



“We need philanthropy to do the really exciting growth work that states are not yet ready to pay for.”

A Conversation with Lauren Cameron of [Recidiviz](#)

Carolyn Robinson

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Carolyn Robinson: Can you introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about your work? When was this venture founded, and what's distinctive about it?

Lauren Cameron: I'm Lauren Cameron. I'm a growth analyst at Recidiviz. I've been here for about two and a half years. I work across our product areas to focus on the biggest areas for impact. We work in the criminal justice system. There are a million problems but we are trying to prioritize the highest impact areas for our scalable venture. Recidiviz was founded in 2019, so we just hit our five-year mark. We are an organisation that partners directly with corrections departments. We're a non-profit engineering team and we work alongside the Department of Corrections to build tools to help reduce the size of the criminal justice system.

Our goal is to safely and equitably reduce the size of the system by uplifting the right information to the right people at the right time, so that each person in the system can chart their fastest, most rehabilitative path back to freedom.

Something that sets us apart is we're almost completely an engineering team. I'm not an engineer; I'm on our impact team but more than 85% of our team are engineers, product managers, data analysts and data scientists. We were founded out of a Google project, so we're very tech-forward.

Carolyn Robinson: What communities do you serve and how do they benefit?

Lauren Cameron: Our primary people we are serving are justice-impacted individuals, meaning people who are in prison or on supervision, which covers both probation and parole. Our primary users, however, are corrections officers. We create tools for corrections officers: parole officers, probation officers, line staff in prison and case managers in prison. They use our tools to keep track of their caseload, and they help flag rehabilitative and decarceration opportunities.

One small caveat is that a huge initiative is now [underway] to make these tools more [forward] facing for people in the system. We've launched two pilots so that our tools and the information is now being uplifted directly to people in the system. There's definitely a future in which our customers are both corrections officers and also people who are directly in prison or on supervision.

Carolyn Robinson: Could you say more about the states that you're in?

Lauren Cameron: We are in 19 states across the country, big and small, red and blue, as big as California and Texas, as small as Maine. We've helped support 156,000 people towards their release. That means 156,000 people moved one step closer to freedom, whether that's from prison to parole, or probation to freedom.

We have saved about \$1.2 billion in correction spending across all of our state partners since our inception. We also cover about 50% of our costs with earned revenue from states. Our state partners are paying us for their services.

Carolyn Robinson: Could you share an example that illustrates the impact of your work? Something that's particularly important where the outreach is working?

Lauren Cameron: We're extremely data-driven. Other organisations focus in wonderful ways on the human stories. We need to do more work on narrative with the human stories, but we track our impact by the numbers. We're really focused on scaling and helping as many people as possible.

An example of our impact is Maine. They had this amazing policy that was called the [Supervised Community Confinement Program](#). It's the idea that people in prison who are succeeding and who have completed these [certain] requirements, X,Y, and Z can be moved to a home confinement program, which provides way more freedom than you can imagine you would have in prison. Before the Recidiviz partnership, they had maybe six people in this program.

They had this amazing program but they weren't sure why no one was using it. We found out it's because the eligibility criteria were confusing. Case officers were overworked and not able to transfer people there. We implemented a tool that makes it super easy to see who is eligible for this opportunity to automate the paperwork, to get them across the finish line.

In the first month of launching that tool, the population of people in home confinement grew by 20 times, it was just unbelievable growth. The second we implemented the tool, they could see exactly how many people are eligible for this opportunity and move them through the system.

That's a tiny example of what we see. Every state has so many people who are ready to be moved through the system and on these better paths, but because the data systems are so bad, people are having trouble tracking who's on their caseload. Our tools make it really easy to make sure that no one is staying in higher levels of incarceration than they should be.

As you can imagine, every step towards freedom just offers a lot more economic mobility and more rehabilitative opportunities. It's really important that we're moving people through the system on their fastest track. It's a simple concept. That's why we're bipartisan. No one thinks that someone should be sitting in prison for longer than they're legally supposed to. It's a no-brainer problem. We are glad to be scaling now to most of the country.

Carolyn Robinson: Everybody learns as much from things that don't work as they do from things that have worked. Could you describe something that you tried that didn't work, but you learned from it?

