

# Unlocking the Potential of the Women's Building



**Women directly impacted by  
incarceration share their  
insight and vision**

A report of the Women & Justice Project  
for the NoVo Foundation

# Unlocking the Potential of the Women's Building

**Women directly impacted by  
incarceration share their  
insight and vision**

A report of the Women & Justice Project  
for the NoVo Foundation

“Whatever problem that you bring to  
this building as a woman,  
whether formerly incarcerated or not,  
when you walk away you have a feeling  
that you, as a person, matter.”

# Table of Contents

---

## Executive Summary

Project background . . . . .	1
Engagement & leadership of directly impacted women . . . . .	1
Consultations with directly impacted women . . . . .	3
Findings . . . . .	4

## Methodology . . . . . 6

## Participant Backgrounds . . . . . 7

Incarceration history . . . . .	7
Community consultation participation . . . . .	8

## Discussion Summary . . . . . 9

<b>I. How can the Women’s Building best embody its mission?</b> . . . . .	9
<i>A safe space</i> . . . . .	9
<i>A Women’s Building for all women</i> . . . . .	9
<b>II. How can the Women’s Building honor the experiences and leadership of directly impacted women?</b> . . . . .	10
<i>Understanding and empathy from the community</i> . . . . .	10
<i>Honoring the leadership and humanity of directly impacted women</i> . . . . .	11
<i>Preserving aspects of Bayview</i> . . . . .	12
<i>Destroying aspects of Bayview</i> . . . . .	13
<i>Directly impacted women telling the story</i> . . . . .	13

<b>III. What programs, services and functions should the Women’s Building have?</b> . . . . .	14
<i>Transformation of the space.</i> . . . . .	14
<i>Concrete support and resources</i> . . . . .	14
<i>Facilitating directly impacted women’s leadership</i> . . . . .	15
<i>Support for families and loved ones</i> . . . . .	15
<i>Service priorities</i> . . . . .	16
<b>IV. What is one word for the Women’s Building?</b> . . . . .	19
<b>Recommendations</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Women’s Building creation and operations.</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Building space dedicated to women’s incarceration</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Building services and functions.</b> . . . . .	21

# Executive Summary

---

## Project background

In October 2015, the NoVo Foundation obtained the rights to redevelop the former Bayview Correctional Facility on 20th street and 11th avenue in Manhattan, acquiring a 99-year lease on the building. Since the 1970s, and until its evacuation in 2012 due to Superstorm Sandy, Bayview operated as a medium-security prison for women in New York State.

Women directly impacted by incarceration hold critically important keys in the process of unlocking the potential of the Women's Building so that the building can unlock the potential of girls and women around the world.

Over the coming years, the Foundation will turn the former Bayview prison into the Women's Building, a hub and home for the girls' and women's rights movement. The building will transform from a space designed to brutalize, dehumanize and silence society's most marginalized women to one dedicated to liberation, equity and justice for all girls and women – trans, cis and gender non-conforming – around the world.

To help guide the building's transformation, NoVo has engaged in a broad community consultation process involving discussions with a wide range of more than 300 stakeholders in the women's and girls' rights movement.

## Engagement & leadership of directly impacted women

Throughout the building development process, NoVo has paid special attention to the voices of currently and formerly incarcerated women. To augment its broader community consultation work and deepen the engagement and leadership of directly impacted women, the Foundation has engaged the Women and Justice Project (WJP). WJP is an independent project dedicated to ending mass criminalization and mass incarceration of women in the United States.

Centering women directly impacted by incarceration throughout the creation and life of the Women's Building is important for many reasons. First, directly impacted women bear some of the most profound degradation and marginalization in society. Because of forces like racism, gender oppression, and economic inequity that grip society and the criminal justice system, vastly disproportionate numbers of incarcerated women are from

low-income communities and communities of color. Transgender and gender non-confirming people are particularly targeted for criminalization and incarceration.

*“That would be really awesome to not only have the building renovated but to have formerly incarcerated women there to be able to not only work there but to share their stories and say, ‘yeah, I was 99G0817, that doesn’t stop me from being a wife, a mother, a grandmother.’”*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

A majority of incarcerated women are mothers, and many were the sole caregivers of their children before prison. Almost all incarcerated women suffered brutal physical and sexual abuse in their lifetimes, and most are in prison for crimes directly related to addiction, poverty, mental illness, domestic violence and trauma. Incarceration itself is a traumatizing and invisibilizing experience, and having a criminal record carries scathing stigma and relentless discrimination.

