

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FUND
DOCKET III – OCTOBER 18TH, 2010
GRANT RECOMMENDATION BLURBS

The Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF) responds in a timely manner to unforeseen crises or open society challenges that impact the mission of the Open Society Foundations' U.S. Programs (USP); conducts research and development in new areas of interest or learning that are not already supported prominently through the work of other USP Funds; and fosters special initiatives that are short-term and of high impact through its flexible grantmaking strategies.

Grants that will be recommended for approval on Docket III represent a range of SOF priority areas, including nine grants related to the role that art and culture play in advancing social justice goals; three grants that support the ongoing civic engagement work of grantees who were supported last year through USP's 2010 Census initiative; three grants that support social justice advocacy in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast; and a pair of complementary grants to support two strands of work at the 2010 Annual Conference of the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG).

In total, SOF will make the following 17 grant recommendations, 10 of which will be presented on the October 18th docket and 7 to be presented to Ann for her approval.

Arts & Culture Advancing Social Justice

Allied Media Projects

\$50,000 over 1 year (project support) – including \$10,000 in co-funding from the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) and possible co-funding from the Transparency and Integrity Fund

Allied Media Projects supports the growth of media arts-based organizing models and disseminates them through the Allied Media Conference (AMC), an annual gathering of artists, social justice organizers, and alternative media makers. Since its founding in 1999, the AMC has developed a sophisticated and evolving understanding of the role that art and media play in communicating solidarity and advancing justice. Each annual conference builds upon prior years to connect established and emerging media-makers and organizers who are developing new forms of leadership and new methods for building power and solving entrenched social problems. Youth-led and youth-centered, the AMC engages a fast-growing and intergenerational constituency of change agents engaged in issue-based advocacy, grassroots organizing, creative arts production, and policy generation at local and national levels. The AMC functions as a network of networks – for youth organizations, international solidarity activists, anti-violence organizers, technologists, educators, media justice advocates, alternative economists, musicians and artists, disability activists, and many others – all using media to advance innovative change across issue areas.

ArtSpot Productions

\$50,000 over 18 months (project support)

ArtSpot Productions is a 501(c)(3) ensemble of artists dedicated to creating live theater in New Orleans through creative practices that advance social justice and model shared power. The organization strives to ignite positive community change through the development and presentation of visually stunning performances that play locally and tour nationally and internationally. ArtSpot is guided in its work by the belief that community stories merit expression, and that performance is an essential element for collective healing in communities where voices have historically been silenced. ArtSpot complements its performance work through a set of community-based programs including a theater project at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW). Established by ArtSpot founder Kathy Randels in 1996 with support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the LCIW program has engaged hundreds of women in writing and performance workshops. ArtSpot also collaborates closely with Students at the Center (SAC) in bringing theater-based workshops to New Orleans public high schools to support youth leadership and explore issues of racial and economic justice.

Ashé Cultural Arts Center (Efforts of Grace, Inc.)

\$250,000 over 2 years (renewal: general support)

Ashe Cultural Arts Center began programming in 1998 and has served as a community hub of artistic collaboration, local advocacy and dialogue, economic development, and as an overall centralizing and stabilizing community force. The Center is recognized by leaders inside and outside of New Orleans as a critical voice for inspiring hope and activism through its cultural programming, and as a center that preserves the historic connections between culture and activism in New Orleans. It has become an even stronger symbol of cultural activism since the severe storm and flood damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. In addition to hosting community planning meetings, lectures and panels, art exhibits and film screenings, the Center partners with churches and cultural and advocacy organizations in their programming.