Lauren Cameron: In the early days before Recidiviz had even tried this problem, our main goal was to make public-facing data dashboards so that the general public, family members of people in prison, would have real-time data access to what's going on in the system. I wouldn't say that didn't work. We still have public-facing dashboards in a number of our states, but we did discover this much larger problem.

When we first started out, we had the idea of bringing this information directly to people in the system. So lifting up, if you're eligible for a lower level of incarceration directly to people who are in the system and their case officers to help correct that information asymmetry. We tried to go about that before we had the trust with the agencies and that work was not yet possible. Now, four years later, we have built up the trust to scale to 19 states and we have been able to return to that work.

It was an important lesson that agency trust is everything and to work directly with these people who are in charge of our entire incarcerated system is how we're able to drive impact. We have been more careful with building that trust and bringing these bold ideas to our most innovative states and trying them slowly, rather than starting out with that bolder idea.

We also used to do more legislative change and policy-impact memos. We found that this was actually harming our trust with agencies because sometimes we were helping amazing advocacy groups pass laws that the agency was against.

We did roll that back for now and there's discussions internally about whether we create another branch of Recidiviz that does that kind of work so as to not harm our trust with the agencies. We are what we call an inside game approach.

We're working with the dominant institution to drive systems change from the inside. You have to really walk that line of wanting to promote that trust, but also support the rest of the ecosystem that's maybe trying to abolish prisons or pass really progressive laws that we support.

We've learned a lot by working directly with this extremely specific and unique group of stakeholders—Department of Corrections leaders. There are 50 of them and then the federal system. So it's as if we have 50 customers. We have 19 of them now and our goal is to get to all 50.

Carolyn Robinson: Expanding on that idea of trust. What role does trust play in your relationship with funders? How can a funder cultivate trust with a venture like yours?

Lauren Cameron: Excellent question. I think trust-based philanthropy is absolutely huge. Something that allows or that signals to us we have a high-trust relationship is unrestricted multi-year funding. It's like the gold standard. It just allows us to be flexible and responsive to different emerging needs around the organisation.

We will still have a project plan and we'll tell our funder exactly what we plan to do with their money. But funders who are really open to an organisation like ours, which is so fast-changing; we're pivoting all the time and being able to go along on that ride with us and get excited about these changes and being a bit more risk averse in a way that resembles more venture funding is beneficial.

Having a ton of reporting is hard for a small organisation like ours. We don't have a fundraising team. The work sprinkles across a few of us, but none of us are doing it as our full-time job at Recidiviz.

We absolutely are so grateful when various organisations [request] annual reports or quarterly reports or even say, can you send us updates here and there, off the shelf about your work rather than filling out this six-page report. It's a small thing, but it makes a huge difference because we would hope that our funders want us to go out and do the work as much as possible. It is important to talk about the work, but funders who allow us to fulfill those requirements with existing reports or off-the-shelf materials or even a meeting are just so helpful because otherwise it's very easy to have 12 reports due every other month and we could employ two people to do that full time.

Rippleworks is an excellent example. We have many other funders who we have a close relationship with and we work well with and [because] we have gone through demonstrations, they really understand what our tools do and are much more willing to be on a fast-changing ride with us rather than strictly tying us to specific outcomes.

Carolyn Robinson: Let's talk about Rippleworks specifically. You received different kinds of support; the capacity building assistance, the talent grant, leader studio and expert office hours. How does the Rippleworks process of deciding what kind of capacity-building support to provide differ from what you've experienced with other funders?

Lauren Cameron: Rippleworks capacity building is honestly best in class. Only a small percent of our funders or maybe a third perhaps actually have existing resources for capacity building. A lot of it is just financial relationships, which is great and important, but for Rippleworks to have such a wide offering of Leader Studio and expert office hours is really unique, at least from what we've seen from our funders.

To be able to offer these resources across the team is also huge. Some of our other funders have fundraising resources, which is great and also important, but to have a variety of resources that we can send out to the team over Slack and say: 'here are some things that you can all engage with if you're interested,' is wonderful. The Rippleworks process was also quite lightweight.