*“When you walk out of prison, we as women, we feel a little down, we feel like we’re excited about being free but we are unsure of ourselves. And when you walk in there [the Women’s Building] and you walk out, you want to walk out feeling empowered, you want to walk out feeling like ok – I can do this, I got this.”*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

Directly impacted women also hold profound resistance to the degradation and marginalization they experience. Alongside that resilience, women have deep expertise about solutions needed to change the conditions that prevent them and all women from achieving their full potential, and powerful leadership in moving those solutions forward.

Achieving true justice and equity for all women requires centering the experiences and expertise of women who are the most marginalized, and investing in their leadership. Only by building this power at all levels can we effectively challenge and change the skewed power-dynamics of decision-making in our society and the oppression that lies at the root of those dynamics. This understanding aligns deeply with NoVo’s philosophy that centering the leadership of people who live every day with injustice is the single most powerful way to create transformative change.

*“I’ve only been home a year. I did 27 years in the prison... and I’m still feeling like I’m shell shocked....You need that support system, you need those that have been there where you’ve been at to help you transition out.”*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

In addition, because of its history as a prison, the Women’s Building has a unique opportunity to play a role – both during its creation and after it opens – in educating the public about women’s incarceration and inspiring people to take action.

Currently and formerly incarcerated women are uniquely positioned to offer advice on how the Women’s Building can best fulfill this opportunity. Women hold special expertise on questions such as whether various parts of Bayview should be preserved for educational purposes, and how those aspects can best increase public understanding and support. Women also have specific insight

into how the building can effectively honor both the devastation of incarceration and the tremendous potential and leadership of directly impacted women – realities that are often disregarded even within the anti-mass incarceration movement itself.

## Consultations with directly impacted women

To support NoVo's efforts to engage directly impacted women, WJP convened three focus groups on February 17, May 19, and May 26, 2016, respectively. These groups built on the rich information the Foundation gathered from previous communication with directly impacted women.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the groups was to gather insight from formerly incarcerated women on how the Women's Building can most effectively:

- (1) embody its mission of liberation, justice and equity for all women and girls
- (2) educate the public about women's incarceration
- (3) honor directly impacted women's experiences, and lift up and support their potential and leadership
- (4) prioritize services, programs and functions most needed by girls and women, including directly impacted women, and by the movement working for their rights

The first group, held on February 17, focused on engaging women who had been incarcerated at Bayview or another state prison in New York. Of the 18 women who participated, seven had served time at Bayview.

The second group, held on May 19, focused on engaging formerly incarcerated women who are leaders in the anti-mass incarceration movement and in the community of directly impacted women in New York City. Nine women participated in the May 19 group.

The third group, held on May 26, focused on engaging transgender women who have experienced criminalization and/or incarceration. WJP organized this group in partnership with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SLRP), a non-profit collective that works for the rights, safety and empowerment of trans and gender non-conforming people, particularly people of color and people from low-income communities. Nine trans women participated in the May 26 group.

*“In this building I hope that trans women and cis women and all women have like a community dinner night to be able to have that communication. We say that we're women. We have to be inclusive and be able to communicate across the lines in a building that is communal.”*

*TRANS WOMEN GROUP*

<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Directly Impacted Women	2/17/16	18
Women Leaders	5/19/16	9
Trans Women	5/26/16	9

(1) This work was coordinated by the Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison Project, and included two focus groups in July 2015, 48 surveys from women currently incarcerated in New York State prisons, and in-person interviews with three formerly incarcerated women leaders.

## Findings

Across the board, participants responded with great enthusiasm and excitement to the vision of turning Bayview into a Women's Building. Participants, especially women who were incarcerated in Bayview, shared the brutality, isolation and inhumanity that defined life in the prison, and emphasized the importance of transforming the building into a place of light and healing. Among the key themes that emerged were the following:

*"It was literal hell. I had to go basically every day, walk all over the city to get the reentry support, just to get to the office to be told we don't do this anymore....also we have to have this staffed by formerly incarcerated women of the trans community as well as the [cis] community."*

*TRANS WOMEN GROUP*

- The building should offer a safe, welcoming, empowering space for all women that is free of judgment, fosters a sense of belonging, and facilitates women reclaiming their own profound worth and agency. Women felt that the building should represent the diversity of women in all its depth, range and beauty, while at the same time nurturing and honoring women's community and connectedness. Trans women identified that safety and empowerment in the building also means the implementation of policies and practices that protect and affirm trans and gender non-conforming people.

