

December 2009
Ann's End-of-the-Year Reflections

Bookends to a remarkable year

As the year winds down and I reflect on our work together, two book ends emerge as metaphors for the broad impact of U.S. Programs and our many partners. One bookend is the Seize the Day Initiative, which we launched early this year to increase the capacity of our grantees nationally to advocate for transformative change. The other bookend is the U.S. Programs Board visit to New Orleans, where we demonstrated the power of grantmaking at a local level to advance real change over time. Both efforts drew on the talents of many staff working together across programs, both showed our ability to respond quickly to changed circumstances in the field, and both highlighted the value we place on innovation and on tackling the hardest issues. The efforts embodied the vision and commitment to principle also evident in so many other successful USP endeavors this year.

Through the **Seize the Day Initiative**, we provided over \$14 million of added capacity to organizations to advance OSI's priorities during the critical period for transformational change at the federal level. No other foundation moved as quickly as OSI to get much-needed money into the field; the support was even more critical because organizations ready to act faced unforeseen budget constraints due to the economic crisis. Our efforts to bring together transparency and equity groups at the federal and state level has been lauded by many grantees as a game-changer that will last far beyond the current moment. State coalitions in California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, Texas, and Wisconsin are bringing together good government, equity, research and grassroots groups to ensure transparency and equity in the distribution of the federal stimulus now that most of the money is in state hands.

A Seize the Day grant to the **National Training and Information Center** (NTIC) helped to bring thousands of low-income people across the U.S. into the fight for TARP accountability, fair lending, and financial regulatory reform. Funding for **ColorOfChange** expanded its capacity as a leader in innovative online advocacy efforts to advance the interests of racial justice and the African-American community. Seize the Day grants also expanded the capacity of groups like the Council on State Governments and the NAACP to advance criminal justice reform. I offer my sincere thanks to the grantmaking committee – Bill, Laleh, Raquiba, Lenny, and Diana, with critical support from Jeronimo – who developed the gold standard for efficient, collegial and effective grantmaking across programs.

There are many moments to savor from the New Orleans Board meeting. The criminal justice panel showcased the many local leaders we have supported over the years – Norris Henderson, Dana Kaplan, Derwyn Bunton – and the concrete reforms that continue to make a difference in the lives of New Orleanians. The panel took place in the Orleans Public Defender office, which didn't even exist a few short years ago. The open governance coalition panel showed the power of community groups partnering with

transparency and research groups to root out corruption and expand public participation in the rebuilding process. Our evening of New Orleans culture and food, at the beautiful Ashe Cultural Center, perfectly illustrated the power of art and culture to advance social change, as musicians and spoken word artists shared their talents, their stories and their causes with us. There are so many people to thank – repeatedly – for conjuring the events – Erlin, Katie, Lenny, Tom, Laleh, Nancy, Gladys and Orelida, and our many wonderful local partners.

Growing our team, planning our strategies, sharing knowledge

We welcomed many new staff this year – Cristina, Elisabeth, Cristobal, Patricia, Terrance, Rashid, Shruti, Lorraine, Luna, Jeronimo, Tim, Katie, and Jeff and Jed in Baltimore. What an impressive team we have! And everyone is so interesting and cool! Before anyone had time to catch their breath, we jumped right into the three-year strategic planning process. The plans are thoughtful, ambitious, and realistic, and will be vital tools for planning our grantmaking and measuring our impact over the next few years.

This year also saw the launch of the new Grantmaking Operations and Finance and Administration Units. Cristina and Fei have wowed us with their energy and ideas for sharing knowledge across the programs, improving systems, and supporting staff development. Elisabeth and Aida were godsend during the budget process, including the significant new involvement and approval by the Board this year.

After completing the three-year plans last summer, staff headed out for the field this fall, meeting with grantees and hosting convenings and retreats. Many of us learned a lot from cross-program site visits, including a CBMA/TIF/NSI trip I joined to Wisconsin last month, and TIF/SOF/CJF visits to New Orleans.

Program highlights

When I asked program directors and campaign managers to send a few brief highlights, I had to smile when I received far more than I could include in one update. This sampling is all the more impressive because it represents only a small fraction of our groundbreaking work this year.

OSI-Baltimore's year-long series on "Talking About Race" paired together national and local experts to provoke thinking about race, including Gwen and Sherilyn Ifill, Ben Jealous, Gerald Torres, Beverly Tatum, David Hornbeck, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Elvis Mitchell and others. This series is literally attracting 300 to 500 Baltimoreans (white and black) and has provoked lively discussion. A new webpage, Storiesaboutrace.org, encourages people to continue the discussion.

OSI-Baltimore's work to dismantle the school to prison pipeline continues to yield impressive results. Now in the fourth year of concentrated work, school suspensions have dropped from 26,000 to 11,000, the regular school budget now pays for a variety of

alternatives to suspension, and OSI-B is now co-chairing a citywide commission on school attendance.

