

**STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FUND**  
**DOCKET III – SEPTEMBER 19, 2011**  
**PROPOSED GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF) responds to unforeseen crises or open society challenges that impact the mission of US Programs; conducts research and development in new areas of interest to USP; and implements initiatives that are short-term and of high impact.

SOF recommends 12 grants for approval by either the President or the Interim Director. Of these, 11 grants connect to SOF's research and development initiative that seeks to raise awareness of the potential for art and culture to advance a broad spectrum of social justice concerns and issues that are specifically relevant to U.S. Programs' priorities. The remaining grant is recommended as a renewal for the Gulf Coast Fund as part of US Program's continued support of social justice advocacy in New Orleans and Louisiana and building upon SOF's rapid response grantmaking during the early months of the BP oil disaster.

**Art & Culture Advancing Social Justice**

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**Allied Media Projects**

*Detroit, MI*

*Amount TBD over 2 years (renewal grant; project support)*

Allied Media Projects supports the growth of media-based organizing models and promotes 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 conference has developed both steadily and robustly and now engages more than 1,500 participants each year. AMC conveners exhibit a sophisticated understanding of the role that art, culture and media play in 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. This renewal grant from SOF will provide project support for the AMC.

**Cornerstone Theater**

*Los Angeles, CA*

*Amount TBD over 2 years (renewal grant; project support; co-funded with the Equality and Opportunity Fund)*

Cornerstone Theater's work is based in the belief that community-engaged theater is a significant tool for facilitating dialogue around critical issues as a means of building bridges between and within communities and advancing social change. Over 25 years, the organization

has commissioned more than 50 playwrights to produce more than 75 new works; has trained more than 2,000 students in its unique methodology; and has engaged tens of thousands of community members across the country. Cornerstone plays take up residence in urban neighborhoods and small towns and are staged in parking lots, shopping malls, factories, schools and subway stations. The theater engages local community members in all phases of production as writers, designers, actors, and directors. This renewal grant will provide project support for Teatro Jornalero Sin Fronteras (Day Laborer Theater Without Borders), a theater troupe seeded by Cornerstone in partnership with the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) – which is a current grantee of EOF and D&P. Since fall 2008, the 15-member troupe has been developing and producing short plays and touring them to day labor sites, schools and community centers across Los Angeles County. This grant will also provide project support to Cornerstone in its efforts to deepen its work with an extensive network of national partner organizations by developing a virtual and convening-based hub for the field of community-engaged theater that is advancing social justice.

### **Design Studio for Social Intervention (fiscal sponsor: Third Sector New England)**

*Boston, MA*

*\$100,000 over 2 years (renewal grant; project support; cofounded evenly by SOF and the Democracy and Power Fund)*

The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) borrows methodologies from design practices and implements them in unconventional and innovative ways to build social justice campaigns. The organization brings together designers, community activists, performance artists and youth organizers to translate design theory into public interventions around complex social issues. DS4SI sees social interventions as actions taken to reconfigure social habits that reinforce social problems. Using a five-point methodology of its own design, the organization works with community groups to explore the terrain in which they work, thus enabling them to sharpen their approaches, identify new possibilities and shape their organizing work. In one recent collaboration, DS4SI worked with Community Labor United in Boston to develop a direct action in support of a policy win around weatherization-related employment opportunities for people of color. SOF and D&P share the belief that culture and creativity are essential tools for organizing in the new millennium and believe that DS4SI brings unique and important new ideas to old models of advocacy and organizing. This grant will provide renewed project support for this work over two years.

### **Global Action Project**

*New York, NY*

*\$50,000 over 1 year (prior support through the Youth Media program; project support)*

Founded in 1991, Global Action Project (G.A.P.) has offered media arts and leadership education to thousands of young people living in underserved communities across New York City and the country. G.A.P.'s mission is to engage young people most affected by injustice in building the knowledge, tools and relationships needed to create media for community power, cultural expression and political change. G.A.P. believes that, when used effectively by those fighting for positive change, media has the power to disrupt dominant narratives, tell untold stories, shift public debate, and inspire popular action. To date, G.A.P. youth have created over