- The building should provide trauma-informed, culturally competent, gender-inclusive and gender-affirming services to help women heal and rebuild, especially after incarceration. Women repeatedly stressed the need for quality, accessible, on-site services (as opposed to referrals only) and resources staffed by directly impacted women themselves. Among the many needed services women identified, emotional and mental health support stood out as a top priority. Women also noted the importance of having specialized services for children and family members with incarcerated loved ones and supports dedicated to helping directly impacted women build and hone their leadership skills.
- The building should dedicate space to honoring and educating visitors about the horrors incarcerated women experience and the strength, community and leadership that directly impacted women hold. Women overwhelmingly felt that parts of Bayview should be preserved for this purpose, including possibly portions of the 5th floor and a keeplock (solitary confinement) cell. Some women suggested offering visitors a multi-sensory educational experience. Women communicated that one of the most effective ways to educate visitors

*"Someone who comes into that building should leave with the experience...that sense of what it feels like to be separated, the feeling of isolation, the feeling of loss, anger, empathy and the feeling of relating to the experienced individual who actually spent time inside that place."*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

would be for directly impacted women themselves to staff the building and to have opportunities to share their lived experiences and expertise in person. Trans women noted the particular importance of highlighting their voices, as their specific experiences are often overlooked and marginalized.

- The building should support the involvement and leadership of directly impacted women in all aspects and functions, not only the portions of the building dedicated to educating the public about women's incarceration. Women commented that placing women in staffing and leadership roles was an important way to honor the history of the building, and could help combat the stigma directly impacted women face and convey women's potential and vital contributions to society.

*"I think that we, as formerly incarcerated women, we should be in there running it, so when people come in there they say 'wow, these women was locked up in this building and they're in here working this building and they're giving back to women who just came home.' "*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

# Methodology

---

WJP conducted three focus groups to gather feedback from formerly incarcerated women to inform the creation of the Women's Building. To assist in this effort, WJP hired two consultants, one of whom brought her expertise as a woman who served time in New York State's prison system. Filmmaker Chanelle Elaine spearheaded the recruitment of directly impacted women for the February 17 focus group, with WJP adding four participants to her outreach. WJP led the outreach to directly impacted women leaders for the May 19 group, and partnered with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) to recruit trans women for the May 26 group. WJP facilitated the February 17 and May 19 groups, and co-facilitated the May 26 group with SRLP.

All focus groups were held at the NoVo Foundation offices from 6:00 to 8:00pm in the evening to accommodate participants' work schedules. WJP provided dinner and a \$50 stipend in addition to a round-trip Metro Card for each participant. Chanelle Elaine filmed the February 17 and May 19 groups, and recorded audio for the May 26 group to capture the wisdom shared by participants and provide a record of the community input process for the Women's Building archives. These recordings will also be used to generate materials to share with the public and invite others to provide their input as well.

At the outset of the February 17 group, NoVo Foundation Executive Director Pamela Shifman provided an overview of the genesis and vision for the Women's Building, and during the May 19 and May 26 groups, this overview was provided by Women's Building Project Manager Ellyson Perkins.

Each group followed a similar outline, developed by WJP for the first two groups and by WJP in partnership with SRLP for the third. WJP tailored the outline for each group to reflect the specific experiences and expertise of the participants.

The outline for each group aimed to gather input from participants in three main areas: (1) how the Women's Building can most effectively embody its mission; (2) how the Women's Building can best educate the public about women's incarceration, and honor the experiences and leadership of directly impacted women; and (3) the programs, services and functions that should be prioritized in the Women's Building.

Participants in each group were asked to complete a Participant Contact Form, which requested information about their incarceration history and recommendations for other directly impacted people and organizations NoVo should consult during the building creation process.

# Participant Backgrounds

---

## Incarceration history

In both the February 17 Directly Impacted Women Group and May 19 Women Leaders Group, all participants had experienced incarceration. Fourteen of those participants had been imprisoned at Bayview; they served an average of nearly two years at the prison. In the May 26 Trans Women Group, four individuals had been incarcerated and all others had experienced criminalization.

In total, 31 participants had been incarcerated. The length of time served by these participants ranged from less than one year to 27 years. The average time served for the February 17 Directly Impacted Women Group was 15 years; 11 years for the May 19 Women Leaders Group; and five years for the May 26 Trans Women Group.

