

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FUND
DOCKET II – JULY 11, 2011
PROPOSED GRANT RECOMMENDATION BLURBS

In total, SOF is considering nine grant recommendations. Four of the recommendations connect to SOF's research and development exploration of the role that art and culture play in advancing social justice goals. The remaining grant considerations are recommended as part of US Program's continuing investigation of New Orleans and Louisiana as priority locales: three of them build on an initial assessment conducted by the Strategic Opportunities Fund in 2010 to evaluate the need for rapid response grant-making during the early months of the BP oil disaster. One is a proposed co-fund with the Transparency and Integrity Fund.

Arts & Culture Advancing Social Justice

Anna Deveare Smith Works, Inc.

Amount and term TBD (general support)

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.

The Opportunity Agenda

Amount TBD over 6 months (project support)

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2006 to engage social justice leaders and organizations in connecting with core American values and growing a sustained base of support for opportunity and human rights in the United States. Specifically, the organization works to develop a stronger, more strategic communications capacity and voice for the social justice community, connected to applied research and advocacy. Based in New York City, the organization works collaboratively with other advocacy groups spanning isolated issues and constituencies across the U.S. as it seeks to build the national will to expand opportunity in America. The project to be supported is *Creative Change 2011*, a convening at the intersection of art and social justice. The retreat will bring together a diverse group of leaders – advocates, artists, media makers, organizers, donors, and policy makers – linked by their commitment to transformative social change. Designed to move the social justice sector towards greater innovation and to create a channel through which artists can connect with advocates. The

Initiative serves as a catalyst for inspiration and action, incubating new ideas, relationships, and opportunities to move beyond traditional modes of organizing and activating constituencies.

Maryland Institute College of Art

Amount and term TBD (project support)

Founded in 1826 and based in Baltimore, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) is among the top visual arts colleges in the nation and is dedicated to the education of professional artists and designers. MICA annually attracts more than 400 of the world's best and brightest artists and designers from around the country and the globe. Many are specifically drawn to MICA's socially relevant curriculum, which takes students out of the classroom and into the community. There they work directly with social change advocates and city residents – from families navigating the juvenile justice system, to community health workers in East Baltimore, to young men being served by the Men's Center. This grant will support MICA to plan, develop, and launch a two-year project that will: map the arts-based social change assets being created and employed throughout Baltimore; connect Baltimore's arts-based social justice practitioners to each other in ways that serve to strengthen their work; and, in partnership with SOF grantee partner Animating Democracy, connect local action to national impact. The project has the potential to serve as a national model that can be replicated in other communities.

Animating Democracy (fiscal sponsor: Americans for the Arts)

Amount and term TBD (project support)

Launched in 1999 as a project of American for the Arts, Animating Democracy nurtures civic engagement through arts and culture. Animating Democracy's emphasis on the vital role of the arts in a democratic society connects to all three of Americans for the Arts' mission goals. The work is based on the premise that democracy is animated when an informed public is engaged in the issues affecting people's daily lives by: contributing unique programs, settings, and creative approaches that reach new and diverse participants; stimulating public dialogue about and engagement with civic issues; and inspiring action to make change. This is a renewal consideration of a 2009-10 grant to Animating Democracy for their art and social change *Mapping Initiative*, which included: the development of an annotated list of funders; a centralized, comprehensive online registry of art and social change initiatives and organizations; and a typology and vocabulary that helps distinguish different streams of practice and intended civic and social outcomes, while also advancing unifying language for the field. Renewed funding would support the next phase of the Mapping Initiative as well as the interrelated *Impact Initiative*, a project launched with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to foster evaluation and assessment practices for social issue-focused art and culture work. In its next phase, the *Impact Initiative* seeks to: improve the quality and efficacy of arts for change work through better assessment and evaluation; synthesize and disseminate relevant indicators and methods for credible and useful evaluation; and communicate the impact of arts for change work.

City/State Based

Southern Mutual Help Association (SMHA)

1 year planning grant – up to \$80,000

SMHA was founded in 1969 to address the oppressive plantation conditions in Louisiana's cane fields. SMHA is a highly respected and collaborative convening organization that has worked tirelessly in response to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike, and is now organizing to help Louisiana's fishers, families and communities survive the unprecedented doom they are facing in the wake of the massive BP oil spillage. SMHA identifies the need for a comprehensive approach to the long-term consequences of the crisis caused by the BP oil disaster. They have grave concerns that BP's focal concern is to mitigate the damage to themselves and that there is subsequently a lack of stringent and objective data collection on the overall impact of the oil seepage not only on the environment but on people's health. There is a similar lack of trust that government will do any better on this front. Given these conditions SMHA has identified a 6-prong response that begins to address the long-term consequences of the BP disaster. They seek upfront resources to help them further develop their strategic plan, and to identify and convene local and national allies. This would be the purpose of an OSF planning grant. There is no expectation that OSF would subsequently fund plan implementation unless distinct pieces of that plan are consistent with OSF priorities.

Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA)

1 year grant to support youth organizing – \$30,000-\$40,000

VAYLA is a youth-led, youth organizing and development organization in New Orleans East dedicated to the empowerment of Vietnamese American and under-represented youth. Launched in 2006, they operate programs for participating youth (education, health, young women leadership), and lead active campaigns on environmental justice, educational equity, and ensuring a healthy future. Youth organizing groups in New Orleans are highly collaborative in a state where collaboration is rare. VAYLA helped form and is an active member of the Power of a Million Minds Alliance. They are currently leading the Raise Your Hand Campaign, which is a concerted, localized educational equity effort and is a primary focus of VAYLA's civic engagement and social change agenda. In response to the BP spillage, VAYLA youth are working to ensure Vietnamese American fishermen have voice, and capacity to respond. Young people are developing a series of videos to help raise the community's voice. In a survey of fishermen, they identified a number of needs that are at the center of VAYLA's advocacy efforts including language access, health care, jobs, and job counseling by members of their own community with the language and cultural skills necessary.

Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVN CDC)

1 year grant for direct services to Vietnamese fishermen and families \$30,000-\$40,000

MQVN CDC was established in 2006 to assist Vietnamese Americans in the Greater New Orleans area, beginning in New Orleans East, rebuild their lives and community after Hurricane Katrina. Their work encompasses health care, environmental and agricultural concerns, education, housing, social services, economic development, and culture and the arts. MQVN CDC provided emergency relief assistance to

over 3,000 Vietnamese American residents post-Katrina and engaged nearly 1,000 community members in identifying needs and articulating priorities for neighborhood rebuilding. They are now engaged in assisting the short- and long-term needs of hundreds of fisher folk affected by the BP oil drilling disaster. Services include claims filing assistance, help in obtaining necessary documentation, explanation of timeline and emergency and final payments, referrals to bilingual technical assistance providers, as well as referrals to other bilingual technical assistance providers, workforce development information, and assistance with applications for SNAPs benefits. They have most recently embarked on an innovative “promotora”-like project with leaders from the community going door to door to document emerging health problems and needs arising from the spillage and subsequent clean-up efforts that put the fishermen and their families at grave risk.

Innocence Project New Orleans (IPNO)

1 year general support grant to sustain policy intervention: \$50,000

IPNO represents innocent prisoners serving life sentences in Louisiana and south Mississippi, and assists them with their transition if they are released. IPNO works in the two states with the country's highest incarceration rates and the highest rates of wrongful conviction. By identifying and remedying cases and causes of wrongful conviction, they engage in high impact, frontline advocacy in the courts of law and public opinion, and lead community-based responses into the mistakes made by our criminal justice system. Since its inception, IPNO has secured the freedom for 19 wrongfully convicted prisoners – the second highest number in the country and preceded by the national Innocence Project based in New York.

IPNO is facing an immediate need for the short-term infusion of funds to maintain their policy focus in addition to their regular case work. Viewed as one of the most prolific and successful of IP’s nationally, IPNO is at risk of severely curtailing its critical policy interventions that have led to unprecedented advances in the maintenance of evidence, and compensation for the wrongfully convicted. One of their unique innovations has been the creation of ASPIRES, a working group of prosecutors, police, defense, judges, and evidence clerks to devise and implement best practices in evidence collection, storage, and preservation in New Orleans. This grant would be recommended in consultation with CJF staff.

Code for America

1 year project support \$150,000 (\$100,000 from Strategic Opportunities Fund; \$50,000 from Transparency & Integrity Fund)

Code for America (CFA) is a competitive fellowship program that pairs municipal governments with leading talent in the technology sector to collaboratively solve civic problems. CFA’s mission is to increase openness, efficiency, and participation in government by building the capacity of government institutions and communities to address key community concerns through technology. This grant would fund support for three fellows working with the city of New Orleans to build a system to gather, manage, and disseminate data about blight and property development. CFA fellows would build the technical infrastructure and practices necessary to creating the system and integrating it into the city’s new 311 system. The fellows will be part of CFA’s multi-city fellowship cohort, benefitting from the program’s collective expertise, support, and information exchange. The fellows would work as part of a team with Denice Ross, a former grantee now working on the city’s IT management team. This grant would build on current investments in open governance in the city and take advantage of the opportunity for open government innovation that currently exists in the Mayor Landrieu administration.