There were a few meetings talking about what would be best, but it felt much more like a partnership than like a funder-grantee relationship. RippleWorks is deeply invested and cares about our work and doesn't want to make us jump through hoops that aren't helpful to us.

It's worth talking about more the talent grant, which has just been the most amazing unlock for our organisation. I can't think of any other funder I've ever come across that provides a grant specifically for talent support. It's something that is so easy to put less money into. We obviously support our talent, but it's not something we're putting extra funds towards.

But to have a grant that's specifically earmarked to go above and beyond in the talent space, whether that is diverse recruiting or mental health services for your own staff, to have money that gets to sit on our very small people team and they get to look at our team and then decide our needs, it is so unique. Honestly, it made us think, wow, after this RippleWorks grant, maybe we should be asking other funders for specific talent grants because it's just so important to support the team.

Criminal justice work is really hard and we don't want people burning out. Recidiviz has an excellent culture, but I think it's so unique to have a funder specifically want to support the talent rather than just the people who we're impacting, which is extremely important as well.

Carolyn Robinson: What were the specifics around receiving the talent grant?

Lauren Cameron: They reached out to us. We had already been working with them on Leader Studio and capacity building work. We had a few meetings talking about different buckets including: acquisition, development, retention, and they wanted to compare those to our biggest talent needs. Our biggest need areas were growing management skills for first-time engineering managers, the team's mental wellness, cultivating a diverse team, and ensuring the team can do state visits and get that proximity to the work, visit prisons and interact with the people we're impacting.

After that, there was a formal application process, then Rippleworks selected us. It's not something we were aware they did nor did we ask them directly for it. It was recent so we don't have much to report on the impact of it yet, but it is so unique. Our chief people officer was just thrilled because it's giving her the opportunity to think of the most ambitious plans for supporting our team. Having specific earmarked funding to do so rather than having to go to our leadership board and make a case for why we should spend more money on talent ; it's just really cool that they do that. I've never seen any other funder do a talent grant.

Carolyn Robinson: Can you say more about the other opportunities such as expert office hours and reflect on the team's experience with that?

Lauren Cameron: Expert office hours is the one that has been widely used by the team. Any expert you want to reach, they will connect you to. There's such incredibly diverse needs across the team. We used expert office hours to talk about procurement of new state partners and government contracts. That's the kind of expert that otherwise would be really hard to find and we'd probably spend so much time sourcing that.

To have a partner like Rippleworks say, whatever experts you need, we will connect you to people you can have conversations with is impactful. The big storyline with RippleWorks is they care so much about the people. They're investing in the people of our organisation, which is just so important for any mission-driven nonprofit, trying to help other people. But it's important to also support ourselves.

Carolyn Robinson: You've been very clear about how useful the RippleWorks support has been. Are there any gaps or shortcomings in the model?

Lauren Cameron: Rippleworks is really easy to praise because they're just really good funders. The only other thing that could be helpful, and I'm not even sure if we've even asked them for that— but we're always looking for more introductions and connections. The funding landscape is shrinking for criminal justice, and it is tough times out here. We are doing all right as an organisation but it's always important to be introduced to other funders in this space who have an interest in scalable technology, economic mobility work, or criminal justice.

Most of our funding is found through introductions rather than cold outreach. That's another best in class for us. If a funder is willing to tell other funders in this space about us. Rippleworks is really good at lifting up our work. We have zero marketing support. To have them posting on LinkedIn and their website, that's all really great for us and that is a form of introduction. More formal introductions are also something we welcome.

Carolyn Robinson: In general, what do you think funders misunderstand or should know about capacity building?

Lauren Cameron: Funders should listen to their grantees, which is exactly what we're doing here. Another big thing that we want is more community building within the ecosystem. It would be so cool if, for example, one of our funders put together a criminal justice round table with representatives from different criminal justice organisations in the space to talk about our shared struggles, learnings and to build off each other. We do that organically, we have ecosystem friends who we regularly check in with in the sector. However, if more funders were able to bring together little cohorts, whether it's similar verticals or similar scale, that would be great.

