

Understanding CURE

On the surface, Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) is typical of many other US-based nonprofit organizations:

- CURE has obtained 501-c-3 status with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, making it tax-exempt and contributions to it tax-deductible.
- CURE has obtained consultative status with the United Nations, enabling it to participate in a wide range of discussions on issues affecting civil society.
- CURE is multi-layered with International, National, State/Issue, and local chapters governed by CURE's constitution and bylaws.

In some very important ways, CURE is unique:

- CURE is a grassroots organization – from top to bottom. It does not hire professional leaders. Instead, its leaders come from the ranks of people formerly in prison and family members or friends of prisoners. These are people who are passionate about seeking improvements in the criminal justice system. CURE's members are also largely prisoners, ex-prisoners, and family members and friends of prisoners.
- The vast majority of CURE's funding comes from membership dues and contributions of members. Because our members often come from the ranks of the lower economic strata, annual dues are relatively inexpensive and may be waived for the indigent.
- The budgets for CURE Chapters are typically very small. The work is done by volunteers, with little or no paid staff. "Offices" are usually in the homes of leaders. Equipment is basic – often just a computer, printer, and phone. We must be good stewards of the resources of our members. The money entrusted to us is to be spent carefully to promote the changes necessary to make criminal justice systems constructive. The largest expense categories are generally printing and postage.
- CURE leaders are cautioned not to accept funds that might obligate them to support any other entity's positions or actions. Since we are working to improve the criminal justice system, it is important that we are able to speak the truth and act autonomously.
- Because we operate on small budgets without paid staff, our members can trust that we will act with their best interests in mind.
- CURE's leaders work to improve the criminal justice system and to empower members to help with that work.
- Country, state, and issue chapters are relatively autonomous. Each is expected to incorporate as a non-profit. While a chapter is expected to support any positions established by International CURE, it is also expected to establish its own policies and priorities and raise and manage its own funds.
- Unlike many nonprofits, CURE does not provide services. We exist solely to promote positive changes in the criminal justice system. To do that...
 - We work with policymakers in all branches of government,
 - We provide information and encouragement to our members so that they will work with policymakers to foster constructive changes.

One other feature of CURE that is worth mentioning is that it is a secular organization. That does not make us unique, but it is important. Our members all share the view that the criminal justice system must improve. All should feel comfortable and welcome, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack of religious affiliation.

It would be impossible to achieve many of our goals without entering into coalitions or working with other organizations. For example, often the best way to help our members is to refer them to another organization that deals specifically with the problem that is troubling them.

Research and policy organizations can provide direction for our advocacy. Their position papers may serve to educate our members on important issues. Sometimes, the only way to achieve a policy change is to enter into a coalition with a group of organizations sharing that common goal. As we work with other organizations, it is important to be mindful of several guiding principles:

- The work must serve to advance one of our criminal justice policy goals or assist our members.
- No element of the effort should promote a goal that is contrary to a CURE position.
- The effort should not be done solely to promote another organization or its broader agenda.