130 videos on topics such as education reform, racial justice and immigrant rights. Over the years, G.A.P. has developed an approach to media production that merges young people's critical thinking and action skills with meaningful engagement with community and media production techniques. The resulting program is *Media in Action*, a national training initiative that connects youth media with youth organizers to increase the reach and impact of youth-led, community-based social change efforts. After five years of developing this particular creative initiative for youth engagement in community-based social justice campaigns, G.A.P. is poised to critically assess the impact of its work and contextualize the learning through a national field scan of the needs of youth organizers. The results of this research and evaluation project, which will be conducted in conjunction with the Oakland-based DataCenter, will aim to expose to a broad audience the game-changing power of cultural organizing, storytelling and arts in the hands of young advocates. SOF recommends a one-year project grant to support this work.

### **Inner-City Muslim Action Network**

*Chicago, IL*

*Amount TBD over 2 years (new grant; project support)*

Founded in 1995, Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) is an organization comprised of Muslim students, community residents and leaders responding to the pervasive problems of inner-city poverty and abandonment in their Chicago neighborhoods. IMAN seeks to foster a dynamic and vibrant space for Muslims in urban America by inspiring the larger community towards critical civic engagement exemplifying prophetic compassion in the work for social justice and human dignity beyond the barriers of religion, ethnicity and nationality. IMAN's three major program areas include direct services, organizing and advocacy around a range of issues related to community health and wellness, and arts. Since the organization's inception, art and culture have been integral elements of IMAN's work. In celebrating both traditional Muslim art forms and pop-culture as means of expression, IMAN hosts regular cultural events that draw crowds of thousands. SOF's grant will support IMAN's work in this regard.

### **Kentucky Foundation for Women**

*Louisville, KY*

*\$50,000 over 2 years (new grant; project support)*

The Kentucky Foundation for Women (KFW) was established in 1985 with one of the largest founding gifts of any women's fund in the United States. As a feminist-led, arts-animating, state-based social justice philanthropy, KFW's theory of change is rooted in place but recognizes the need for strong and active partnerships at the community, state and national levels to advance gender equality and justice for all. KFW advocates for grassroots, bottom-up change that is based on an understanding of the lived experiences of local people and an awareness of the structural inequalities that create poverty for Kentuckians and for poor people everywhere. In recent years, the organization has developed a special initiative in its home community of Louisville to demonstrate how creating art with families of incarcerated people strengthens the protective factors for children with incarcerated parents. This grant from SOF will support KFW to expand its arts-based engagement with people who are formerly incarcerated and to grow its collaborative work with the Vera Institute and other regional and national partners in exploring arts-based approaches to reforming the justice system.

**Native Public Media (fiscal sponsor: New America Foundation)**

*Flagstaff, AZ*

*\$50,000 over 1 year (current grantee of the Transparency and Integrity Fund; new SOF grant; project support)*

Native Public Media (NPM) advocates for policies that enable Native people across the US to participate actively in all forms of media. NPM provides direct services to 34 Native-owned public radio stations, mostly based in tribal homelands across 13 states. While retaining close connection to Native public radio, NPM leadership acknowledges that the organization's mission – to expand the voice of Native America – requires a long-term strategy that includes a diverse variety of media platforms. In 2011, NPM is collaborating with the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) to strengthen and expand media-making capacity in Native communities. SOF's grant will support these partners in launching the Tribal Digital Literacy Project, a summer workshop to provide digital media arts training for college credit to participants who will be selected from Native stations and tribal communities across the nation. NPM and IAIA believe that informed, educated and digitally-enabled storytellers can actively support, maintain and advance Native culture for future generations. Through this program, participants will practice art-making that embraces new technologies as a means to strengthen and sustain Native communities, and will leverage the power of media-based storytelling to advance their communities in the social, cultural and economic arenas.