Fundraising workshops are typically helpful. Storytelling workshops of any sorts are really helpful. I don't think we are alone in that. A lot of nonprofits and organisations we talk with regularly don't have a lot of storytelling support or marketing support. We are always looking for advice and channels and help with uplifting our stories.

That would be another amazing talent grant, something bespoke, where it would be a grant about storytelling or narrative change because it's just so important in this climate to lift up positive stories about criminal justice. Generally funders in this space, not Rippleworks, but some funders are not very understanding of how much time their applications may take or their reporting processes might take. So asking for a report quarterly, being more trusting and willing to take what we have off the shelf and setting up time to ask questions would be beneficial.

We are always willing to dig into our work, but it can be really onerous to fill out these six-page grant reports. When people give money, they want to see what you're doing with it. It's a fine line, and I very much understand it. I have never been on the funder side, but I can say from the organisation-side that it can be a serious burden and takes time away from doing the work that we all care about.

Carolyn Robinson: Do you think there are any bold shifts in funding that are needed to strengthen the voices of those who are closest to the problem?

Lauren Cameron: There should be an important focus on supporting leaders with proximity to the work. The more proximate you can support people to the work, the better. That's something we've worked on as an organisation— always trying to center the voices of people in the system. Now we have an advisory board of formerly incarcerated people who vet all of our products. We meet with them regularly.

Carolyn Robinson: Where do you get most of your funding at Recidiviz?

Lauren Cameron: 40% of our funding is foundations on our philanthropic side, and 40% is high-net-worth-individuals. About 10% is corporations, very low. Then less than 10% these days is federal funding. That doesn't include our state revenue side and contracts with our state partners. By far our biggest groups are high-net-worth-individuals either with small family foundations or just operating with their own money through a financial advisor or more formalized foundations.

Carolyn Robinson: What kind of funding did you start with and how has that diversified over the years, if it has?

Lauren Cameron: We started with individuals. We had no foundation connections. Our founders came from the big tech world and were able to get the attention early. Honestly, we love funding from individuals rather than foundations because it's almost always unrestricted. The process is much less formalized. It's usually a few meetings and they trust us and are willing to make this bet.

Foundations tend to be on certain cycles, for instance, 'we fund this time of year.' But what if there is a funding need that pops up in April and they don't fund until October? From our experience, individuals have tended to be much more flexible. We started mainly with a few individuals then gained one or two foundations. We certainly did not start with any federal funding. Over time, we were able to diversify to more foundations.

We brought in some corporate funding. In our small experience with the sector, we have found that corporate funding has the highest barrier. That's why we tend to stay more with foundations and individuals. In general, our funding hasn't seen any big changes.

By far the biggest change is not on the philanthropic side, but we've spun up a revenue stream from our state partners, in the past two to three years. This shift means we can decenter philanthropy in a way that allows us to do the work and spend less time fundraising. But also keep fundraising and philanthropy as a way to do these bold expansion projects.

We have that revenue stream from states but we will never ever make that 100% because then the states are in control of the work we're doing. If we keep at least 30% of our costs covered by philanthropy, we can try bold new projects and vet them before we're ready to bring those to the core state work that the states are paying for.

Carolyn Robinson: Would you describe your state support as more reliable?

Lauren Cameron: Things are shifting on a daily basis. We're super, super lucky and privileged as an organisation that our federal funding stream is so low. We've talked to friends who are 90% federally funded and are having to close their doors, which obviously is heartbreaking. Right now, less than 10% of our funding is coming from federal sources. At this moment, we're considering that to be zero. We can't guarantee any of that funding is going to come through this year. Given we have such a heavy revenue stream from states, we're definitely worried about the trickle-down effects of federal funding on state funding.

For the state funding strategy, we're scrappy. We started with more ARPA (The American Rescue Plan Act) funding. Our goal on the state funding side is to get directly in the state budget, the governor's budget, so that it's harder for them to get us out of that budget cycle. In 2024, we were really successful in renewing for a higher amount in every single one of our state contracts. As states are seeing the impact: the time saved and the shrinking of their system, they're much more willing to put more skin in the game.

