

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FUND
DOCKET III – SEPTEMBER 20, 2012
PROPOSED GRANT RECOMMENDATION BLURBS

As a core fund of U.S. Programs the Strategic Opportunities Fund (SOF) has operated as a fund that responds to timely opportunities to impact issues relevant to the overall mission of U.S. Programs. This work has been undertaken through three functions served by the fund: research and development, rapid response and special initiatives. In general work taken up by the Fund is time-limited, with commitments to specific initiatives not extending beyond three years. **In 2012, SOF has undertaken a discrete initiative that seeks to reduce the inappropriate and harmful use of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in public schools in an effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.** This builds on a 2009 SOF initiative that aimed to inform the debate in Congress around the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind/Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB/ESEA) about ways in which reliance on standardized tests had unintended consequences on school climate and disciplinary policies.

Special Initiative: Dismantling School-to-Prison Pipeline

Center for Community Alternatives

Amount and term TBD (project support)

Founded in 1981 and based in New York City, the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) is a leader in the field of community-based alternatives to incarceration. Its mission is to promote justice and a reduced reliance on incarceration through advocacy, services, and public policy development that promote civil and human rights. CCA serves youth at risk; families in crisis; people struggling to address drug and alcohol problems and HIV and AIDS; and people who have been involved in the criminal justice system who are seeking community reintegration and productive, law-abiding lives. Through its strengths-based approach, CCA emphasizes personal empowerment, the cultivation of self-respect, and exercising concern for one's community.

The proposed grant will support CCA to map out a campaign specifically to counteract the use of school disciplinary records in the college admissions process. The goal of their campaign is to eliminate the use of both criminal history and school disciplinary records in the college admissions process, particularly in light of the disparate impact of these records on people of color. They propose working with a wide array of potential allies including college admissions staff, high school guidance staff, the DOE Office of Civil Rights and grassroots organizations.

This campaign would build on CCA's research and advocacy on the use of criminal history screening in college admissions procedures and the impact of this practice on young people, especially youth of color. It issued a report in 2011: *The Use of Criminal Justice Records in College Admissions Reconsidered*, that recommended that colleges and universities should refrain from engaging in criminal justice information (CJI) screening and that an institution which continues to perform CJI screening should adopt policies and procedures that will help mitigate the negative effects of such screening and make the process more transparent. CCA currently hosts a Soros Justice Fellow, Benay Rubenstein, and is also a grantee of the Campaign for a New Drug Policy.

Gay Straight Alliance Network, CA

Amount TBD over 1 year (renewed project support)

To provide support for the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) Network's racial and economic justice project. Founded in 1998, GSA Network is a diverse, youth-driven organization working to empower youth activists fighting homophobia and trans phobia in schools throughout California. The organization seeks to create supportive school communities where all students are safe to learn, free from discrimination, harassment, and violence based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. More recently, GSA Network has extended the scope of its work to supporting the development of the GSA movement nationally, while sustaining and deepening core programs in California.

Project support for GSA Network's racial and economic justice project will cultivate the leadership of queer youth of color in the GSA movement nationally and ensure that GSAs are welcoming and empowering to young people of color. GSA Network will continue to engage a range of educational and racial justice advocates advancing a shared policy agenda that bridges the needs of students of color and LGBTQ youth of color. Issues to be addressed include school safety, school funding and equity, culturally-relevant curriculum, and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. The prior grant to GSA Network came out of the Equality and Opportunity Fund.

Just and Fair Schools Fund (Public Interest Projects)

Amount and term TBD (project support – to be jointly funded by SOF and CBMA)

The Just and Fair Schools Fund (JFSF) supports grassroots organizing initiatives that work to eliminate harsh school discipline policies and practices and that uphold the right to education for all youth. Zero-tolerance policies, aggressive policing in schools and other extreme school discipline practices lead to high rates of suspensions, expulsions and arrests of students. As a result, large numbers of youth are pushed out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Across the country, youth, parents, and concerned allies are forging a movement to secure meaningful and sustainable changes in how public schools address student discipline. The JFSF seeks to bolster this powerful community-based leadership for reform on the local, state and national levels, as highlighted in its report *Communities Turning the Tide on School Discipline*.

The Fund's goals are to support organized communities with targeted support and greater capacity to collaborate in the interest of shifting the national discourse from "zero tolerance" to keeping all children learning in school; support organizing by youth and parents who are positioned to convince schools, school districts and states to adopt prevention-oriented and evidence-based school discipline that respects students' right to education and fosters engaging learning climates; reduce suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests, push-outs and drop-outs; and increase funder interest and support for community organizing on school discipline reform.

The JFSF was launched with lead support from The Atlantic Philanthropies and now operates as a donor collaborative that includes Atlantic, the Falk Foundation, the Gill Foundation, and the NoVo Foundation. Together with these funding partners, the JFSF and its grantee partners are raising awareness of the devastating repercussions of the school-to-prison pipeline while building broader support for effective grassroots strategies to dismantle the pipeline.