**Penn Center**

*St. Helena Island, SC*

*Amount and term TBD (new grant; general support)*

For nearly 150 years, the Penn Center has been a hub for African American education, cultural preservation and social justice and has engaged tens of thousands of descendants of formerly enslaved Africans living in the southeastern United States, known as the Gullah people. Founded in 1862 as one of the first academic schools for formerly enslaved Africans, the Penn School was established by two Quaker missionaries and named in honor of the great humanitarian William Penn. Over time, the Penn School became a model for advancing the principles of racial equality and justice for all men as it empowered African people through literacy education and in this way prepared people to own land, become homeowners, pursue economic opportunity and act as engaged citizens. When the school was closed in 1948, the institution carried on as the Penn Center and recommitted itself to the stabilization of Gullah culture and the advancement of social, racial and economic justice in the region and across the country. It served as a critical gathering place during the Civil Rights era as the first and only place in the state of South Carolina where racially integrated groups were allowed to meet in the early 1960s, and as a sanctuary for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. SOF's grant will provide general support for the Penn Center as it continues to evolve and extend its work at the intersection of art, culture, education and social justice, and as it leverages the benefits of its appointment as a national interpretive center in the newly designated Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

## **Provisions Learning Project**

*Washington, DC*

*Amount and term TBD (renewal grant; 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. This project grant will provide renewed support for the Provisions Residency Program, which engages leading artists, scholars and activists from the art and social change community. It will also enable Provisions to heighten the visibility of its work, create greater access to its resources and materials, generate new research and build new relationships and partnerships – including a new institutional collaboration with George Mason University – across the field of art and social justice.

## **REACH LA**

*Los Angeles, CA*

*Amount TBD over 2 years (renewal grant; project support)*

REACH LA (Realistic Education in Action Coalition to foster Health) is a youth-driven organization whose mission is to educate, motivate and mobilize urban youth of color to improve their own communities through the delivery and promotion of health and wellness services, leadership and advocacy. REACH LA trains low-income youth of color (ages 15-29) and empowers them with skills to develop innovative program initiatives that lead to sustainable social change in their own peer community and beyond. REACH LA was founded in 1992 by three media artists with a vision for building the capacity of young people to affect social and systemic change in their community and for creating youth movements that integrate wellness, arts and culture, leadership, social justice, social enterprise, policy and advocacy work, and coalition-building. With this grant, SOF will provide support for REACH LA as it: continues the project funded by SOF in 2010 to convene 20 national House/Ball leaders and develop a National House/Ball Community HIV/AIDS Agenda; and launches and expands a local and national media-based campaign, "Don't Censor Yourself, Speak Up", to address social injustice in the African American and Latino LGBT youth communities and to inspire and empower youth to improve their own lives and communities.

## **Split This Rock**

*Washington, DC*

*Amount TBD over 2 years (renewal grant; general support)*

Split This Rock is a Washington, DC-based organization that emerged out of DC Poets Against the War with the mission of calling poets to a greater role in public life and fostering a national

community of socially engaged poets. Split This Rock believes that poets have a unique role to play in advancing social change – as innovators, visionaries, truth tellers and restorers of language. Split This Rock believes that poets, having long played a central role in movements for social change in this country, give voice to the voiceless, name the unnamable and speak directly from the individual and collective conscience. In March 2008, Split This Rock held its first national festival, attracting both local and national poets, activists and audience members. In March 2010, Split This Rock produced its second biannual festival with its largest attendance ever, and will look toward expanding the convening further in 2012. Split This Rock is currently building its organization as a national body that will support the ongoing networking, advocacy, and organizing work of poets of provocation and witness. SOF seeks to renew its support for Split This Rock through this multi-year general support grant.

### **Advancing Social Justice in the Gulf Coast Region**

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#### **Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health (fiscal sponsor: Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors)**

*New Orleans, LA*

*Amount and term TBD (renewal grant; project support)*

The Gulf Coast Fund (GCF) is a grantmaking initiative that supports progressive movement building in the Gulf Coast region, including the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The Fund aims to grow the capacity of local, state and regional efforts to engage and empower residents displaced or otherwise threatened by regional disasters. Since its inception in September 2005, GCF has made grants to more than 145 grassroots and community-based organizations working on a wide range of issues and has, in the process, created a vital network of individuals and communities working for a just and sustainable future for the Gulf Coast. At the Fund's core is an Advisory Board of leading policy advocates, community activists and grassroots organizers from the four referenced states, representing a broad swath of constituencies, geographies, and issues. This project grant will provide renewed support from SOF for GCF's work related to the BP oil disaster as well as its core grantmaking program for local and regional social justice organizations.