

An OSF Shared Framework on Global Drug Policy

The Context: The 2016 UN Special Session as a Crucial Rallying Opportunity for Policy Reform

In the first half of 2016, the United Nations will convene the first General Assembly Special Session on drugs (“Special Session”) since 1998. For those working towards drug policy reform around the world, including within Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Special Session presents an opportunity to advocate for global change that supports a human rights-based approach to illicit drugs. With unprecedented movement on the international level to re-examine current policies – particularly coming from voices in Latin America – the Special Session has the potential to be an important rallying point for those advocating a change away from policies that lead to violence, mass incarceration, and diversion of public health funding. It is clear that the current system in place in most nations – a system that criminalizes not only organized drug crime, but responds to drug use with law enforcement - is not working. The Special Session provides an opportunity to not only articulate these harms, but to put forward new policies that are consistent with public health, human rights, and public safety.

The next two years offer a window of opportunity for wide-ranging debate on global drug policy at the Special Session and the need to move beyond a single-minded emphasis on drug control. For OSF’s programs and foundations, this presents an opportunity to more effectively and collaboratively drive drug policy reform at the national and international levels. Through discussion on OSF’s online platform (the Souk) and debate within the global board, it is apparent that the success of a UN-focused approach depends on mobilization efforts. Specifically, we need to engage new actors that could broaden the leadership of and strengthen the drug policy movement over the long run. However, the Special Session itself presents an avenue for amplifying a wide diversity of civil society voices from around the world. If the Special Session could become a stage for bringing to the forefront voices from around the world and with different perspectives that articulate a new vision, then the hope for lasting change and reform is a possibility. Regardless of the level of consensus within the United Nations, the Special Session can be a strategic avenue for changing the frame for drug policy.

Goal of a Drug Policy Shared Framework

The overarching goal of this shared framework is to coordinate OSF resources and expertise around the Special Session to shift the dominant paradigm and narrative on drug policy. The shared framework will do this by facilitating support and engagement of existing local and national civil society actors, government officials, and drug policy models, while also exploring and modeling innovative policies with existing and new partners. Finally, the strategy will use the platform of the Special Session as a unique opportunity to raise global awareness and movement around drug policy reform. This strategy was recognized by the review committee, the global board, and Souk¹ contributors as a promising approach for OSF.

In order to accomplish all of this, OSF will need to focus on our own work and resources that we are willing and able to bring to this effort. This implies two primary objectives to be achieved through the charette:

1. Clearly defining a **road map** of the *specific* activities, required inputs and roles that each OSF entity would exercise in this joint effort. OSF participants, in consultation with each other and

¹ OSF’s internal online platform

external partners will need to define a shared set of goals, success indicators, and targeted outcomes they hope to realize on drug policy reform in the Special Session context, and the road map would support that realization. This should include defining and prioritizing a set of activities that can be pursued *after* 2016, including implementation and monitoring related to outcomes from the Special Session. In selection of activities, consideration should be made to longer-term support for organizational capacity, anticipated risk, and how best to exercise OSF's positional power. The proposed strategy for collaboration is nicknamed S⁴ for the four stages in this process as outlined below:

- **STRUCTURING.** Beginning at the inception of the shared framework and running until approximately mid-2015, OSF programs will articulate their specific strategy around the Special Session. This phase will focus on identifying and supporting existing strengths. OSF will work towards strengthening the capacity of existing partners to engage at local, regional, and global levels. Activities here could include promoting of national-level approaches and models of drug policy reform, and supporting effective government and UN preparation and participation.
 - **SCALING.** This phase will begin in early 2015 and continue through 2015. It involves building upon the work set out in the previous phase, but with a focus on expansion of actors, relationships, and scope of work. It is about building as big of an effort as possible around reform in preparation for the Special Session. This phase would be focused on expansion and amplification of civil society capacity as well as offering support to government and other actors.
 - **STAGING.** This phase could officially begin on June 26, 2015 (an international day of protest of the current drug regime) and continue to the Special Session one year later. This phase is about OSF creating a "stage" for civil society voices to engage with the public, with governments, and with UN actors, and others. OSF will focus on leveraging our strengths to bring a diverse group of voices calling for reform, cutting across lines of geography, gender, race, income, age, vocation, etc. Activities in this phase could include everything from op-eds to large public events.
 - **SURVEYING.** Following the Special Session, it will be important to look back on what worked and didn't, and develop strategies to sustain accomplishments made during the shared framework period in order to support future efforts in drug policy reform undertaken by OSF and its key partners in the field.
2. Design an overarching **communications and mobilization plan** that would link 'on-the-ground' and regional work by each OSF entity into a Special Session -oriented advocacy effort that will reach fruition in Phase 3 - Staging. OSF will likely need to engage all of its internal expertise and some outside professional support to help conduct a power analysis and narrative analysis, and design a campaign-type effort that can engage new voices, deliver effective messages, and reach decision-makers and opinion-shapers at all levels.

