

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FUND
DOCKET I – MARCH 14, 2011
PROPOSED GRANT RECOMMENDATION BLURBS

The Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF) responds in a timely manner to unforeseen crises or open society challenges that impact US Program’s mission; research and development in new areas of interest to USP that are not already a prominent part of grant-making as well as initiatives that are short-term and/or of high impact through its flexible grant-making strategies.

Grants that will be recommended for approval on Docket I, both for approval by the President and by the Executive Director of US Programs, represent a range of SOF priority areas, including two new grants related to the role that art and culture play in advancing social justice goals; two legacy grants -- for support of cultural memory preservation in historic sites and museums around the world, and for support of a longtime OSI community resource partner based in New York City; and finally an as yet undetermined number of renewal grants to organizations working to counteract harsh disciplinary policies, standardized testing and ‘push out’ policies in the nation’s public schools in conjunction with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education/No Child Left Behind Act.

SOF will be making the following grant recommendations. In some cases, grant amounts and terms are yet to be determined.

Arts & Culture Advancing Social Justice

Anna Deveare Smith Works, Inc.

Amount, term and grant type TBD

Anna Deveare Smith Works, Inc. is a cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to create a community of artists from around the world whose creative work addresses the pressing social issues of our time. The organization, led by prize-winning actress and playwright Anna Deveare Smith, exists with the goal of fostering new work that is aesthetically sophisticated and highly communicative about the issues that challenge us in the world today – including war, poverty, global health, the environment, the economy, racism, food, religious differences and others. In addition to supporting artists in residencies that build community, ADS Works, Inc. provides a forum in which artists, intellectuals, policy makers, scholars, journalists and law makers can convene in a unique setting that facilitates difficult and complex conversations to affect change. In addition, ADS Works, Inc. creates innovative ways of developing audiences for the work with the expectation that the audience members will pick up the mantle to make a difference in their communities and, more broadly, in the world. This grant will provide capacity building assistance to ADS Works, Inc. to build out the core elements and programs of the organization.

Urban Bush Women

Amount TBD, one year project support for the 2011 Summer Leadership Institute

Founded in 1984 by choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Urban Bush Women (UBW) seeks to bring the untold and under-told histories and stories of disenfranchised people to light through

dance. As a dance company, they do this from a woman-centered perspective and as members of the African Diaspora community in order to create a more equitable balance of power in the dance world and beyond. Across its work, UBW practices art as a means of addressing issues of social justice and encouraging civic engagement. Based in Brooklyn, UBW aspires to ensure continuity by strengthening and expanding its international community via ongoing professional education, development of new audiences, nurturing young talent and presenting bold, life-affirming dance works in a variety of settings including at its annual Summer Leadership Institute in New Orleans. This 10-day intensive serves as the foundation for all of the company's community engagement activities, and its learning is infused with UBW's artistic process. Ultimately the Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) connects dance professionals and community-based artists in a learning experience to leverage the arts as a vehicle for social activism and to strengthen the national network of community arts practitioners. The SLI was born out of UBW's first community engagement project in New Orleans in 1990, an artistic collaboration with community-based organizations to create an organized structure to support and assist in the development of community. By situating the SLI in New Orleans, UBW contributes to the city's ongoing rebuilding efforts in partnership with local artists and activists including ArtSpot Productions and Junebug Productions (both SOF grantees), as well as 7th Ward Community Center with Neighborhood Housing Services, The People's Institute for Survival & Beyond, the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies, Mondo Bizarro, Tulane University, Dillard University, and alumni of the Institute.

Legacy

Community Resource Exchange

\$30,000 for 1 year (project support) for the Fund for the Future

This proposed legacy grant recognizes Fran Barrett, founder and leader of Community Resource Exchange (CRE) at its 30th anniversary and celebrates her leadership and vision, as well as the organization's accomplishments. CRE has been a valued partner and grantee of Open Society Foundations' from the early days of U.S. Programs and has provided critical technical assistance to a number of New York City-based grantees over the years. Through its innovative consulting and leadership development services, CRE deepens the impact of hundreds of nonprofit organizations serving New York City's most vulnerable citizens. The Fund for the Future, for which this grant is intended, will provide CRE with the resources to continue serving its clients as they face a changed economic reality and will help to support CRE as it also faces funding gaps.