### *February 17 Directly Impacted Women Group*

Of the 18 women who participated in this group, seven had been incarcerated at Bayview. The average length of incarceration at Bayview was about two years, ranging from less than one year to four years. With the exception of one woman who was incarcerated at Rikers Island, all participants had been incarcerated in one or more New York State women's prisons. Eleven women had been incarcerated at Bedford Hills, four at Albion, four at Taconic, three at Beacon and one at Willard correctional facilities; three women did not specify. Several women were housed at more than one prison during the course of their incarceration. Participants had served between seven months and 27 years, with an average of 15 years.

### *May 19 Women Leaders Group*

Of the nine women who participated in this group, seven were incarcerated at Bayview. The average length of incarceration at Bayview was about two years, ranging from one year to four years. All participants were incarcerated in one or more New York State women's prisons. Five women had been incarcerated at Bedford Hills, four at Taconic, three at Albion and two at Beacon correctional facilities; two women did not specify. Participants who responded to the question (all except one) about length of time served had been incarcerated from three to 20 years, with an average of 11 years.

### *May 26 Trans Women Group*

Of the nine participants in this group, four had been incarcerated. All of the women who experienced incarceration were confined at Rikers Island and/or one or more New York State men's correctional facilities. Nearly all incarcerated trans women in New York are housed in men's prisons, even though they are women and are at higher risk of brutality, sexual assault, rape and solitary confinement in men's prisons. One participant in the group had been imprisoned at Franklin, two at Woodbourne, one at Marcy, and one at Clinton correctional facilities. Women reported that the overall length of their sentences ranged from 3.5 years to eight years, with an average of 5.4 years.

## Community consultation participation

Nearly all participants expressed interest in receiving email updates about NoVo's progress in creating the Women's Building (34 of 36) and indicated their desire to receive information about future opportunities to be involved (35 out of 36). (One woman did not answer the question about future involvement, and another woman indicated she did not wish to receive updates.)

WJP asked participants to recommend other individuals and organizations for NoVo to consult with regarding the Women's Building. Both lists are on file at WJP.

# Discussion Summary

---

## I. How can the Women's Building best embody its mission?

Overall, focus group participants articulated that the Women's Building could best embody its mission to promote justice, equity and liberation for all women and girls by (1) being safe, supportive, empowering, and free of judgment; (2) creating an atmosphere, spaces and opportunities that facilitate women building community with each other; and (3) offering services to help women heal and rebuild their lives, especially after incarceration.

### ***A safe space***

Women commented that the building should work to counter the trauma and disempowerment of incarceration by supporting directly impacted women in building self-worth and agency. To do this, women suggested that the building offer a safe space with support and community free from judgment. Women wished to see an environment where they could be vulnerable, express fears, hopes and dreams, and regain a sense of worth as a woman and human being. Trans women identified that safety also means implementing policies and practices that protect and affirm trans and gender non-conforming people, such as gender neutral bathrooms.

- "I want it to feel like a safe environment." (Trans Women Group)
- "You can have permission to go ahead and be who you are. You have strengths, and empower yourselves." (Directly Impacted Women Group)

*"There's a lot of different women – diverse voices, diverse looks. People say the word woman and there just is this cookie cutter, you know, strict box. I know women that wear Brooks Brothers suits and they're the best women that I know. And I respect them as women....And I want to see that reflected in the space."*

*TRANS WOMEN GROUP*

*"Because Bayview was a place that contributed to women who may have been traumatized, who may have suffered from depression, we want to see a safe place where they can feel protected, empowered... let it be a place that no longer hurts, but helps."*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

- "People coming out would actually just have a different feel, they would see the building not just as a Women's Building, but a transformative building." (Women Leaders Group)

### ***A Women's Building for all women***

Women felt that the building should represent the diversity of women in all its depth, range and beauty, while at the same time fostering and honoring women's community and connectedness. Several participants expressed that this was important not only for directly impacted women but for all women entering the building.

- “I’m for women’s rights, I’m for women’s dignity, I’m for the restoration of us connecting as women.” (Trans Women Group)
- “I want to know that, as a woman, I matter.” (Directly Impacted Women Group)

## II. How can the Women’s Building honor the experiences and leadership of directly impacted women?

Participants expressed hope that people unfamiliar with women’s incarceration would leave the building with both increased empathy for the experiences of directly impacted women and an understanding of the resilience, contributions and leadership that directly impacted women hold. Participants felt that the building should educate visitors about the trauma of prison, and also provide powerful messages about directly impacted women being the catalysts with the greatest potential to challenge mass incarceration and the suffering it inflicts.

Participants hoped that visitors would be moved to get involved in efforts to challenge mass incarceration after visiting the building, learning about women’s incarceration and hearing directly from formerly incarcerated women.

