

MEMORANDUM

To: U.S. Programs Board
From: Ann Beeson
Date: February 16, 2011
Re: February 23-24, 2011, U.S. Programs Board Retreat

Greetings. We look forward to seeing you at the February 23-24 Board retreat. Included below is some logistical information, a brief overview of our meeting agenda, and highlights of our recent work. Given the nature of the retreat, we thought it would be helpful to focus the programmatic highlights on our efforts to more closely align U.S. Programs' work with the vision and direction outlined by George Soros and the Board in September. We look forward to your additional guidance during the retreat.

Logistics for February Board Retreat

We are holding the retreat off-site, at the New York Academy of Medicine, at 1215 Fifth Avenue, at East 103rd Street (entrance is on 103rd Street). The retreat begins at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, February 23. George Soros has invited a few distinguished guests to join our sessions on Wednesday until 4:00 pm; biographical information on them follows the agenda in your Board material. Staff will be at the main entrance to help you find the room, which is the Board Room on the fifth floor. From 4:00-6:30 pm on Wednesday, Board members only will meet in executive session to discuss Board governance. From 7:00-9:30 pm on Wednesday, George Soros will host a dinner discussion with the outside guests and Board members at his home (1060 Fifth Avenue, entrance is on East 87th Street) to discuss his vision and obtain feedback on his draft introduction to the forthcoming book, The Philanthropy of George Soros: Building Open Societies.

On Thursday, February 24, from 8:00 am - 2:00 pm, Board members will resume their executive session on Board governance and budget issues (George Soros and Ann Beeson will join from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm).

Jonathan Soros, Robert Redford, and Bryan Stevenson will not be present at the retreat, but we are delighted that Joan Dunlop and Geoff Canada have agreed to remain on the Board and will attend. Given the nature of this meeting, staff attendance will be quite limited.

In addition to the enclosed material, please bring the small binders on the proposed 2011-2012 U.S. Programs budget that were distributed to Board members in advance of the September meeting. If you need another copy of this material, please contact Gladys Lopez (glopez@sorosny.org or 212-548-0394).

Overview of Board Retreat Agenda

The agenda for the retreat, developed from multiple conversations with George, Aryeh and other Board members, consists of four primary topics: 1) extreme polarization and the breakdown in civic discourse; 2) the growing influence of money in politics; 3) the state fiscal crisis and the need to expand our work at state and local levels; and 4) strengthening Board governance and finalizing the 2011-12 budget. We have sought to provide some framework to the retreat without over-structuring it, so that the Board can engage in an open and free-flowing conversation about these issues.

Wednesday's session will begin with a substantive discussion about extreme polarization and the breakdown in civic discourse. Aryeh will moderate the discussion, which will address the drift from fact-based discourse, the rise of right-wing media, and increasing xenophobia. To inform the discussion, staff has prepared brief background on our current work and potential areas for exploration, including a number of new proposals we have solicited from leading organizations and a couple of thought-provoking articles. See Tab 3. We will then move into a discussion of potential strategies to counter the growing influence of money in politics following the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Citizens United*. See Tab 4.

In the afternoon, Andy Stern will moderate a discussion about the impact of the state fiscal crisis, which presents many challenges and some opportunities. States have experienced large budget shortfalls for the last few years, which they have offset with reserve funds and federal stimulus money that will no longer be available going forward. Staff has worked with Andy to gather background on the fiscal crisis so that the discussion can focus less on the nature of the crisis and more on our role in addressing it. See Tab 5. Deepak Bhargava will then moderate a discussion about how best to expand support for state and local work to advance open society in key states over the long term. George Soros, Board advisors and other experts met last month to discuss the vision and framework for this work, and we are eager to obtain more input from the full Board. See Tab 6.

From 4:00 – 6:30, the Board will meet in executive session to discuss Board governance; George Soros and Ann Beeson will not attend. Over dinner on Wednesday at George's home, the Board and outside guests will engage in discussion about George's draft introduction to the forthcoming book, The Philanthropy of George Soros: Building Open Societies. He is interested in Board members' reactions to the draft, as well as thoughts on how this translates to our work. The draft is in Tab 7.

