

OCAD Initiative Against Chicago's Gang Database Receives Grant from Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

The human rights organization [Unitarian Universalist Service Committee](#) (UUSC) has awarded its fourth annual Human Rights Innovation Fellowship Grant to [Organized Communities Against Deportations](#) (OCAD). UUSC works to activate people of faith and conscience to resist harm and criminalization of communities based on their identities. Part of this work includes supporting community partners working to create more just, safe, welcoming and sustainable communities in the face of discrimination and inequity.

Organized Communities Against Deportations is an undocumented-led nonprofit group that contests the deportations and criminalization of Black, Brown and immigrant communities in Chicago and surrounding areas. OCAD's grant-winning project reflects [a growing movement nationwide](#) against the pervasive use, abuses and often erroneous misuse of gang databases by law enforcement and immigration enforcement authorities.

[The city's gang database, which includes some 128,000 names](#) not counting juveniles, has been compiled over the years by Chicago police officers. Rights advocates say it's inaccurate, out of date and racially skewed, disproportionately including Blacks and Latinos. The controversial gang database and its use are now under scrutiny by Chicago's Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

“Since last year, through coalition work, research, advocacy and community organizing we have been able to expose how the CPD added the information of over 195,000 Black and Brown Chicagoans to the gang database. A database that was kept in the dark for over two decades is now under investigation as a result of the ongoing mobilization across the city to erase the database.”

OCAD's gang database initiative is part of the group's wider commitment to creating sanctuary in Chicago, a self-proclaimed Sanctuary City — by working at local levels with individuals and families through grassroots organizing and legal and policy action, to develop community environments that can thrive without fear.

In awarding this year's Innovation Fellowship Grant, UUSC Vice President and Chief Program Officer Rachel Gore Freed said, "OCAD's community-level work in combatting unjust profiling by law enforcement in the critical city of Chicago is resisting the national plunge into anti-immigrant and racial bias that is being supported by the U.S. administration today."

OCAD Project Leader Reyna Wences said they will collaborate under the UUSC Fellowship grant with the Chicago chapter of [BYP100](#), a national community mobilization collective that arose after the killing of Trayvon Martin.

"The partner collaboration is part of our 2-year old Expand Sanctuary Coalition in Chicago, Wences said. "Our project's aim is to see the gang database dismantled and to have the City of Chicago attempt to repair the harm the use of these databases is causing.

"This includes supporting people who have been detained or who are in process of being deported because of the database's gang designation. We intend to give people the opportunity to defend themselves and potentially be taken off the list," said Wences. OCAD and BYP100 are also working towards securing a moratorium that would prevent adding additional names to the database and spark investigations into possible due process and civil rights violations.

In June, both organizations joined individual plaintiffs and other community groups in a class action lawsuit against the City of Chicago and Chicago Police Department for the use of the gang database. The Coalition to Erase the Database, which OCAD and BYP100 are a part of, is also leading efforts to pass a temporary ordinance that would put an immediate stop to the use of the gang database and would create procedures for people to appeal the information found in the city's current database.

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