Federal funding is stressful. We're stressed out and we're stressed for our friends. But again, we're really lucky that that is such a small part of our revenue stream. We certainly will not be going out and pursuing more federal grants in the near future for fear of that. The federal administration is not a good thing for criminal justice, at least not right now that we're seeing tough-on-crime rhetoric. The general view the public [holds] about criminal justice plays a huge role in the funding landscape.

We've had funders say, 'We used to be criminal justice funders, but now we're completely shifting to environmental needs or women's rights,' which is also important. We believe in those causes too. But we could see a serious strain on criminal justice funding in the next few years, which is why it's more important than ever that we have

that self-sustaining revenue stream from our state partners. Everything feels up in the air.

Carolyn Robinson: What kind of impact does that uncertainty have on the work?

Lauren Cameron: We need philanthropy to do the really exciting growth work that states are not yet ready to pay for. If philanthropy funding retracts then we will still do our core work and still grow but we'll be less ambitious, less of a startup that's incubating new, bold ideas. Also, less willing to take risks that can end up being some of our biggest successes. Philanthropy is so key. Having trusting philanthropists who are willing to take those risks with us and follow along in our bold ideas for criminal justice and trust us as the experts in our own space is so important.

Criminal justice funding has been shrinking since 2020. What is so important there, and we would love more funders to be talking about, is narrative change. The tough-on-crime mindset is really harmful for our funding landscape and our work in general. We are being much more cognizant of talking about community safety and showing the statistics that reveal how we are actually reducing recidivism. We've finally been around long enough that we can show that we're reducing reincarcerations. So few of our funders support criminal justice, specifically. But we can frame our work in a way that's economic mobility.

We used to really talk about the racial justice aspects a lot, and now no one wants to fund that. Our work doesn't change based on what funders want, but we can frame it differently. Having more funders who are willing to be bold and steadfast in their support of criminal justice to uplift victim stories, but also stories of people who got out and changed their lives and made a difference in their communities is so important.

Since we don't have big storytelling or marketing support, having more funders who are willing to help us out with that, whether that's to film a video, or write a blog post, or post more on LinkedIn. Storytelling and narrative change will be so key over the next four years. We're thinking about it a lot, and they're also amazing people in the ecosystem doing that work.

Carolyn Robinson: Can you share more about how the tough-on-crime mindset is affecting your funding streams or impacting your work? On the other hand, how do you get the message out about recidivism in that climate?

Lauren Cameron: The biggest thing we hear is, 'how do you know you're getting the right people out of the system?' What happens if one of these people supported through your tools commits a horrible crime and goes back to prison?' Valid questions. We're very open and willing to have those conversations with funders. Being the data people

that we are, we are thrilled that we've been around long enough that we can finally run conclusive recidivism studies. We have data showing that across the board, our tools have reduced recidivism, which is the rate of people going back to prison by 12%.

As always with recidivism, we lean on the data to kind of prove to our funders that we are being safe and we're keeping community safety in mind. On a personal level, I actually got into this work because I was the victim of a violent crime and saw how broken the system was. These days, I am much more willing to talk about that story personally because very often our funders are like, 'Well, do you all think about victims?' I say, 'here I am, I'm ready to talk about this because that is important.'

You can't think about one part of the criminal justice system without considering the other...victims and people who have done those crimes and why they did them. We are just approaching the work really holistically in the way we talk about it. We're extremely willing to engage with people who are very tough on crime. Our funders range from the reddest red to the bluest blue. We're in a unique position of bipartisan support, which is rare these days. It is especially rare in the criminal justice world.

We have a lot to learn from the position we are in. It's just so important that we're getting the right messages out there. We're starting to try and explain to our funders and to people talking about our work that the criminal justice system is this microcosm of so many social issues. Where else in the country do you have people leaving the same system and all of them need housing support, all of them need employment? Most of them need mental health or substance abuse treatment. That's also what drew me to this work—the intersectionality.

We want more funders and the public, willing to think about it that way and how ripe this ecosystem is for positive social change and how this is one of the most vulnerable populations in our country. If we're able to equip them with the right resources, not only is it better for our economy and for these people who we're helping, but it's also better for community safety.