### ***Understanding and empathy from the community***

A number of women shared their deeply painful experiences of incarceration, and emphasized the importance of building visitors understanding these realities. Participants in the Trans Women Group noted that their experiences with criminalization and incarceration are often marginalized even within the anti-prison movement.

- “I went in pre-op, I went in and I got abused in the system. I was there for eight years. I went into prison as a woman. I wasn’t transgender, I was in transition, but because of my gender marker by the government standard, I was put into a male facility for five years and then three years in a female facility and I was abused by both systems because there wasn’t a narrative... I was an anomaly, an aberration in that women’s conversation. And how are we going to create that? How are we going to create that women’s narrative?” (Trans Women Group)

**“We want people to experience the type of hell that we’ve been through and how serious the situation is inside when it’s dealing with trans women and what...they can do to help us to better things.”**

*TRANS WOMEN GROUP*

- “In order to understand, even if you’ve never been in a situation, it’s about having empathy and compassion for someone. I may not have experienced what you have had to experience but when I hear these stories I have compassion, and say ‘oh I’m so sorry that that happened to you.... enlighten us and I’m so proud of you because you got through it.’” (Trans Women Group)

## ***Honoring the leadership and humanity of directly impacted women***

Women noted that building visitors should gain greater knowledge about not only the brutality of prison, but also the myriad ways in which women resist the dehumanization of incarceration. Participants commented that the building could help combat the stigma directly impacted women face and convey women's potential and powerful contributions to their families, communities and society as a whole. Women emphasized that one of the best ways to do this would be to employ directly impacted women in key positions throughout the building. Several participants mentioned that having directly impacted women work in the building could, in conjunction with services, make an especially positive impact on young women and girls.

- “The amazing thing is having had these experiences, and we can look back and chuckle. That’s the idea of the spirit. And that spirit is also inside...It’s really about the resistance and how it shows up, and how we take care of each other.”  
(Women Leaders Group)

- “We want everyone to walk away with the knowledge that we’re not monsters, that we should not be stigmatized for what we have done.” (Directly Impacted Women Group)

- “We actually come home and we help, we do become a part of society...we do move on and actually make something of our lives.” (Women Leaders Group)

- “The idea of having staff members who are [formerly] incarcerated so they can see it’s not a high recidivism rate, it’s not a revolving door. We do come home, we do good work. Most of us work in human services and help other people trying to get their life together while we’re trying to get our life together.”  
(Women Leaders Group)

*“It will change the perception, shift the lens... I think that people really need to put a different face on what that [incarcerated woman] looks like because it’s things that happen. Nobody wakes up and says I want to be 07G0209, ever.”*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

*“How can that [resilience] be shown? [It] is the people who experienced it. There is this certain kind of love that we just have...and that’s what people will see...that in spite of our traumatic experiences, in spite of the horrific conditions, in spite of all those things, we nurtured each other, support each other, and we love each other.”*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

- “I would like for a person to have a different point of view of what incarceration looks like, especially knowing that formerly incarcerated people with criminal justice involvement...have actually had their hand in [the] transformation of this place.” (Women Leaders Group)

- “Where people can see what this building once was for women and what it is now, and hopefully that would have a positive impact on the youth that’s coming through and be able to see wow, this is how far we came.” (Women Leaders Group)

## ***Preserving aspects of Bayview***

In all three focus groups, women were asked about whether aspects of Bayview should be preserved in an effort to honor incarcerated women's experiences and educate the public. Women in the Directly Impacted Women Group and the Women Leaders Group provided specific feedback on this question, as numerous participants had been imprisoned at Bayview or otherwise visited the building. Because none of the Trans Women Group participants had been in Bayview when it was operational, the feedback from this group was more general.

The overwhelming majority of participants agreed on the importance of preserving some aspects of Bayview to remember what women went through at the prison and to help people understand the painful realities of incarceration.

The areas women identified most frequently for preservation were portions of the 5th floor, particularly the area that housed Bayview's keeplock (solitary confinement) unit.<sup>2</sup> Several women suggested preserving a keeplock cell. One woman noted that a specific door in keeplock, which she had seen during a recent tour, would be particularly powerful to preserve. The door has a "feed-up slot" that officers used to pass women food trays and small openings where women would place their hands and feet to be shackled.