Potential Elements of the Charette Agenda

While an agenda is yet to be designed, the two-day charette is likely to include the following elements:

- Address outstanding questions posed by all OSF stakeholders including Global board
- Achieve consensus on shared framework goals
- Plan for effectively tapping external expertise

- Identify the specific strategies and activities through which the shared framework will be achieved including the most promising opportunities for each participating entity related to advocacy, research, support to government, grant-making and other OSF tools
- Clarify the roles of relevant foundations and programs and identify new areas for collaboration
- Determine the necessary internal resources, governance structure, and systems necessary to implement the shared framework

What is a *charette* at the Open Society Foundations?

A charette is an interactive design-and-planning meeting at which dozens of possible solutions are honed down into a discrete set of strategies that aim to achieve a small set of common, clearly articulated, time-limited goals. A charette follows weeks and often months of discussions and debates about a problem that has been nominated for concentrated attention across the Open Society Foundations. At the charette, we refine goals and design strategies to achieve those goals for implementation by many different programs, foundations, grantees, and other partners across the Open Society network within a shared framework. A successful charette:

- Creates a common understanding and definition of the problem and agreement on what might be achieved within a limited number of years to solve it;
- Facilitates the efficient and intense exchange of ideas, sharpening the articulation of possible strategies for achieving the agreed goals;
- Reveals connections among the multiple strategies so that work can then be pursued in coordinated and mutually reinforcing ways;
- Identifies champions within OSF and the field who can promote and implement the strategies that are later endorsed by the Global Board of the Open Society Foundations;
- Produces a shared framework—a clear concept with concrete goals, a set of interconnected strategies, and a work plan—that provides a solid basis for work to move ahead.

By the time a problem reaches charette, it has been subject to virtual discussion debate on our on-line platform (the Souk) and it has been approved for further development by a Committee of the Global Board of the Open Society Foundations. The product of a charette – a proposal of specific collaborative strategies – are then put forward to the Committee who vote to approve the proposal as an official shared framework, with an official budget.

Specifics on the Global Drug Policy Charette

Dates: The 2-day Drug Policy charette is scheduled for August 19th and 20th in New York. Like all charettes, this meeting will derive its agenda and structure from the particular design problem at hand, and the needs and priorities of participants. A working group of OSF staff and fellows with drug policy expertise will organize and host the charette with support from colleagues from the Drug Policy Review Committee and the Strategy Unit.

Charette Mandate: The Global Drug Policy charette has two central goals, as identified by the Review Committee Process and approved by the Global Board’s Committee for Strategy Budget and Performance. First, to do the work and discovery necessary to enable consensus on implementation priorities for a specific set of activities, including roles of participants in that work and identifying a preliminary set of objectives and partners; and second, to identify the best ways to enhance OSF’s advocacy efforts on drug policy in the context of UNGASS 2016. These two pieces of work will be

considered for final approval and allocation of additional funds at the Global Board meeting in September 2014.

Continued planning, including the development of work plans and timelines and the actual implementation itself will be overseen by a governance team designated by Chris Stone, if the shared framework receives final approval.

Audience: Pre-charette and charette discussions will focus on bringing together OSF representatives from programs, foundation and advocacy offices that are currently working on drug policy, as well as entities with a related but as yet underdeveloped engagement with the issue of drug policy reform. We are very interested in what OSF colleagues think *could* be done with additional resources (financial, technical, etc.) *in addition to what their existing work is*. Importantly, the charette also provides an opportunity to bring together vital external partners, scholars and experts who can push us to think and plan broadly and creatively. We hope the August charette will provide an opportunity to discuss coordination between these work streams and examine synergies across them.

Joint Advance Planning Underway: The August charette is designed to sharpen proposed plans and ideas, rather than to begin a brainstorming or planning process from scratch. Ongoing discussion and planning is already being advanced through efforts of the working group, and includes a set of internal and external consultations, and the development of a short set of background materials which will be available for the charette. Please contact Lauren Agosta in the Strategy Unit (lauren.agosta@opensocietyfoundations.org) for more information and to get involved in the pre-charette planning.

Interested in Getting Involved or Learning More?

Please contact Johanna Chao Kreilick at johanna.kreilick@opensocietyfoundations.org or Lauren Agosta (lauren.agosta@opensocietyfoundations.org) for more information.