

**From:** Ethan Zuckerman  
**Re:** Comments on 2010 U.S. Programs Budget  
**Date:** September 23, 2009

Thanks for the opportunity to offer my comments on the proposed 2010 budget. I'm happy to offer my endorsement of the overall strategy and proposed allocations, and wanted to include some thoughts and questions regarding specific spending within the Transparency and Integrity and Democracy and Power funds, the two funds I directly advise.

I'm pleased to see a careful consolidation of focus within Democracy and Power, a recognition that this fund's history includes a large number of pre-existing grantees, which points to a need for tying off a large number of grants and focusing on a narrower set of priorities. As mentioned in the strategic planning process, I enthusiastically support the focus on building state-based power in a carefully selected set of laboratory states, and cultivating multi-issue organizations who can both help develop a new set of leaders and pioneer policy approaches that could be useful in other locales.

As someone who manages a nonprofit, I appreciate OSI's policy of providing tie-off grants to organizations with whom we've had long relationships. I wonder, however, whether in some cases we're insufficiently willing to end relationships with grantees whose goals no longer align neatly with our own. I was somewhat confused by the statement, "We expect to reduce funding or make tie-off grants to several grantees that no longer fit our goals..." It would seem to me that grantees no longer aligned with our goals should be tied off and assisted in whatever ways we're able - TIF, for instance, proposes a fundraising consultant who will assist tied-off grantees - but shouldn't receive continuing, though reduced, funding.

As Democracy and Power moves to a strategy focused on state-based power, I'd like to see budget documents that consider state by state allocations, and an evaluation process that helps us understand what state-based strategies are succeeding and which are struggling. My hope is that the large investments we're making in state-based power turn into a set of reproducible strategies - being able to compare state-based investments and impact side by side would be greatly helpful.

I'm happy to see the Transparency and Integrity Fund offering bold plans to provide leadership in the face of the current crisis in journalism. The proposed allocations are significant and will position OSI as a major voice at the table in ongoing discussions about future journalism models. I don't know that the program will be able to allocate \$5 million in spending in the coming year, and would urge the flexibility to deploy some of those funds in 2011 as 2010 is likely to be a year in which a great deal of learning and exploration take place.

The focus on the crisis in journalism is going to require close work with other foundations in the space focused on these issues - Knight Foundation, McCormick Tribune, Ford, MacArthur. It also requires deep engagement with professional, academic and technical communities. I'd recommend a modest increase to the program development budget to make it possible for TIF staff to be deeply involved with conferences and convenings in this field - while TIF will be well-served by the forthcoming November convening, there's a wealth of important events and for 2010, as TIF determines strategy for approaching the journalism crisis, a strong presence at these events will be critical.

My hope is that 2010 will see TIF figuring out a role within the funding ecosystem supporting journalistic innovation. Here I wonder whether D&P's focus on state-based intervention might be particularly helpful - some of the most frightening scenarios in the crisis in journalism focus on a lack of coverage of state and local issues. Perhaps TIF will consider a similarly state-based strategy, and similar metrics that compare state-based strategies to the one I'm suggesting for monitoring D&P.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to review and comment on the budget proposals and happy to offer my enthusiastic endorsement.

Best,

-Ethan