

## **Rebuilding Transparent and Open Government in New Orleans**

This session will explore the opportunities and challenges in working for greater government transparency and openness in New Orleans. With a bitter history of racial and economic inequality, corrupt government, and neglect, the problems of government transparency in New Orleans parallel those in many other countries where OSI has worked. Lack of open and accountable government played a role in creating the divisions and stratifications that existed in New Orleans prior to Katrina, problems exacerbated by the often disastrous government response after the storm. At the same time, the civic revival since August 2005 has been most impressive, providing a new will for change in that city.

This moment offers a perfect opportunity to reflect upon the history of open governance in New Orleans both before and since Katrina, the efforts to launch a new transparency initiative, and the steps ahead in building that initiative. The New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance and the *New Orleans Lens* have just received grants from OSI to support their respective launches, marking the first attempt in memory by a collection of organizations to work together to take on the shared agenda of unveiling the workings of city government. (Descriptions attached). A key concern is how the larger context of racial politics in New Orleans influences transparency efforts and coalition building more generally. Given the local focus of these projects, another question is how best to draw on national resources to support the effort without undermining the building of local capacity.

Moderator: Linda Usdin, Co-Coordinator, New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance

Panelists: Lucas Diaz, Puentes  
Karen Gadbois, *New Orleans Lens*  
Denice Ross, Greater New Orleans Community Data Center  
Timolynn Sams, Neighborhoods Partnership Network

### **Questions to frame the discussion:**

How has the lack of transparency and openness impacted efforts to rebuild New Orleans communities since Katrina?

What are the New Orleans-specific challenges in building and advancing an open government reform agenda in New Orleans?

What role will your organization play in advancing open governance in New Orleans?

How will the coalition work on open governance advance your organization's own work?

How do open governance issues intersect with criminal justice reform efforts in New Orleans?  
How about housing issues?