As the leading community-based organization in New Orleans that connects the city's most marginalized with its cultural and government leaders and activists, SOF has seen Ashe as a valuable partner and resource particularly in our efforts to raise awareness of the power and potential for art as an activism tool to advance a broad spectrum of social justice concerns and issues of specific interest and relevance to U.S. Programs. One example of a timely partnership with Ashe to create a greater understanding of the power of art and culture to bring issues to the forefront of conversations and actions is a funder briefing that SOF has organized for September 14. We are capitalizing on Ashe's September 13 production of *Swimming Upstream* at the Apollo Theatre to hold a funder briefing the next day that will feature the production's producers and performers. The funder dialogue will address the role of arts and culture during crisis; how the creation of *Swimming Upstream* helped those involved; and lessons learned that can be applied to other disaster situations or conflict.

First Peoples Fund

\$250,000 over 2 years (general support)

Founded in 1995, First Peoples Fund advances social justice for Indigenous communities by providing grant support to artists who root their work in Indigenous cultural traditions and who are committed to building community power as part of a sacred honor system. The Fund seeks

to strengthen that honor system through its *Community Spirit* grants to artists who uphold the traditions and life ways of their peoples, maintain direct ties to their communities, and nurture youth creativity and leadership. Through its *Cultural Capital* program, the Fund empowers these artists to develop local networks, leverage additional resources, and access technical assistance. As an anchor organization and leader in the field of art and social justice, First Peoples Fund builds the capacity of artists-as-change-agents across Indigenous communities and connects these communities to non-Native artists, organizers, and advocates who are advancing racial and economic justice across the country.

Junebug Productions

\$150,000 over 18 months (project support) – including \$75,000 in co-funding from the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA)

The mission of Junebug Productions is to create and present theater of the highest quality that encourages and supports African Americans in the Black Belt South who are working to improve the quality of life available for themselves and others. Junebug is the organizational successor to the Free Southern Theater, which was formed in 1963 to be a cultural arm of the Civil Rights Movement. The organization's current name is taken from the mythic Junebug Jabbo Jones, a character invented by members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the 1960's to represent the wisdom of common people. Based in New Orleans, Junebug Productions believes that the greatest resources required for the development of cultural programs and products come from artists themselves. Junebug operates programs at both the national and local New Orleans levels, including the Free Southern Theater Institute; touring productions of original work; and the Color Line Project, a national story collection documenting the legacy and influence of the Civil Rights Movement in the ongoing struggle to challenge racism. In all of its work, Junebug advances collaboration between creative artists, grassroots organizations, and community organizers who share a commitment to social change.

Provisions Learning Project

\$50,000 over 1 year (project support)

Provisions Learning Project is a research, education, and production center dedicated to exploring the intersection of art and social change. Since its founding in 2001, Provisions has assembled a 6,000-volume special collection library, presented dozens of exhibitions, and collaborated to launch innovative educational programs. At its Washington, DC-based Provisions Library, the organization features on-site programs including exhibitions, screenings, and workshops, all complemented by extensive online resources and rotating virtual exhibitions. Provisions' work is grounded in the values of justice, community sustainability, and social responsibility. With its extensive resources, public programming, and research opportunities, Provisions plays a critical role in supporting artistic and intellectual endeavors that explore the social dimensions of contemporary culture and advance social justice.

Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development

\$300,000 over 2 years (general support)

The Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development is a leading Indigenous social change organization with a mission to promote Native arts and cultural expression as a strategy for maintaining traditional wisdom, promoting intergenerational leadership, and sustaining

communities. Through grantmaking, training, and technical assistance, Seventh Generation supports established and emerging Indigenous artists and culture-bearers including traditional storytellers; artisans, such as basketweavers, potters, and carvers; performing artists working in Hip-Hop, theater, poetry, and other expressive forms; and digital media-makers. Founded in 1977, Seventh Generation Fund emerged as Indigenous leaders – elders, young people, community activists – responded to the call from their communities for cultural revitalization and culturally appropriate sustainability strategies. The organization derives its name from a precept of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy) which calls upon leaders to consider the impact of their actions on the seventh generation to come. Today, Seventh Generation artists draw upon traditional knowledge to develop culturally-based creative practices that advance social justice in, by, and for grassroots Indigenous communities.

