

**US Programs State Strategies Initiative
Blurbs for Docket I and Out of Docket Recommendations
February 7, 2011**

The State Strategies Initiative (SSI), approved by the US Programs Board of Directors in September, 2010, is designed to enhance the internal coordination, strategic integration, and overall impact of US Programs efforts at the state and local levels through grantmaking and operational work. In 2010-11, the Initiative is developing field informed strategic plans in Louisiana and Texas, two states with a long history of USP programmatic interest, significant existing funding, compelling demographics, and breaking opportunities for defending and expanding open society.

SSI's nine initial recommendations, supported by the Project Management Team, include seven small grants for out of docket consideration and two larger grants for the March 14 docket. These recommendations include six grants to address Texas's fiscal crisis, defend immigrants in the state from attacks, and spotlight the responsible allocation of funds from a groundbreaking housing settlement in the Lone Star State. Two recommendations continue USP's work to build Texas's independent media capacity as a vehicle for communicating open society ideas and efforts. The final recommendation, for Public Interest Projects, supports on the ground philanthropic capacity in Louisiana and Texas, research and facilitation of the two states' power mapping processes, and the new State Capacity and Innovation Fund collaborative.

These recommendations are representative of SSI's approach to grantmaking: coordinated grants to multiple organizations that each bring unique strengths to strategies that advance or respond to significant policy opportunities. While addressing policy opportunities, the grants build sustained state capacity, including forging new alliances, connecting different regions of the state, connecting states to national strategies; and bridging together civic engagement, research, advocacy, service, media, and philanthropic strategies.

Addressing the State Fiscal Crisis

TexasForward (fiscal sponsor: Center for Public Policy Priorities)
\$50,000 project support, one year

To support the TexasForward project of the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP), an Austin-based nonpartisan, non-profit policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. CPPP pursues this mission through independent research, policy analysis and development, public education, advocacy, coalition-building and technical assistance. Texas policymakers widely regard the Center as a source of credible, accessible, and timely research and policy analysis. This grant would aid CPPP's leadership in TexasForward, a coalition of organizations promoting a balanced approach to Texas budget decisions, particularly at a time when the Texas state budget shortfall is projected

to be \$25- 27 billion over the next two years. TexasForward member organizations represent a broad spectrum of interests and are committed to applying a balanced approach to furthering Texas's economic and social well being. TexasForward is helping to lead an effort to conduct research, analysis, and public education on the current budget crisis and the coalition will focus on creating awareness of the need for structural change to the state's ongoing revenue system to meet the future needs of Texas, one of the nation's fastest growing and most rapidly diversifying states. Background: The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a current Democracy and Power Fund grantee.

Confronting Attacks on Immigrants

Border Network for Human Rights

\$50,000 project support, eight months

To support the Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance's (RITA) campaign *Texas Can Do Better*. RITA is a project of the Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR), an El Paso-based grassroots membership organization that combines community organizing, leadership development, litigation, and policy advocacy to build the voice and power of those who are hardest hit by border and immigration policies, and to address the systemic injustices facing border communities. Its mission is to facilitate the education, organizing, and participation of marginalized communities of El Paso, Texas and in southern New Mexico to defend and promote human and civil rights. RITA is a newly emerging coalition of Texas-based diverse stakeholders that emerged from BNHR efforts and continues to be one of their long term projects. This grant will support RITA's campaign *Texas Can Do Better* and specifically the campaign's efforts to: 1) educate the immigrant community and allies on anti-immigrant proposals in Texas and 2) facilitate the civic engagement of immigrant communities and allies through a series of community events. This is one of three grants to organizations collaborating, communicating, and sharing expertise to advance common strategies on issues that affect the immigrant community in Texas. In this collaboration, RITA will focus on community mobilization and educating the immigrant community in Texas on the impact of anti-immigration proposals. Background: The Border Network for Human Rights is a current Equality and Opportunity Fund grantee and the Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance project is currently funded by the Democracy and Power Fund.

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (fiscal sponsor: ProTex: Network for a Progressive Texas)

\$50,000 project support, eight months

To support research, communications, and coordination efforts intended to complement the efforts of pro-immigrant groups in Texas. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) is committed to identifying and working towards real solutions to the problems facing Texas' juvenile and criminal justice systems. It does this by providing data-driven policy analysis, partnering with like-minded organizations and associations, and promoting evidence-based criminal justice solutions that embody the principles of effective management, accountability, public safety, and human and civil rights.

Through this project, TCJC will dedicate its skills and expertise in research, coordination, and communications to assist pro-immigrant groups in their efforts to educate the media, unlikely allies, key stakeholders, and the public in general about the negative ramifications of anti-immigrant policies. Goals include: 1) providing timely research and information to organizations, law enforcement, media and community members; 2) authoring press releases and editorials for existing partners and unlikely allies; 3) monitoring progress of anti-immigrant organizations; and 4) coordinating meetings and external communications among pro-immigrant groups. This is one of three grants to organizations collaborating, communicating, and sharing expertise to advance common strategies on issues that affect the immigrant community in Texas. In this collaboration, TCJC will focus on providing communications and research assistance to partner organizations. Background: The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition is a current grantee of the Criminal Justice Fund.

Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)

\$50,000 project support, eight months

To support analysis and education on immigration-related state public policy proposals brought in Texas. Founded in 1968, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) has been a leading Latino legal civil rights organization for over forty years. Its mission is to advance fair treatment of and opportunities for Latinos through advocacy, communications, education, and litigation. Through this project, MALDEF aims for broader retention of available legal protections and supports for immigrants in Texas and to use the local experiences to advance immigrant rights in the national debate. In 2011, MALDEF will track and analyze immigration-related proposals and educate community coalitions on these proposals. This is one of three grants to organizations collaborating, communicating, and sharing expertise to advance common strategies on issues that affect the immigrant community in Texas. In this collaboration, MALDEF will provide expertise on policy, research, and advocacy, including development of public education materials for use by partner organizations. Background: MALDEF is a current grantee of the Equality and Opportunity and Democracy and Power Funds.