Hats off to the OSI-B communications and donor development team, which has raised OSI-B's profile throughout the region and continued to cultivate donors despite the economic recession. They have now raised \$13.6 million and, in the process, have engaged more wealthy individuals in systemic change work.

Equality and Opportunity Fund grantee the Native American Rights Fund celebrated an important victory earlier this month when the U.S. federal government agreed to pay \$3.4 billion to settle a lawsuit claiming government mismanagement of American Indian trust accounts, an amount believed to be the largest settlement ever against the federal government. The dispute arises from a system dating back to the 19th century when Congress divided tribal lands into parcels and placed them into federally administered trust accounts.

Neighborhood Stabilization Initiative grantees Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (LCCR), National Council of La Raza and the National Coalition for Asian Pacific Community Development (National CAPACD) recently formed the National Mortgage Rescue Scam Task Force, which NSI is supporting. The task force represents a coordinated effort among key stakeholders to address the growing national problem of mortgage "rescue" scams, which disproportionately harm minority, immigrant and lower-income borrowers.

The **Campaign for Black Male Achievement** has supported several innovative multi-media campaigns this year. CBMA hosted a community screening of grantee Twenty-First Century Foundation's film *Bring Your A-Game*, a documentary of interviews with black male popular culture figures, which uplifts the importance of education and high school graduation for young black males' success; and hosted "Reframing the Story of Black Males in the Media: A Philanthropic Call to Action," which engaged philanthropic leaders, youth-media advocates, and media professionals to counter negative stereotypes and deficit-driven narratives around black males in the media. CBMA also partnered with grantee the Association of Black Foundation Executives to sponsor two premieres of the film *Beyond the Bricks*, a documentary using two Newark, NJ's students' school struggles and triumphs to frame a larger discussion around solutions to poor academic performance and low graduation rates of school-age black males in the United States.

CBMA continues to prioritize its role as a philanthropic catalyst through its work with the Black Male Donor Collaborative, an OSI-funded project of the Schott Foundation, which brings together the private sector, philanthropy, and policy advocates, including RBC Capital Markets, Gates Foundation, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, and Sullivan & Cromwell, LLP. CBMA has also organized grantee working groups around potential partnership with the Knight Foundation on technology infrastructure and innovation; strategic communications and messaging; and educational outcomes.

The **Transparency and Integrity Fund** began the year celebrating President Obama's first-day-in-office pledge for a new era of governmental transparency. This month the Administration finally pinned down its policy when it released its "Open Government Directive," reflecting the efforts of TIF grantee **OMB-Watch** and many others that developed a blueprint a year ago. The Directive requires all agencies to take specific actions to improve transparency, participation, and collaboration in the release and use of data.

TIF sponsored two terrific convenings this fall. On Nov 16, Bill Moyers moderated a group of 35 journalists, leaders of public and nonprofit media outlets, and philanthropists who presented a range of ideas to address the crisis of journalism. On Dec 10-11, TIF convened our judicial independence grantees, all of whom are part of the Justice at Stake (JAS) coalition, to begin to develop a five-year field-wide strategic plan. Since OSI seeded JAS 10 years ago, the coalition has scored major victories that include, most recently, public financing of judicial elections in Wisconsin.

The **Democracy and Power Fund** partnered with the New World Foundation and Stoneman Family Foundation to issue an RFP to support organizations and alliances that seek to develop innovative and replicable models of small donor development. The effort will fund 8 great grassroots groups nationwide who are building small donor funding bases, increasing donor diversification and community "ownership," and enhancing fiscal sustainability. The effort is now attracting the interest of other donors, including Surdna and FACT. D&P has also continued its important work to shift more OSI dollars into organizing networks to sustain public participation from people of color, low-income, youth, and immigrant communities post-election. Groups like the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the PICO interfaith organizing network played key roles in 2009 to support federal advocacy on the federal budget's inclusion of key priorities for low-income people, health care for all, jobs, and immigration reform. D&P also hosted two convenings in late 2009, the first to build support for Democracia-USA's work to build voter participation and power for the Latina/o community nationwide, and the second to build funding support for state-based organizing and advocacy.

In addition its leading role in organizing the New Orleans Board meeting, the **Strategic Opportunities Fund** collaborated with the Democracy and Power Fund on a rapid response initiative to increase the accuracy of the 2010 census count by providing support for organizations that aim to engage hard-to-count constituencies. The funding strategy has prioritized specific work in Louisiana, Florida, Texas and NYC – a strategy balanced between current OSI priorities and critical hard-to-count constituencies in each of these three states.

SOF also partnered with OSI-Baltimore, the Criminal Justice Fund and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement to develop an RFP to support efforts that highlight the linkages between *No Child Left Behind* and the school-to-prison pipeline. The grantees will use advocacy, organizing, education and communication strategies to engage a broad set of policy makers and other stakeholders.

