11/a-history-of-hell-how-rikers-island-became-a-modern-municipal-abomination.
- ¹⁰ Associated Press, November 24, 1975, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/nycdoc/jorge/rikers-nov-1975-riot.html>.
- ¹¹ Nicholas, 2017.
- ¹² Open Societies Foundation, "Q&A: Inside the Campaign to Close Rikers," April 6, 2017, www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/qa-inside-campaign-close-rikers.
- ¹³ Nicholas, 2017.
- ¹⁴ Michael Schwartz and Michael Winerip, "Close Rikers Island? It Will Take Years, Billions and Political Capital," March 2, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/03/03/nyregion/closing-rikers-island-despite-rhetoric-intractable-obstacles-remain.html.
- ¹⁵ New York was the last state in the nation to change its laws—in 2017—to treat 16- and 17-year-old children as adults in the criminal justice system. The Raise the Age effort was focused on raising the age of adult criminal responsibility to 18.
- ¹⁶ For more on the Raise the Age campaign, see <http://raisetheage.nyc.gov>; on ending solitary confinement, see <http://nycaic.org>; on parole reform, see the RAPP campaign's website, <http://rappcampaign.com>; on legalizing marijuana, see the Start Smart New York website, <http://smart-ny.com>; on discovery reform, see the Discovery for Justice website, <http://www.discoveryforjustice.org>; on closing Attica, see Soffiyah Elijah, "Attica Must Be Shut Down," CityLimits, September 24, 2012, <https://citylimits.org/2012/09/24/attica-must-be-shut-down>.
- ¹⁷ See Drug Policy Alliance, "\$75 Million a Year" The Cost of New York City's Marijuana Possession Arrests," (New York: Drug Policy Alliance, 2011), <http://marijuana-arrests.com/docs/75-Million-A-Year.pdf>. Also see the Marijuana Arrest Research Project website at: www.marijuana-arrests.com.
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³⁹The hashtag was initially #closeRIKERS. But in a meeting in the fall of 2015, the artist Josh MacPhee, also a historian of street protest and street art, asked sayegh, “Why put the emphasis on Rikers in the hashtag? If you emphasize the demand, to *close* Rikers, then the hashtag will amplify the demand rather than the problem.” And thus, the campaign made the switch from #closeRIKERS to #CLOSERikers.

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