SilencelsViolence (New Orleans Bayou Steppers Social Aid and Pleasure Club)

\$80,000 over 2 years (renewal: project support)

SilencelsViolence is a project of the New Orleans Bayou Steppers Social Aid and Pleasure Club, an organization founded in 2000 to promote, preserve, and celebrate the music and culture of New Orleans, especially as embodied in the tradition of the Second Line.

New Orleans Bayou Steppers launched SilencelsViolence as a campaign in 2007 in response to the back-to-back murders of New Orleans artists Dinerral Shivers (Hot 8 Brass Band) and Helen Hill (independent filmmaker). The project's core strategies around public safety advocacy include: engagement of young people in addressing public safety and criminal justice reform; solidarity-building across diverse New Orleans communities; and intervention within the public school system. The overarching approach is to advance community advocacy around public safety by engaging young people in arts and culture activities that are rooted in local traditions.

Sweet Home New Orleans

\$250,000 over 2 years (renewal: general support)

Sweet Home New Orleans's mission is to support the individuals and organizations that perpetuate New Orleans' unique musical and cultural traditions. The organization assists New Orleans' musicians, Mardi Gras Indians, and Social Aid & Pleasure Club members with establishing sustainable lives in their New Orleans neighborhoods, and it has become an artistic force behind the city's revitalization.

New Orleans' music, the root of the city's identity and a driving force behind its economy, is an expression of a unique American culture whose tradition bearers practice a functional art that unites and strengthens communities. Over successive generations, local artists were marginalized by the mainstream music industry often earning less for their intellectual property than those cutting the record deals. They learned to cope with limited opportunities for earning a living and restricted access to basic services while transmitting their art forms to family and friends within their neighborhoods – so that communities became conduits for sharing knowledge, documenting history, schooling next generation artists, and sustaining culture even within an unfriendly economic system.

Founded in 2005 as the New Orleans Musicians Heritage Relief Fund, Sweet Home New Orleans (SHNO) began disbursing emergency aid to New Orleans' musicians immediately following Hurricane Katrina. Initially, SHNO's work focused on streamlining resource allocation.

Today their programs have evolved to include in-depth services such as job creation and legal assistance, as well as advancing policies that promote the social function of music and culture.

The Renaissance Project

\$150,000 over 18 months (project support) – including \$25,000 in co-funding from the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA)

The Renaissance Project operates a number of core programs that advance arts and cultural practices, youth leadership and education, economic development, and food access for community members of New Orleans neighborhoods including Central City and the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards. Founded pre-Katrina, the Project engages in advocacy, capacity-building initiatives, and collaborative partnerships at the local and national levels as it applies an intersectional approach to advancing racial and economic justice. Its long-running Students at the Center (SAC) program works within public schools in New Orleans to engage high school age youth in rigorous, inquiry-based writing and digital media workshops that honor young people as social change agents and that nurture authentic youth leadership. Over the next two years SAC student interns and staff will lead the Project's *Healing a City Through Stories* initiative, bringing together public schools, arts programs, and grassroots community organizations in New Orleans to create a community-based public high school curriculum and new teacher training program that addresses racial healing.

Special Initiatives

2010 Census Initiative:

SOF recommends the following grants to organizations supported through its 2010 Census Initiative, which was developed in partnership with the Democracy and Power Fund in grantmaking year 2009 to support outreach efforts in communities of concern to USP. The following grants will provide renewed support for three of these organizations to build upon the momentum of their census-related work and to expand the depth, breadth, substance, and impact of their civic engagement activities in hard-to-reach communities.