*If you go into a building and you read the history or you see it, you see this visual, then you're going to come away heavy, overwhelmed, but yet proud of this transformation, and say, 'dag, this is once what it represented, and now look at it.' "*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

Some participants advocated for offering visitors a multi-sensory experience of incarceration, and several people called for preserving the entire 5th floor as a kind of museum. Some participants in the Women Leaders Group were in favor of preserving a correction officers' station, the slop sink, laundry room, and one of the open shower stalls. A few participants also mentioned preserving the mess hall, kitchen, gym, beauty parlor, school area, and the space where women worked as Department of Motor Vehicles operators as part of a DMV program at the prison. Some women suggested using the library to house an exhibit of the building's history as a prison.

Suggestions for showing visitors the day-to-day experience and dehumanization of confinement included posting a typical daily schedule from Bayview, recreating the sound of officers shouting orders, and limiting cell phone use for visitors in the area of the building dedicated to incarceration-related education. Many participants felt it would be important for the building to have photo and story exhibits featuring and staffed by directly impacted women.

---

(2) In New York's prisons, keeplock operates as a type of solitary confinement – a torturous punishment meted out to thousands of incarcerated people each year. Solitary consists of being locked down for 23 hours per day in a small cell with extremely limited contact with other human beings. Even basic amenities like sanitary supplies and showers are restricted. People can be, and often are, sent to solitary for violating even minor prison rules like talking too loudly or having the wrong shampoo. Women who report being sexually abused can be sent to solitary if officers believe the woman is lying. Trans women in men's prisons are disproportionately confined in solitary, even sometimes purportedly for their own "protection," as they are at serious risk of abuse and sexual assault. When it operated as a prison, Bayview had a 15-bed keeplock unit.

A few women in the Directly Impacted Women Group disagreed with preserving elements of Bayview, noting that exposure to reminders of past incarceration can be re-traumatizing: “Just the sight of it can give you panic attacks.” They also felt that preserving a cell could never do justice to the enormity of the trauma faced by women housed at Bayview. Instead, they suggested displaying stories and visuals about women’s experiences and resilience in prison and women’s transformation and contributions when they come home.

Women were glad to hear that the building will preserve the chapel and pool, which was hidden under a temporary floor and used as a storage area when the building was a prison. Women who had been in Bayview described the chapel as a beautiful space, and a few participants noted the therapeutic and recreational benefits of swimming. One participant in the Directly Impacted Women group commented that it is especially important to offer swimming lessons because many women returning from prison, and their children, may not have had the opportunity or resources to learn how to swim.

### ***Destroying aspects of Bayview***

Along with questions about whether aspects of Bayview should be preserved, participants were asked about whether certain areas in the prison should be destroyed. Women singled out a number of areas for destruction given their painful history, including: the front windows and doors at the entrance of the building; the small, cramped OB-GYN room, which symbolized the demanding and appallingly poor quality of health care at the prison; and the roof, particularly the caged-in area where women in keeplock were sent for their one hour of recreation. Women suggested that the roof should become a green space with a garden that can grow food.

*“When I went back into Bayview, that [entrance] was the one thing that was like ‘damn, this is what my family went through?’ ”*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

### ***Directly impacted women telling the story***

Participants, especially in the Women Leaders Group, felt strongly that the part of the building dedicated to honoring incarcerated women’s experiences should not be a memorial, but rather a living, dynamic space. Overwhelmingly, participants felt that stories told by directly impacted women themselves would most powerfully and accurately communicate the realities of incarceration.

Participants also emphasized that the voices and leadership of directly impacted women should be an integral part not only of the incarceration-related portions of the building but also of the building as a whole.

- “Archives – having some type of area in the building where people can go and see the history, what this building had once represented – dehumanization. And that they’ll be able to get the full effect...whether it’s via having a film, pictures around, through storytelling, through words of formerly incarcerated people and incarcerated people...” (Women Leaders Group)
- “For some of the women post incarceration to be in there and be curators of that experience of Bayview...For them to be employees...and become curators of what Bayview represented in the community.” (Trans Women Group)

### III. What programs, services and functions should the Women's Building have?

#### ***Transformation of the space***

Participants who were incarcerated at Bayview or who had visited the prison universally voiced the importance of comprehensively overhauling the space. Participants called for the Women's Building not just to represent but tangibly feel like the polar opposite of what the prison was – dark, oppressive, violent, dehumanizing. Women suggested the new space be filled with light, greenery, and art. For a few participants, Bayview's brutal history made it difficult to even envision such a change.