There is little to no evidence that sitting in prison helps make communities safer. It's more important than ever that people understand the rehabilitative aspects of our work and how we are trying to, not just get people out because we want to get people out, but because we truly do want to make communities safer and have people not commit additional crimes after leaving the system.

Carolyn Robinson: What are your plans going forward? State expansion?

Lauren Cameron: State expansion is always top of mind. The core tension of Recidiviz as an organisation is what we think of as breadth versus depth. Breadth is like more

states. We will never say no to a state that wants to work with us. While we're slowing the gas a little bit on state expansion in 2025 and focusing on depth, we are still always trying to sign more states. Our goal is to get to 40 states by 2028. We're on track for that. Then the depth portion is about ensuring that we're not leaving impact on the table. In each of our state partners, currently 19, we want to make sure they have as many recidivist tools launched as possible, that their usage rates are high, and that people are understanding the value.

One expansion that we are thinking about, 2025 and beyond, is that reentry piece. We will never be direct providers of reentry support, like giving people housing or employment, but since we do have access to people in the system. We're really thinking about serving as that bridge.

The moonshot goal is — imagine an app that's a reentry hub. People in prison are on supervision before they even leave the system, when they have a year left or even weeks in the system. [They] can start lining up housing and apply for jobs while in the system, and enroll in a substance abuse treatment course or a mental health course, for instance. We like to say at Recidiviz, our goal is for reentry to begin on day one, so that your first day in the system, whether it's in prison or on supervision, you're thinking about your transition back to your community.

We've reached such a scale and have proven our solution. We can move people through the system, we can get people out. It's really important for us to think about keeping them out and making sure they have the right resources they need to really thrive in their communities.

This plays into the community safety piece. We're hearing it from a huge portion of our funding base, what about reentry support? It's something we care deeply about and we feel like we're at the right time to begin exploring more how we can be a scalable bridge and allow people to access the amazing reentry resources that exist through our tools. That's a big moonshot vision.

Our other area of growth right now is bringing our tools to people in the system. We think about it this way. If you were to go to college and you're told to graduate in four years, you need to do these 20 things. But no one tells you what those 20 things are. That's how prison is right now. Most sentences are indeterminate and you're given maybe eight years in prison, but if you do ABCDEFG, you can get out in four years, but no one tells you what that ABCDEFG is. We are trying to lift up that information directly to the people with the most motivation, the most time, so that they have agency, and that sense of autonomy to chart their best path through the system.

The breadth versus depth is a key thing. It's important that we have funders who care about both. We have our own little breadth scaling group of funders, the five funders who are solely focused on getting us into new states, and that's amazing. Then we have funders who really care about our product growth team and going to states and driving usage. Also our early AI work, bringing tools to people in the system and launching more core tools in their home states. Both kinds of funding are super important to us.

Carolyn Robinson: What are some of the challenges or obstacles you're facing with the breadth and depth expansion? Can you share more about that and how you're responding?

Lauren Cameron: On the breadth side, the less glamorous answer, one of the hardest parts of the process of new states is procurement. Getting in state budgets and getting them to sign data sharing agreements sometimes takes years. What's extremely helpful are connections in the state, whether it's political, whether it's to other community-based orgs working with the Department of Corrections. The state expansion team's motto is we will talk to anyone.

If you know someone in the governor's office, give us a call. If you know someone working in the women's prisons, let's give them a call. Having funders in their own home states that have those resources has been absolutely fundamental for getting us in particular states: Texas, Utah, Colorado. In all of those states, we were climbing these huge uphill battles and because of funder connections, we were able to sign the states.

State-specific funding is really helpful. A lot of funders care about supporting their own state, which we totally understand. When we have additional funding for a specific state, let's say Texas, one of our largest states and one of the biggest systems in the country, we can then sit down with the state team and ask, 'What's your most ambitious plan for tools in Texas? We now have funding that can allow you to do that,' which is amazing. It allows us to really meet that depth portion as well in funders' specific states.