The **Criminal Justice Fund** celebrated significant reform of the Rockefeller Drug laws after many years of advocacy by a number of grantees. (The New York site of the Closing Addiction Treatment Gap also provided critical support.) CJF also organized a number of foundations to support advocacy, communication and litigation strategies around *Sullivan* and *Graham* cases in the Supreme Court, which challenge the sentencing of juveniles to life without parole. (USP Board member Bryan Stevenson brilliantly argued the *Sullivan* case). This year also saw the repeal of the death penalty in New Mexico, a significant limitation of its availability in Maryland, and the lowest number of new death sentences in Texas since 1976 reinstatement of the death penalty. Many other reforms seeded by CJF and its grantees continue to take hold among policymakers. The federal government is now embracing the concept of justice reinvestment, recently introducing the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act, and has allocated \$100 million in funding for Second Chance Act programs.

National Security and Human Rights Campaign grantees began the year on a high note when President Obama signed executive orders requiring the closure of the Guantánamo within one year and banning the use of torture and secret prisons. Unfortunately, due to the fear-mongering conservative backlash and other obstacles, it is unlikely that the January 22, 2010 deadline will be met. The Administration will transfer some detainees to the U.S. to be criminally tried before American courts, but much advocacy remains to limit the number of detainees tried in military commissions and to oppose indefinite detention. NSHR grantees, including the Constitution Project, Human Rights First, and the Center for International Policy, are mobilizing a wide-reaching group of spokespersons. Allies include former members of Congress, diplomats, generals, judges, and prosecutors, as well as conservatives Bob Barr, David Kean, and Grover Norquist. Retired Generals Robert Gard and John Johns and former Rep. Tom Andrews also launched a popular grassroots campaign of more than 15,000 supporters with musicians including R.E.M., Pearl Jam, the Roots, Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, Tom Morello of Rise Against the Machine, Rosanne Cash, Billy Bragg, Jackson Browne, David Byrne, and Steve Earle.

Nancy Youman continues to lead OSI-wide efforts on **climate change**, and has just returned from Copenhagen where George Soros unveiled an innovative plan for developed countries to finance support for developing countries to deal with climate change.

We also continue to support strong leaders through our **OSI fellowship programs**. OSI-Baltimore has awarded more than 110 fellowships to talented leaders devoted to revitalizing Baltimore's underserved neighborhoods, and announced its 12th Class of Community Fellows earlier this year. A recent survey showed that 86% of the Fellows continue work related to their initial project many years later. This year's diverse group of OSI-B Fellows includes Herbert Johnson, a 73-year-old grandfather who realized that the oral stories of older adults could offer healing and guidance to current and future generations. During the fellowship, he will collect the survival stories of his peers, pair them with accompanying recipes, and pass them on to the next generation.

The Soros Justice Fellows program also continues to thrive. Since 1997, OSI has awarded more than \$14 million in grants to Soros Justice Fellows. 2008 Fellows Jennifer Thompson-Cannino and Ronald Thompson received prominent attention this year from 60 Minutes and other media outlets for their moving book, Picking Cotton, a non-fictional account highlighting the causes and prevalence of mistaken identification. Among the 2009 Fellows is Clemmie Greenlee a community organizer in Nashville whose son was murdered in street violence and who spent more than half her life entangled in the criminal justice system. She will train current and former gang members to become advocates for reform.

This past year we began to partner with the new OSI Global Fellows programs as well, welcoming a number of Global Fellows who are working in the United States on a broad range of issues. Zack Exley has brought experience in building online organizing, Richard Cizik is organizing evangelicals to support efforts to address climate change and civil liberties, and Matthew Alexander, a former senior interrogator for the U.S. Air Force who is now working to reform U.S. interrogation policies. Marcy Westerling will begin her fellowship in January to help us build fields that incorporate rural Americans into broader social justice work.

In our spare time, we also launched a number of other special projects this year, including the JEHT Emergency Fund and the Arts Education Initiative, and partnered with the new Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation.

Looking ahead

I am inspired by all we've accomplished this year and eager to jump into next year's work. Our work together will include renewed advocacy for comprehensive immigration reform; a coordinated drug policy agenda that includes sentencing reform, harm reduction, and access to treatment; a cross-program collaboration to address hate-based violence; an exciting opportunity to work with the Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation to bring its vision into closer alignment with U.S. Programs advocacy goals; and the expansion of our place-based strategies in several programs. I also plan to spend more time sharing our vision with grantees, funders and other leaders, and working with staff to understand and support the role that art and culture play in advancing social change. I am deeply grateful to all of you for your energy and commitment. Enjoy your richly deserved break during the holidays, and have a peaceful new year.

Warmly,
Ann