Funders Committee for Civic Participation (Public Interest Projects)

\$20,000 over 1 year (renewal: project support)

The Funders Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) is a national membership-based philanthropic affinity group that brings together grantmakers committed to enhancing democratic involvement in all dimensions of civic life, including elections, governance, media and civil society, with a particular emphasis on historically disenfranchised and underrepresented communities. In 2008, FCCP launched the Funders Census Initiative (FCI) as a national working group focused on initiating and supporting activities designed to ensure a fair and accurate 2010 Census, with a particular emphasis on enumeration in “hard-to-count” communities across the country. FCI has been committed to stimulating interest in the 2010 Census among funders and their grantees through outreach, updates, resource development and one-on-one consultations. In the months ahead, FCCP seeks to build upon the work of the FCI collaborative, documenting activities and successes to inform future philanthropic efforts related to the decennial census and other civic engagement opportunities.

National Congress of American Indians Fund

\$125,000 over 18 months (renewal: project support)

The National Congress of American Indians was founded in 1944 in response to termination and assimilation policies that the United States forced upon the tribal governments in contradiction to their treaty rights and status as sovereigns. The NCAI Fund (NCAIF) is the organization's 501(c)(3) arm and works to inform the public and Congress about the governmental rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives. In 2003, NCAIF established the Policy Research Center (PRC) to serve as a national tribal research center guided by a diverse and distinguished advisory council. The PRC provides tribal leaders with the best available knowledge to make strategic and proactive policy decisions that are rooted in a framework of Native wisdom and that positively impact the future of Native peoples. This project support grant will enable NCAIF/PRC to build upon the success of its *Indian Country Counts* 2010 Census campaign – which promoted an accurate census count in Indigenous communities throughout Indian Country – and will support the organization's work to shift the discourse in Native policy from a problem-focused approach to proactive, future-thinking strategy development.

Southern Coalition for Social Justice

\$75,000 over 6 months (renewal: general support) – including \$25,000 in co-funding from the Democracy and Power Fund

The Southern Coalition for Social Justice (SCSJ) promotes justice by empowering minority and low-income communities to defend and advance their political, social, and economic rights. SCSJ uses the combined skills of lawyers, social scientists, community organizers and media experts to help underrepresented people develop strategies to achieve their visions for themselves and their communities, incorporating a rights-based perspective and linking their efforts to broader processes of political, legal, social, and economic change in the South and across the country. This general support bridge grant will build upon SOF support for SCSJ's 2010 Census campaign in five southern states (including North Carolina and Louisiana) and will lend capacity to the organization as it pivots its work towards addressing the impact of redistricting processes on communities of concern to USP – new immigrants, communities of color, working class communities, incarcerated persons – in these and other states.

Other Special Initiatives

MIGIZI Communications

\$20,000 over 6 months (project support)

The mission of MIGIZI Communications is to put the tools of digital media and innovative communication in the hands of young people. Through the support of this project grant, MIGIZI will act as the coordinator for a collaborative initiative to engage youth media producers from diverse communities in documenting the 2010 Annual Conference of the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Project partners include Intermedia Arts, St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), and the Twin Cities Youth Media Network (TCYMN). The video documentation project will connect youth artists to grantmaker participants at the NFG Conference and will highlight for funders the role that young artists and media-makers play in advancing social change. This grant builds upon USP's legacy of support for youth media as a

strategy for engaging young people in addressing social issues, and complements USP's ongoing support for youth organizing and next generation leadership.

Neighborhood Funders Group

\$15,000 over 6 months (renewal: project support)

The Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) is a membership association of grantmaking institutions whose mission is to strengthen the capacity of organized philanthropy to understand and support community-based efforts to organize and improve the economic and social fabric of low-income urban neighborhoods and rural communities. NFG provides resources, learning opportunities, and professional development activities to its national membership of grantmakers and encourages the support of policies and practices that advance economic and social justice. This project grant will support NFG's 2010 Annual Conference, which will highlight the power of place-based philanthropy and will draw specific attention to issues of concern to USP including the foreclosure crisis; youth organizing for social justice; cradle-to-college advocacy and support for low-income communities and communities of color; the power of art and culture to advance social change; and the ongoing work of advocates and organizers in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to rebuild and sustain their communities.