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

\$50,000 over 2 years (renewal: general support) co-funded with EOF and the President's Office (EOF's contribution will be \$50,000 and the President's Office's contribution will be \$400,000) for a total of \$500,000 over 2 years)

Note: *this grant was approved by the President's Office the week of 1/18/11*

This renewed funding, in partnership with the Equality & Opportunity Fund and the President's Office, will support the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience's (ICSC) pioneering work to build a vibrant international movement of 250 memory initiatives in 42 countries that are working to harness the power of place to engage the public with the present and inspire them to shape a different future. ICSC has helped to set up collective action networks in Asia, Europe, Russia, Africa, Latin America and the U.S. (Immigration Sites of Conscience). The U.S. network

consists of 20 museums and historic sites that are striving to become new civic spaces that foster open community dialogue on contemporary immigration issues and policies.

In addition to documenting and disseminating best practices, developing new web tools to promote exchange and information sharing, ICSC operates a re-granting and technical assistance initiative to foster innovation. Recently funded projects include the University of Texas-El Paso's "Building a City and a Nation: Immigration Stories from El Paso", which will feature an exhibit that aims to spark a contemporary debate on cultural assimilation and immigration politics.

The Coalition's work has led to increasing recognition of sites of memory as a unique tool to foster human rights and build democracy. An operating principle is that the power of historic sites is not inherent; it must be harnessed as a self-conscious tactic in the service of human rights and civic engagement. Youth are a target demographic for these conversations and during the coming year, the Coalition is working with member sites to create designs for programs that engage youth in dialogue on contemporary issues important to their communities.

Special Initiatives

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Organizational grant amounts TBD

Following the September 2009 OSI board discussion that explored the forces that fuel the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP), the Strategic Opportunities Fund, in its research and development capacity, worked in collaboration with OSI-Baltimore, the Criminal Justice Fund and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement to develop an RFP to support efforts that highlight the linkages between the *No Child Left Behind* version of the Education and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the school-to-prison pipeline. We saw this as a timely opportunity to bring the issue of the school-to-prison pipeline to the forefront of the expected 2010 debate about the ESEA reauthorization. Since reauthorization and related discussions did not take place in 2010 and are now expected to be on 2011's agenda, the STPP staff team recommends that SOF consider renewed support for some, if not all groups in the original cohort. The six groups that received support in 2010 used advocacy, education and communication strategies to engage a broad set of policy makers and other stakeholders.

The organizations funded in 2010 and being considered for renewed funding (with amounts to be determined) are:

The **National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest)** and the **Forum for Education and Democracy** – both focus on shifting education policy away from low-quality tests and punitive accountability rules that create intense pressure to narrow curriculum, undermine school climate, and push students out back to a focus on student learning. They are both important partners in this initiative, given the networks they each have in the education reform arena and their existing partnerships with organizations like the Advancement Project and NAACP-LDF. The **Education Law Center (ELC)** has worked since its inception to address and eliminate issues of school discipline and exclusion in Pennsylvania's schools. In its education reform efforts, the Center partners with a network of Pennsylvania-based organizations, including the **Juvenile Law Center (JLC)**, which is a long-time grantee of OSI and an expert in juvenile

justice field. For the STPP initiative, ELC worked in partnership with JLC and re-granted a portion of their grant.

The **NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund** has long been a leader in responding to the STPP crisis for nearly a decade. In 2005, LDF published “Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” a seminal study of the policies and practices that push students from our country’s schools to its criminal justice system. Since the 2005 report, LDF has maintained a national voice in the growing dialogue about these problems, and has engaged with grassroots advocates to confront particular local problems as well.

The **Advancement Project (AP)** - the pre-eminent national organization focused on defining, analyzing, highlighting and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. Its decade of local, state and national work has made it a leader among educational justice organizations, due to its deep content expertise and the comprehensive, supportive advocacy strategies it employs to help its community partners. Since its inception, AP has consistently proved itself to be an effective advocate and partner, substantially reducing the suspension, expulsion and school-based arrest rates in each community in which it has worked. AP was therefore well placed to serve in a coordinating role for OSI’s STPP grantees. They have aimed to leverage each organization’s expertise and strengths, to reinforce organizational relationships and combined efforts, coordinate communications strategies, develop shared policy priorities, support each other’s efforts on key issues as needed, and work efficiently together throughout the grant.