Spotlighting a Landmark Housing Settlement

La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)

\$200,000 project support, one year

To support an increase of housing organizing capacity in the Rio Grande Valley via a grant to La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE), a San Juan, TX-based non-profit membership organization that was established by César Chávez. LUPE anchors the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network, a ten organization, Marguerite Casey Foundation-supported effort representing over 10,000 families in the region, home to three of the nation's poorest counties. LUPE will expand its own housing organizing capacity in the region and will regrant a portion of the funds to three other Equal Voice Network member organizations: Texas Organizing Project (a current Democracy and Power Fund

grantee), Proyecto Azteca, and ARISE. This grant and one recommended for policy partner Texas Low Income Housing Information Services is part of a larger project partnership with the Ford Foundation (Ford is likely to contribute \$100,000) to build the policy advocacy capacity of low-income leaders and their community organizations. This project seeks to involve community-based organizations representing low-income constituencies in identifying and directing the use of millions of dollars of hurricane recovery funds available through a groundbreaking recent \$3.2 billion U.S. Housing and Urban Development Conciliation Agreement in Texas. This settlement has the potential to create a national civil rights model for fair housing. Background: La Union del Pueblo Entero is a current Democracy and Power Fund grantee.

Texas Low Income Housing Information Service

\$50,000 project support, one year

To support Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS), a Texas advocacy organization formed to effect change in low-income housing policies. This grant is part of a partnership with the Ford Foundation to build the policy advocacy capacity of low-income leaders and their community organizations, and involve them in identifying and directing the use of millions of dollars of hurricane recovery funds for infrastructure repair, replacement, or relocation for families in the Rio Grande Valley. National civil rights and fair housing experts view the provisions of a recent \$3.2 billion HUD Conciliation Agreement as creating a huge opportunity to leverage a much stronger role for grassroots organizations to direct change in their communities, and to substantially increase government transparency and accountability. This grant and one recommended for La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) – with regranting to three other member organizations of the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network – will help build the policy capacity of community organizations working in the colonias in the Rio Grande Valley to inform, shape, and take advantage of this historic opportunity.

Supporting Independent Journalism

Public News Service

\$50,000 project support, one year

To support the Boulder, Colorado-based Public News Service (PNS), a member-supported independent network of state-based news services that leverages use of traditional and online media to amplify the public interest perspective through mainstream and alternative news outlets on a daily basis. PNS is an AP-style news service that utilizes sliding scale dues from community-based organizations to hire top quality producers who then produce high quality public interest news that is multi-platform, broad in reach, and cost effective. PNS has a particularly strong reach in urban and rural communities through its radio news service that reaches commercial radio stations that have had their own news departments decimated in recent years. Through this grant, PNS will launch a Texas affiliate – the Texas News Service – and provide eight Texas-based OSF grantees with access to its news-producing service with placement in both English and Spanish language media. The eight Texas-based OSF grantees are also

strategically linked to other SSI grant recommendations to organizations working to address Texas's fiscal crisis, defend immigrants in the state from attacks, and spotlight the responsible allocation of funds from a groundbreaking housing settlement. This service has the potential to be a strong complement to existing US Programs' funding, via the Transparency and Integrity Fund, to support independent media as a vehicle to broaden the reach of open society perspectives and priorities. With this grant and the recommendation below, USP will soon be funding five Texas rooted media efforts, also including the *Texas Observer*, *Texas Tribune*, and National Public Radio's state legislative reporting project.

Vox Veritas LLC, dba Rio Grande Guardian

\$30,000 project support, one year

To support the Rio Grande Guardian, an online news service that was established in 2005 to cover issues important to the people of the South Texas border region, a key region for an emerging OSF state strategy in Texas. Since 2005, the Rio Grande Guardian has accumulated a large readership in this underserved area with stories that have been picked up by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, ABC World News Tonight, CNN, and all of Texas's major newspapers. It attracts 110,000 unique viewers monthly, including many key elected officials and business leaders in South Texas and at the state capitol in Austin. An OSF project support grant would enable the Rio Grande Guardian to expand coverage on the colonias, health care, education, environment, and veterans' issues. Most importantly, this would allow the Guardian to expand its coverage of the Texas state legislature at a time of massive budget shortfalls that will likely lead to deep cuts to public services of importance to the people of the Rio Grande Valley. The Guardian is the only media outlet south of San Antonio to have a presence at the state legislature and it has developed an innovative partnership with local TV news stations in the Valley to broadcast legislative updates and issues of interest to even wider audiences.

State Strategies Philanthropic Coordination

Public Interest Projects

Amount TBA, projections only below, project support

To support on the ground philanthropic capacity in Louisiana and Texas (\$135,000); assist with the research and facilitation of the two states' power mapping processes (\$100,000); support ongoing coordination of state strategies work (\$160,000); and join a new funding collaborative, the State Capacity and Innovation Fund, that has been launched with initial support from The Atlantic Philanthropies (\$250,000- 500,000, contingent on whether one or two years support).

This docket has been prepared by Cristóbal Alex, Terri Bailey, Shruti Garg, Raquiba LaBrie, Archana Sahgal, Jeronimo Saldaña, and Bill Vandenberg, with coordination by Terri Bailey, the State Strategies Initiative's lead consultant, and support from SSI's Project Management Team. Please refer questions and comments to Jeronimo Saldaña, program associate for Special Initiatives, at jsaldana@sorosny.org.