On Thursday, February 24, from 8:00-11:00 am, Board members only will resume their executive session on Board governance, with George Soros and Ann Beeson re-joining from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm for a report back on the executive session, a discussion of next steps, and resolution of remaining budget questions and a few action items. See Tabs 8 and 9.

Highlights of Programmatic Shifts in Response to the Board's Guidance

We look forward to the Board retreat and further guidance from the Board about the direction and strategies for our work. We have begun implementing initial guidance from George and the Board in September. Earlier this month, staff shared more in-depth updates with Board Advisors to each program, along with comprehensive grant lists sorted by strategic goals. Memos summarizing those discussions are in Tab 10. Below are brief highlights.

Responding nimbly and flexibly to emerging issues

In the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that limits life without parole sentences for youth, we have been developing grants to two legal organizations (the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana and the Barry University School of Law Juvenile Justice Life Without Parole Project) to help some 175-190 young people secure re-sentencing hearings in Louisiana and Florida. In addition, there is an unexpected moment of opportunity to reform juvenile justice practices in New York State, and we worked with advocates and other funders to develop a statewide strategy to capitalize on the opportunity. We also made a series of grants late last year to ensure a fair and open redistricting process beginning in 2011.

Engaging leading thinkers to inform and guide strategies

Sherrilyn Ifill is working with staff to develop an initiative on judicial impartiality, particularly the notion that women, people of color, and others cannot serve on the bench in a “neutral” manner; the initiative aims to produce research and writing to shape the debate in this area. In the neighborhood stabilization field, staff is now actively engaged with the What Works Collaborative, a brains trust of urban research experts that grapples with complex housing and urban policy issues. In recent months, 30 thought leaders and practitioners came together to map out strategies to end U.S.-sponsored torture and abuse of detainees. They included a former military interrogator, faith leaders, communications experts, healthcare experts, legal authorities and others.

Supporting idea generation to ensure that ideas drive policy efforts

Our grants are supporting idea generation on a range of issues, with some efforts beginning to take root. Grantee Free Press just issued a report by leading academics on strengthening the noncommercial media sector. The report surveyed structures in nation-states around the world and provides a range of concrete policy prescriptions for the U.S. In the criminal justice arena, staff is working with funding partners, advocates, and leading academics at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to produce research that will guide our new police accountability work, particularly on stop-and-frisk practices in New York. We also continue to explore the possibility of creating a U.S.-based drug policy research center.

Increasing support for direct services

The Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement both already allocate significant funds to support direct services, as highlighted in their enclosed summaries. Other programs have also begun to expand support for innovative service models that advance our core priorities. One promising new model is Welcoming America, which uses direct engagement at rotary club meetings, church socials, and other venues to bring native- and foreign-born Americans together to better understand each other. Grants are also currently being developed to support organizations that provide direct legal assistance to Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian people who face profiling and discrimination. In two states – Michigan and Pennsylvania – criminal justice grants support direct service and training programs that can serve as models for replication or blueprints for reform. Staff are also partnering with a number of other funders to explore expanded support for naturalization services for the nation's 8 million eligible immigrants.

Supporting more communications and public education work

During the September Board meeting, the Board highlighted the need to shift public opinion and change hearts and minds on punitive criminal justice and national security policies, and we have begun to increase our support for communications efforts on these issues and others. In December, a major convening brought together some of the nation's leading thinkers and influencers to strategize shifting perceptions about black men in America. Panels included leaders in arts and culture, the business sector, academia, and strategic communications. On several priority issues, we are increasing our efforts to broaden support beyond traditional constituencies as well. For example, we are exploring strategies to better engage evangelicals and white working-class people in our racial justice and immigration work. A grant to the California State Conference of the NAACP at the end of 2010 will help engage African American faith-based associations in drug policy reform work. New grants also support civics education projects and debate programs geared toward reaching high school students on national security and human rights issues.

More information about U.S. Programs' ongoing efforts is provided in the docket cover memos in Tab 11. These are the cover memos provided to Aryeh along with full write-ups on each grant recommendation, and they summarize individual grants and connect them to our broader strategies and goals. We have also enclosed a few articles that highlight recent work of our grantees in Tab 12.

We look forward to seeing you next week.