

Memorandum

To: U.S. Programs Board
From: Ann Beeson
Re: Upcoming U.S. Programs Board Meeting in New Orleans
Date: November 23, 2009

We look forward to seeing you in New Orleans for an exciting schedule of site visits, tours and other events designed to introduce you to the work of U.S. Programs and our grantees. Like last year's visit to OSI-Baltimore, the New Orleans Board meeting and site visits will provide the Board with a unique opportunity to witness the impact of our grantmaking over time in a particular place, and to deepen our collective understanding of the remaining challenges to open society in the region.

As always, the Board binder contains background materials to help frame our visits and conversations, and we encourage you to review the materials in advance of the meeting. **The memo entitled "A History of OSI Grantmaking in New Orleans," in your binders, will provide you with a particularly helpful overview. See Tab 3.**

The formal meeting will begin at noon on December 2, 2009, with lunch at the Loews Hotel where we are all staying.¹ Staff will provide an introduction to U.S. Programs' grantmaking in New Orleans. Luceia LeDoux of Baptist Community Ministries, a close partner in funding criminal justice reform in New Orleans, will then offer commentary on the broader social and political landscape of New Orleans. We have also set aside time for Board members to share their own experiences in New Orleans, to help inform our site visits and discussion. See Tab 3.

Following lunch, we will board a bus for an open-society-themed tour of New Orleans, led by Norris Henderson and Rosana Cruz, of Voice of the Ex-Offender (VOTE). See Tab 4.

The tour will end at the offices of the Orleans Public Defenders, which did not even have its own office or full-time staff prior to OSI investment. Over the past twenty years there has been intense criticism of every facet of the justice system in New Orleans -- overcrowded and brutal juvenile detention facilities, corrupt and abusive policing, and severely underfunded public defender services. A panel discussion on the state of criminal justice reform in New Orleans will explore the complex factors and challenges facing advocates and community leaders fighting for reform, and the impact of OSI's

¹ George Soros and other members of the Soros family are arriving on December 1, 2009, for a special afternoon site visit to the New Orleans Criminal Court. That evening, U.S. Programs is hosting an evening conversation at Loyola Law School with George Soros and the Honorable Calvin Johnson, retired chief judge of the Orleans Parish Criminal District Court. The conversation will address the challenges to open society around the world, in the United States, and in New Orleans. A reception with refreshments will follow. Board members arriving on December 1 are welcome to attend the event, at Loyola University College of Law, 526 Pine Street, New Orleans.

grantmaking over the past ten years. Dana Kaplan, former Soros Justice Fellow and now director of the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, will moderate the discussion, joined by James Carter, New Orleans City Council Member; Derwyn Bunton, Orleans Public Defender Office; and Gina Womack, Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children. See Tab 5.

Following a brief late afternoon break back at the Loews Hotel, we will travel by bus to the Ashe Cultural Arts Center, another OSI grantee, for an evening of New Orleans food and culture. Co-hosted by Carol Bebel, executive director of Ashe, and Lolis Elie, a journalist, filmmaker, and former OSI Katrina Media Fellow, the evening program will appeal to all the senses. Lolis has curated a dinner menu of traditional New Orleans cuisine prepared by a renowned local chef, and will offer remarks about the role of food in New Orleans and in the city's redevelopment after Katrina. Carol will provide an overview of the role that art and culture play in advancing social justice in New Orleans, and will introduce artists throughout the evening. A number of local musicians and spoken word artists will join us for dinner, share their talent during the evening, and discuss their role in advancing social change in New Orleans. We hope the evening will demonstrate firsthand the power of art and culture to inspire social change. Tab 6.

On December 3, breakfast will be available at your leisure between 7:00 – 8:45 a.m. at the Café Adelaide at the Loews Hotel, in a private room reserved for OSI. **Please check out of the hotel in the morning and bring your luggage to the concierge.** We will transport all luggage so that it meets us at our last stop. We expect most of us will depart for the airport directly from there.

At 9:00 a.m., we will depart together by bus from the hotel for Basin Street Station, a historic train station now converted into a cultural center for the city. Our morning panel discussion will explore the opportunities and challenges in working for greater government transparency and openness in New Orleans, and will describe the efforts of the newly formed OSI-supported New Orleans Coalition for Open Governance (NOCOG). Lack of open and accountable government has plagued New Orleans for generations, and led to the disastrous government response after the storm. Linda Usdin, Co-Coordinator of NOCOG, will moderate the panel, joined by NOCOG partners Lucas Diaz, Puentes; Karen Gadbois, *New Orleans Lens*; Denice Ross, Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, and Timolynn Sams, Neighborhoods Partnership Network. See Tab 7.

Over lunch, the Board will have the opportunity to reflect on the visit to New Orleans, to make connections to our work nationally, and to offer suggestions for our grantmaking going forward. The meeting will end promptly at 2:00 p.m., and there will be plenty of time for travel to the airport. Transportation to the airport will be provided from Basin Street Station.