On the depth side, the biggest gap or the biggest challenge is driving usage. Our goal is that every officer in the country is logging into our tools on a weekly basis. But they're really understaffed and overworked and right now that's not realistic. How funders have helped there is being willing to support our go-to-market team or our product growth team. It's not as exciting as supporting bringing tools to people in the system but the product growth team has been instrumental in driving impact, traveling around the country and doing on the ground training and figuring out what product nudges are needed to drive people to use our tools, even hosting usage competitions. It's where the rubber hits the road. The deeper they understand our work, the more willing they are to take those kinds of bets with us.

Carolyn Robinson: What are the three main things Recidiviz needs to grow and sustain this work?

Lauren Cameron: The first is quite straightforward. Multi-year unrestricted funding. That is the gold standard. Multi-year just allows us to do growth plans further out and feel much more secure in our growth plans than if we have to renew on a yearly basis. It allows us to really draw up ambitious growth plans and work with our states to get those implemented because states need a lot of planning time to launch new tools. When our funding landscape feels way more volatile, it's much harder to make those ambitious roadmaps, so multi-year unrestricted funding.

Another would be more trust-based philanthropy. Reducing the burdensome reporting and application processes and trying to prioritize impact over paperwork. That's our motto on the side of corrections officers. We want to free up your time from paperwork so you can do the work on the ground.

One best in class example, I had one funder, we had a meeting where I pitched them on our work. They were actually taking notes and said, 'We have a pre-filled application that I've made for you, if you could just look it over and make changes.' I thought I don't have to write this application, you wrote it for me, which is going above and beyond. But more funders really having that trust-based relationship and being willing to go above and beyond on their end, reducing the effort on our end is huge.

This also goes with trust but more funders who are willing to fund systems change and take on big bets. We also love collaborative funding. If a funder wants to support us in a partnership with another organisation. In general our best products and ideas have come from a funder being willing to fund a small pilot and then say, 'I'll see if it works and if it works, I'll help bring other funders to help you scale.' It is just huge. We're such a scale-forward company, so having our funders see that in order to come up with bold scaling solutions, we have to start by incubating small ideas is really important.

Narrative whether it's a grant that allows us to hire a team to help us with that or we have contractors or consultants to help us with that or if the funder themselves has a video team in which we can make a video or write a blog post, that would be huge. In the next four years, one of the most important things in the criminal justice landscape is to uplift positive stories, because it seems like the only stories we hear from criminal justice are bad. It's so important and can really play a role in not only changing public perception, but changing funding perception. We're not great at storytelling, so more narrative support in the criminal justice landscape. I'm sure others need it as well, but specifically in the landscape we're in, it is so important.

Carolyn Robinson: Are you mostly working at the state level? Does your work go even smaller, to local perhaps?

Lauren Cameron: When we partner with a state, we are then working with every single state-owned prison. We don't work with local jails at this moment because it is just a much smaller subset of the incarcerated system. Similarly with private prisons, we get asked that a lot, but private prisons actually make up less than 10% of total prison populations, although we hear about them a lot.

We are currently just focused on signing states and working with the state-run prisons and supervisions because that does make up the majority of the incarcerated population in our country. It's a much more scalable solution to sign a state and suddenly you're in every prison in the country rather than go local district by district.

Carolyn Robinson: This has all been fascinating. Is there anything else that you want to add to the conversation about funding?

Lauren Cameron: I would just like to reiterate some things: more long-term engagement, long-term support, more flexible funding, whether it's unrestricted or not. Also, more operational support for the less glamorous things, but the things that need to happen to make the impact work. Narrative support and more peer learning networks.

Funders have this amazing bird's eye view of the ecosystem. They have a hand in selecting what they think are the biggest players in the ecosystem. It would be so cool to have more of a cohort feeling with organisations all funded by Rippleworks and capacity building. Rippleworks does this above and beyond, but if more funders offered resources for capacity building, whether it's narrative resources, expert office hours, fundraising workshops, storytelling workshops, any of those. We always love it when funders are willing to go above and beyond financial support.

Carolyn Robinson: Thank you for your time.

Carolyn Robinson led Solutions Journalism Network's broadcast initiatives for many years. She is an experienced television producer/reporter for global news media such as CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera. As an international media development consultant, she has trained local journalists and directed media programs in two dozen countries around the world.

***This conversation has been edited and condensed.*