Place-Based Grantmaking in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

*SOF works to explore and support opportunities for **place-based philanthropy** that will advance OSI's goals on several fronts and promote the interconnectedness of our issues.*

Louisiana Justice Institute

\$50,000 over 1 year (project support)

The Louisiana Justice Institute (LJI) is a civil rights legal advocacy organization founded in the wake of Hurricane Katrina with the mission to support the right of displaced residents to return to their homes and to foster social justice organizing in communities of color and impoverished communities. The organization seeks to strengthen capacity for statewide, systemic, legal advocacy on behalf of Louisiana's minority and poor residents with a particular focus on ongoing disaster recovery issues that affect residents of New Orleans and the surrounding coastal parishes. LJI fills community-identified gaps in Louisiana's current public interest legal resources and works closely with partners and advisors to target those gaps. Its programs and litigation efforts are focused on issues that include voting rights and civic engagement; public education; housing; worker rights and economic justice; health care; government accountability; and criminal justice reform.

Mississippi Economic Policy Center (Enterprise Corporation of the Delta)

\$150,000 over 2 years (renewal: project support)

This grant, originally made as a Katrina grant in 2008, subsequently funded through the Democracy and Power Fund, is transitioning back to SOF for renewed funding. The Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD) is a nonprofit community development financial institution that provides commercial financing, mortgage loans and technical assistance to support businesses,

entrepreneurs, home buyers and community development projects. ECD's mission is to strengthen communities, build assets and improve the lives of people in economically distressed areas of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

ECD, along with the Mississippi Center for Justice, launched the Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) in 2007, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. MEPC became a new member of the **State Fiscal Analysis Initiative** and is the only policy group in the state that focuses on general budget and tax issues affecting low-income families.

Over the next two years, Tax Reform will be the top priority for MEPC. MEPC selected this area of focus when the Mississippi Governor appointed a Tax Study Commission that was lacking voices that would advocate for a progressive tax policy. MEPC is preparing research in this area and helping to build and participate in a coalition of advocates in the state to push for progressive change. MEPC chose this area of focus by analyzing budget forecasts which suggest that revenue growth will be declining in the upcoming years. Additionally, the \$90 million shortfall for the FY 2009 Medicaid Budget also raised budget analysis to a priority level for MEPC. Ongoing efforts to get a state EITC enacted will round out the fiscal policy work of MEPC.

Overall, MEPC staff has established itself as a source of expertise on the subjects of tax equity, workforce supports, and predatory lending. It has strong relationships with many of the state and local advocacy organizations and is a member of the Seize the Day Fund grantee, The Mississippi Stimulus Coalition.

SOF Co-Funding for Grants Recommended by Colleague USP Funds

In addition to the recommendations described above, SOF is collaborating as follows to provide co-funding on Docket III grants recommended by colleague USP Funds:

Design Studio for Social Intervention

\$25,000 SOF co-fund on a total grant of \$50,000 over 1 year (general support) from the Democracy and Power Fund. (Arts and Culture Advancing Social Justice)

Highlander Research and Education Center

\$50,000 SOF co-fund on a total grant of \$200,000 over 1 year (project support) from the Democracy and Power Fund. (Arts and Culture Advancing Social Justice)

New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance

\$350,000 SOF co-fund on a total grant of \$900,000 over 1 year (project support) from the Transparency and Integrity Fund. (Special Initiatives: Place-Based Grantmaking in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast)

State Fiscal Analysis Initiative – Louisiana Budget Project

\$35,000 SOF co-fund on a total grant of \$75,000 over 1 year (renewal/tie-off: project support) from the Democracy and Power Fund. (Special Initiatives: Place-Based Grantmaking in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast)

Youth Justice Coalition

\$25,000 SOF co-fund (for technical assistance) on a total grant of \$75,000 over 2 years (project support and general support) from the Criminal Justice Fund.