

## **End-of-Summer Reflections**

### **August 2009**

Greetings, everyone. The summer has whizzed by with a whirlwind of activities in U.S. Programs. As I prepare to leave for two weeks of vacation later today, I offer a few random end-of-summer reflections.

The summer started with a bang at our all-staff retreat in early June, as we were dazzled by the creativity and passion of our colleagues and their whimsical presentations of our goals in U.S. Programs. Lenny as Bob Barker on *Price is Right*? Tom as the singing star of *School House Rock*? Nancy Chang as Dick Cheney in a *Star Wars* parody? Clearly we are all frustrated performers at heart and we need to plan future outlets for our collective talents!

It is easy to become impatient about slow progress this summer on some of our issues during what we have all dubbed as a transformative moment for open society, but it is important to highlight our successes and keep pushing forward. To that end I offer a few reasons for optimism and highlights of our work. The country's first Latina was just sworn in as a United States Supreme Court Justice. The need to reform our criminal justice system is finally beginning to emerge as part of the national dialogue and in Congress and the states – today's front page story in the *New York Times* on the death penalty and the editorial on juvenile justice are just two examples.

The Seize the Day grantmaking team created a lot of buzz across the country this summer in response to our RFP to support state coalitions to ensure transparency and equity in the recovery. The RFP process is going smoothly thanks to Helena Huang's expert assistance, and we look forward to recommending grants this fall. The National Security and Human Rights Campaign worked overtime to develop two important rapid response grants to Human Rights First and the Center for International Policy to launch a National Campaign to Close Guantanamo and Defend American Values. The campaign is getting underway now and I remain cautiously optimistic that it is still possible to convince the Obama Administration to abandon any plans for a preventive detention scheme.

U.S. Programs staff managed to find time to host a range of interesting convenings this summer – including an OSI-wide meeting on international migration (spearheaded by Maria Teresa), a workshop on strategic communications for black men and boys (spearheaded by Shawn, Rashid and the CBMA team), a panel discussion on the Constitution in 2020 (spearheaded by Tom and the TIF team), a debate about grassroots organizing strategies (Bill and the D&P team) and the annual Soros Justice Fellows conference (Adam, Crissy and the CJF team).

Like most of you I devoted much of my time this summer to finalizing strategic plans, budgets, and dockets, but I also found some time to get out of the office. I participated in a workshop on racial justice at the Center for Community Change with many of our grantees, and have had meetings this summer with EOF staff and grantees to learn more about how we can support and expand resources for the racial justice field. I am always

inspired by the Soros Justice Fellows and this summer's meeting in Chicago was no exception. After a terrific plenary session on art and social justice (complete with performances), I was able to spend some time with a number of inspiring activist/artists affiliated with the daring Insight Arts in Chicago. To deepen my understanding of economic policy, economic injustice and how it connects to our work to advance open society, earlier this week I had a series of meetings in DC with grantees the Economic Policy Institute, the Center for Economic and Policy Research, PICO, and Jobs with Justice. I look forward to exploring these themes further with you in the fall. At the end of the month, Erlin and I will attend a "Creative Change" workshop about art, new media, and social change, hosted by The Opportunity Agenda in Telluride, Colorado.

In addition to our significant grantmaking and programmatic activities this summer, we managed to complete an amazing (some would say absurd) number of processes in U.S. Programs in the last three months – our three-year strategic plans, our organizational development and restructuring process, and our annual budget and planning process. As I recently reviewed the three-year plans in advance of sending final binders to Aryeh, I was wowed once again by the breadth of our work and the innovative and critical thinking that informs our goals and strategies. I offer my sincere thanks to all of you for your dedication and inspiring work throughout these processes. A heartfelt thanks goes out to Nancy Youman and Elisabeth Williams in particular for going far beyond the call of duty in developing our complex budget documents and crafting a brand new process for Board engagement and review with very short notice.

I am looking forward to a busy fall season and highlight a few items on my calendar so far. During our September Board meeting, we will discuss our work to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and review the U.S. programs budget and annual plans. Along with other U.S. Programs staff, in early October I will attend the OSI Global Staff Forum in London. I am looking forward to participating in an important convening on November 16 planned by Lori McGlinchey and Laleh Ispahani to address the crisis in journalism. I am also likely to attend the annual Drug Policy Alliance conference in New Mexico in November, and am hoping to schedule site visits in Wisconsin and possibly Florida. In December we'll take the Board to New Orleans to showcase our work to advance social justice in the Gulf Region. Finally, I am happy to report that I've been chosen to participate in the Yearlong Rockwood Leadership Program, and I will attend the first of three leadership trainings in early November.

As summer winds down, I encourage all of you enjoy some extra down time with family and friends -- you deserve it. I look forward to another busy fall of working with you and our grantees to advance our vision of justice and equality. See you in September.

Warmly,  
Ann