- "I just get stuck on the cages. It's a place of dehumanization."  
(Women Leaders Group)
- "I think art is a really good way for everyone to express themselves. A lot of people can't express themselves verbally so people can express themselves through art and then express it through words." (Trans Women Group)

*"It's dreariness that comes to mind – when it's sunny out, it's gray inside....If you can just get rid of some of that brick and steel and put some glass...art work...greenery."*

*WOMEN LEADERS GROUP*

#### ***Concrete support and resources***

Participants in all three groups felt strongly that the building should offer concrete services and supports for women returning home from prison. Participants explained the profound need for these services given the difficulty of reentry and the isolation and obstacles women face after incarceration. Many women identified having a 24-hour drop-in center as a priority, along with in-person and phone support available around the clock for women coming home. Women felt it was critical for as many services as possible to be on-site, instead of referring women out to other organizations.

*"It was my experience in post-incarceration...I had no bearings, I was really like terrified. My thing was maybe should I throw a brick in a glass window and just go back. Because I wasn't plugged in to a lot of the services that were there, I didn't know what services were available."*

*TRANS WOMEN GROUP*

Women also identified key principles they felt should guide the services offered. First, having reentry services provided by formerly incarcerated women themselves, women who understand the reentry process and what women need to heal and successfully navigate the

challenges of returning to the community. Second, making services culturally competent and accessible to women from all backgrounds, and in a wide range of languages. Participants in the Trans Women Group in particular related the trauma of receiving substandard services and emphasized the importance of having programs responsive to their specific experiences and needs.

- “Having a shower and having something hot to eat, having clean clothes, that was a blessing.” (Women Leaders Group)
- “I think that when you come out of prison as a trans woman and you go into these different organizations, from personal experience when just coming home, there is no compassion, there is no sympathy, there is no understanding because they don’t live that life. They’re not you, they don’t experience it. We need them to take away first of all having an open mind and really listening to our experiences to get where we are coming from, what we have been through.” (Trans Women Group)
- “A lot of times when we are incarcerated or we finally get to this place where we are breathing this fresh air, people are telling us what we need, right? Folks are organizing programs or organizations around the support and services that they feel we need as trans and gender nonconforming people.”  
(Trans Women Group)
- “A lot of us do when we first get out, and I’m no different, break down crying when trying to explain to somebody what it’s like to be in a state prison or Rikers Island and to be physically beat half to death and raped, and misgendered and abused so much that you’re ready to take your own life.” (Trans Women Group)
- “It was the people that did not judge me that got me through it. This is the longest I’ve been home.” (Directly Impacted Women Group)
- “Who knows better than somebody who just had to do it?”  
(Directly Impacted Women Group)
- “I need to get me together – because I see how you’re walking, I want that. I see how you’re talking, I see how you’re dressing, hey, and I want some of that because I know your history....I want some of what you got because I’ve seen the transition.”  
(Trans Women Group)

*“If I come here I don’t want you to send me here, here, here at \$5.50 a round trip....Some things have to be in the building.”*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

### ***Facilitating directly impacted women’s leadership***

Participants also identified the importance of having services and supports to facilitate directly impacted women developing and honing their leadership skills.

- “Great to have training and encourage formerly incarcerated people to be leaders. Who has an open mind to do that?” (Trans Women Group)
- “I want to be part of the problem solv[ing] – I’m not just looking for you to do everything.” (Trans Women Group)

## ***Support for families and loved ones***

Participants in all groups stated that support for families of directly impacted women should be offered in the building. Ideas included services for children of incarcerated parents and support groups for people with incarcerated loved ones. Participants in the Trans Women Group identified the need for specific support and information for families of directly impacted trans women and gender non-conforming people.

- “Mothers, sisters, daughters who have loved ones inside are directly impacted, so if we can just broaden that concept and have a place where they too can come and get assistance and counseling.” (Women Leaders Group)
- “My daughter is 30 years old. She still talks about that I wasn’t there for a significant amount of time. It’s hard for her.” (Women Leaders Group)

*“Our families were sentenced when we were sentenced. If you did one year, five years, 20 or 30 years, that family was doing time and they suffered right along with us.”*

*DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN GROUP*

## ***Service priorities***

Prior to the WJP focus groups, the NoVo Foundation generated a list of building functions that participants in the Foundation’s broader community consultation process had identified as priorities. WJP asked participants to reflect on this list and to identify which priorities resonated and which areas, if any, were missing.

The charts below outline the categories WJP presented to each focus group based on NoVo’s curated list and summarize the additional categories participants named as priorities.

