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Subject: End-of-the-Year Reflections

End-of-the-Year Reflections

Greetings, all. What a crazy, inspiring, challenging, hectic, ultimately phenomenal year this has been! Last January we faced the daunting but exciting task of launching several new and restructured funds and campaigns in U.S. Programs. Now each of the programs is humming along, churning out great ideas, supporting amazing organizations and leaders, and spreading inspiration in all directions. It is tempting to see this transformation as magical, but it came from the hard work of all of you.

It's hard to pick and choose among so many highlights in a year like this one, but here goes.

- Staff came together in hiring teams early and efficiently to choose leaders for the new funds and campaigns. It is an ongoing inspiration to witness your dedication and leadership.
- Solomon, Herb and Raquiba modeled our ability to respond quickly to a crisis through their leadership in launching the Neighborhood Stabilization Initiative, which made over \$4 million in grants to help those most hard hit by the subprime lending crisis.
- Officially launched last January, the National Security and Human Rights Campaign distributed over \$10 million this year and strengthened the field through convenings, communications research, and capacity building.
- Our working group on art and activism, built relationships with key activists and funders, retained former Katrina media fellow Larry Blumenfeld as a consultant to map the art and social justice universe in New Orleans, and gave initial grants in New Orleans. There are so many cool culture warriors – Alexis Magill, Erin Potts, Si Kahn, Yosi Sargent, Carol Bebel, Jeff Chang and more.
- Through Maria Teresa's leadership, we secured \$15 million in special funding for immigration reform over 3 years and expanded our connections with partners overseas.
- Our colleagues in Baltimore celebrated their 10th Anniversary in May, threw an awesome party, and introduced us to their local partners at site visits and gatherings that still inspire months later. George has now committed another \$10 million to sustain OSI-Baltimore beyond 2010. Bravo!
- Our new board members turned our board meetings into fast-paced forums for constructive debate and reflection about our goals and strategies, and breeding grounds for innovative ideas. And Cecilia will soon be in the White House!
- The Criminal Justice Fund worked with grantees to develop a new multi-year strategy to end the death penalty, helped convince Wichita, Kansas (really!) to implement justice reinvestment strategies, and supported another talented crop of Soros Justice Fellows.
- USP staff, with the help of Tom's coordinating skills, worked with grantees and other foundations to help prepare for the Presidential transition well in advance of the election. It paid off grandly, as grantees and staff across our

- programs are now having serious, high level discussions with transition team members to implement our concrete policy recommendations.
- The Transparency and Integrity Fund provided critical support for election protection, made a range of initial grants to core watchdog groups, and supported grantees who worked collaboratively to develop priorities for the incoming Administration.
 - The Democracy and Power Fund supported civic engagement efforts that ensured high levels of participation among traditionally underrepresented groups, including low and moderate income people, young people, people of color and immigrants. Pilot grants went to national grassroots networks to strengthen the long-term capacity of community-based organizations to advocate for change on their own behalf.
 - Shawn brought together advocates and experts across disciplines for a truly inspiring retreat earlier this month for the Campaign for Black Male Achievement. When Lani Guinier says “it feels like a movement is being born,” you know it’s serious.
 - Nancy Youman went to Europe to talk to OSI colleagues and leaders on climate change (in her spare time!) and is now drafting a memo outlining a global strategy for OSI.
 - Tom, Rachel, Yukiko and Quito planned our first Squashathon – a smashing, delicious success. I hereby move to make the “fun” committee a permanent structure in USP!
 - Our cathartic staff meeting following the election was a wonderful opportunity to witness, at a very personal level, the depth and breadth of knowledge and life experiences that each of us brings to our passion for social justice.
 - Just in the last few weeks, George Soros has committed new funds to support a multi-constituency, multi-issue campaign for a “new new deal” in America, and a new public/private partnership to plug gaps in services for the needy created by the economic crisis.

A few more transitions and thanks

I’m excited to report on the latest staff and title transitions. Georgia was just chosen to be the Program Associate for the Black Male Achievement Campaign. Jill Sowards and Chrissy Voight are transitioning from Program Assistants to Program Associates in the Criminal Justice Fund. Michael McCutcheon is making the same transition in the Transparency and Integrity Fund. Lindsey Caruso and Tania Libdan are also transitioning from Program Assistants to Program Associates in OSI-Baltimore. Sophia Conroy will transition from Senior Program Associate to Program Officer in the National Security and Human Rights Campaign. My own title is also undergoing a slight transition. Because U.S. Programs now has its own independent board, Aryeh and I agreed that it makes sense for me to use the title of Executive Director, U.S. Programs.

Let’s all extend a special thanks for the terrific work of our administrative and grantmaking strategies staff in supporting everything we do in U.S. Programs – Aida, Fei, Gladys, Jimmy, Michael, Orelida, Priscilla, and Rochelle. Your smiles and sense of humor are all the more admirable given the heavy workload and limited staff resources we’ve this past year.

I look forward to completing our hiring and staffing of the remaining open positions early next year. All of us are more than eager to be fully staffed – there is so much exciting work to be done!

A final thought

As we look forward to next year and the potential for transformational change in America, we have many things to be grateful for. We are lucky to be working for a foundation that has the resources to take advantage of this historic moment, especially during these difficult times economically. We are lucky to have such smart colleagues at OSI, within and outside of U.S. Programs, who share our passion for social justice. And we are lucky to be able to support such an inspiring range of leaders and organizations around the country who have worked so hard, even when there was little hope for real change. Though much work remains to be done, we now share a renewed sense of hope and purpose for open society in our country.

I look forward to rolling up my sleeves with all of you next year -- I'm fired up and ready to go! In the meantime, let's all enjoy our much-deserved time with friends and family this holiday season.

With peace and hope for our shared future,
Ann

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