

MEMORANDUM

To: Aryeh Neier
From: Ann Beeson, Laleh Ispahani, and the Transparency and Integrity Fund
Date: April 13, 2009
Re: Transparency and Integrity Fund's April 2009 Docket

We look forward to meeting with you next Friday, April 17, 2009, to discuss the first docket of the Transparency and Integrity Fund (TIF). We respectfully seek approval of 9 grants in this docket.

As you know, TIF's grant making and other program strategies include support for:

- Effective external oversight of government, including the development of strategies to strengthen the field of independent oversight (*i.e.*, watchdog) organizations and continuing our support for media policy reform and journalism;
- Efforts to promote transparency and integrity within key government institutions and systems, including continued support for judicial independence and electoral system reform initiatives, and some support for initiatives related to Congress and executive branch agencies and departments; and
- Efforts to strengthen support for the public sector, including an initiative to address the detrimental impact of outsourcing government functions in the name of privatization.

Grants in this docket

Watchdog Organizations

From its outset, the Transparency and Integrity Fund has sought to identify and support those watchdog organizations that work across transparency issues and strategies while demonstrating a deep commitment to collaboration and leadership. This docket includes general support grants for three organizations that fit this description: Focus Project (d.b.a. **OMB Watch**), the **Project on Government Oversight**, and the **National Institute on Money in State Politics**. The first two recommendations are jointly supported by TIF and the National Security and Human Rights Campaign. All three organizations are engaged in ongoing projects which fuel broader efforts for openness and reform. General support would guarantee that the organizations have stable funding to continue this work while also responding to new crises and opportunities as they arise.

Judicial Nominations

President Obama has begun nominating judges to the U.S. Courts of Appeal, putting forward nominees to the Second, Fourth, and Seventh Circuits. Prior to these

nominations, Senate Republicans unanimously stated their intent to filibuster nominees that did not meet their approval. Amidst increasing rumors suggesting that Justice Souter will announce his retirement at the conclusion of the Court's present term, the battle over judges has resumed. The Coalition for a Fair and Independent Judiciary (the Coalition) has been working effectively since the beginning of the year to develop a strategy for informing and engaging the public in debates over the future of the federal judiciary. Over the past year, OSI staff has been re-evaluating and recalibrating its grant making to adjust to the new political and legal terrain in which these nominations are made.

This docket contains three recommendations that reflect the changing strategy of the Coalition and TIF. The first, a renewal recommendation to the **Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund** (LCCREF), supports that organization's significant role in leading the Coalition. While officially co-chaired by LCCREF, the Alliance for Justice, and People for the American Way, it is LCCREF that has taken on the lion's share of the work in leading weekly meetings, coordinating messaging and communications, and managing grassroots operations. A recommendation for the **National Council of Jewish Women** (NCJW) would, if approved, mark that group's first grant from OSI. NCJW has long been a Coalition member, organizing and supporting its local chapters' efforts in nominations debates. The group's expertise and past success on that front puts its work squarely within an evolving grant making strategy that recognizes the need for greater capacity at the grassroots. Finally, a renewal grant to the **Communications Consortium Media Center** (CCMC) would allow CCMC to continue providing communications assistance and media training to organizations such as NCJW and LCCREF that are working at grassroots levels. CCMC would also continue to provide communications support to smaller organizations within the Coalition.

Elections Systems Reform

We are making a recommendation that will kick-off a new and transformational election reform agenda: to modernize the nation's antiquated voter registration infrastructure. Our grant will be directed to the **Rockefeller Family Fund**, which will serve to coordinate funding for this special initiative. The groups participating (as a coalition) include a strategic range of organizations, many well known to U.S. Programs, either as grantees or as allies of grantees including the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU, AARP, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, US Public Interest Research Group, League of Women Voters, and the National Military Family Association.

Building on OSI's past elections-related grant making, this coalition will work to build support among policymakers, the public, and other key stakeholders for this effort, by, among other things, conducting and disseminating significant research and policy papers. The coalition will also simultaneously assess how this form of voter registration works in at least two states to build momentum toward a national policy change. This reform has already garnered significant press attention including lead editorials in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other media outlets.

The ability of citizens to participate in decision making through voting is a hallmark of representative democracy and essential to advancing open society interests. Yet, in the U.S., there continue to be significant obstacles to voter registration, with disproportionate barriers for society's most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. In the 2008 national elections, nearly 9 million Americans encountered problems related to registration and therefore did not vote. This reform would begin to remedy this problem, automatically and affirmatively registering eligible citizens; keeping voters on the rolls as long as they lived in a state; and allow voters who for some reason are not on the rolls at Election Day to register or update registration records with election officials or at the polls on Election Day. To meet these new requirements, states would receive federal funding toward implementation.

Journalism and Media Policy

The new Administration in Washington provides an enormous opportunity for OSI grantees to make substantial gains and advance a proactive vision for media and technology policies that foster democratic values. Open Internet and balanced copyright policies are central to the President's technology agenda, and he has made universal access to the Internet a cornerstone of his economic stimulus program. Many of the individuals now joining the Administration are, or have deep connections to, OSI grantees. For the first time in almost a decade, these public interest organizations will have significant access to key policymakers and opportunities for meaningful participation.

This docket includes renewal recommendations for **Free Press** and **Public Knowledge**, two core media policy reform organizations that work in coalition with other OSI-funded organizations including the Center for Media Justice, the New America Foundation's Wireless Future Program, the Media Access Project, and Consumers Union. As all types of media content are increasingly delivered via the Internet, these media policy reform groups have developed expertise in the rapidly evolving field of Internet/technology policy.

Specifically, Public Knowledge is dedicated to fortifying and defending a vibrant information commons and works with a wide range of stakeholders – including libraries, educators, scientists, artists, musicians, journalists, consumers, software programmers, civic groups, and enlightened businesses – to promote the core conviction that fundamental democratic principles and cultural values of openness, equitable access to information, and the capacity to create and compete, must be protected and intelligently regulated in the digital age. Free Press promotes diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, and universal access to communications. This year, Free Press has launched a new initiative to address the crisis in journalism, exploring proposals for policy solutions by convening a series of strategic policy roundtables with leading journalists, scholars and organizers to identify specific, viable policy proposals, discuss a coordinated policy agenda and a public campaign to support innovative models and creative solutions for American journalism.

This docket also includes what is likely to be a final general support grant to the *American Prospect* from the Transparency and Integrity Fund. The Fund is currently developing a grant making strategy for media and journalism that is unlikely to include major general operating support for national publications. This final grant does not absolutely preclude future OSI funding. The *Prospect* has expanded its coverage of criminal justice, immigration, and race issues, and individual U.S. Programs funds and campaigns may be interested in coordinated efforts to support specific issue coverage in the future.