Among the needed services women identified, emotional and mental health support – as part of a wellness center or clinic, and/or as independent services – stood out as a top priority. Participants noted that many directly impacted women need quality medication management, counseling, and peer support, especially as they return to the community.

## ***Community Consultation Building Priorities***

Space for community events, including celebrations, memorials, etc.

Referrals/resource hub (connected to this translation services)

Not-for-profit office space

Business & nonprofit incubation

Mission-aligned for-profit offices

Performance & lecture space

Meeting space, conference rooms

Co-working space, drop-in working space with computers, etc.

Shared outsourced resources (HR, accounting, IT, graphic design, translation, etc.)

Industrial kitchen, open for cooking classes, etc.

Café (which may provide skills-training)

Wellness center/clinic

Contemplative garden(s) that can grow food/Green space

Art gallery space

Studio or creation space (podcast, videos, etc.)

Museum

Dance studio

Spiritual sanctuary space

Bookstore/library

Gym/fitness center

Childcare center (play space, childcare for people who work in building, people who are visiting building for services/meetings)

## ***WJP Focus Group Additional Building Priorities***

### Mental health services & emotional support

- Counseling and therapy
- Psychiatry/medication management
- Trauma-informed clinical services
- Support for survivors of rape and sexual violence
- Broad range of support and empowerment groups, including anger management and parenting
- Support for people involved in sex work

### Substance abuse treatment

- Alcoholics anonymous

### Reentry support for women returning home after incarceration

- Peer coaching/counseling to help women navigate reentry
- Referrals to relevant organizations and resources
- Housing support

### Education & vocational training

- GED/high school/college
- Computer training, computer lab
- Vocational skills training and support
- Independent living/life skills
- Sex education

### Domestic violence services

- Awareness, prevention and support

### HIV/AIDS

- Support services, education and awareness

### Daily living needs & donation space

- Beauty parlor
- Thrift store
- Low cost/free clothing and daily living supplies

### Clinic for trans & gender non-conforming people

- Including culturally responsive hormone replacement therapy for trans women

### Interpreters/translation services

### Immigration services



# Recommendations

---

The below recommendations are based on the key themes that emerged from three focus groups WJP organized as part of the NoVo Foundation's Women's Building community consultation process. The overwhelming majority of women (31 of 36) who participated in the focus groups had been incarcerated in New York State. All women had experienced criminalization. The focus groups were held on February 17, May 19 and May 26, 2016, respectively.

## Women's Building creation and operations

- (1) Continue to center the voices and leadership of cis and trans women directly impacted by incarceration in all aspects of the development and life of the building.
- (2) Prioritize hiring directly impacted women for various staff roles when the building opens, especially as curators and leaders in managing the portion(s) of the building dedicated to educating the public about women and mass incarceration.
- (3) Gather input from directly impacted people who are gender non-conforming. These perspectives can help ensure that the building embraces and empowers gender non-conforming people and that the space(s) dedicated to incarceration-related education also reflect these specific experiences.

## Building space dedicated to women's incarceration

- (1) Consider forming a sub-committee specifically to help guide the creation of building space(s) dedicated to honoring directly impacted women's experiences and leadership, and educating the public about incarceration. If created, engage directly impacted women as committee leaders.
- (2) Preserve at least a portion of the 5th floor, particularly at a minimum one keeplock (solitary confinement) cell that has a solid metal door and slots for food trays and shackling.
- (3) Develop a multi-sensory exhibit with audio and visual components to educate visitors about the horrors that existed at Bayview and that continue to exist for incarcerated cis and trans women nationwide, and to honor the resilience, resistance, contributions and leadership of directly impacted women.
- (4) Include the cages on the roof among the items designated for destruction. Integrate a garden with the capacity to grow food in the transformed rooftop space.

## Building services and functions

- (1) Ensure that the building provides at least some services that are accessible on-site, such as a drop-in center where women can receive support, resources and referrals 24 hours per day, seven days per week.
- (2) Offer at least some services, including emotional and mental health support, to help women heal and rebuild after incarceration. Also include services for currently incarcerated women, and children and family members with incarcerated loved ones, along with supports to help directly impacted women build and hone leadership skills. Ensure that all services are trauma-informed, culturally competent, gender-inclusive, and gender-affirming.
- (3) Wherever possible, prioritize tenants who provide services that are led and/or staffed by directly impacted women.
- (4) Create spaces and policies that are gender-inclusive and gender-affirming, including gender neutral bathrooms.
- (5) Provide space and support for directly impacted and all women to build community with each other and to engage in cross-movement dialogue and work.