

**OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
U.S. PROGRAMS
OPERATING PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES
September 2009**

U.S. Programs recognizes that power is not broadly shared and that inequalities cut across multiple lines, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and citizenship. To build a just and open society, we support efforts to expand accountability for those currently in power and to build power for historically excluded groups. We work to ensure that the benefits, burdens and opportunities of society are distributed equally among all groups within our society.

- We prioritize grantmaking to groups grounded in communities that have not had access to resources and that work on community-identified priorities.
- We increase our knowledge of ways to change systems and impact the field and we share our learning with our grantees, other funders, and the public.
- We collaborate with other social justice funders to fund intermediaries, to facilitate across groups and networks and to pool our resources to create a greater impact on the field at large.
- We ask our grantees to produce and regularly update inclusion plans that include pipeline strategies for leadership development and succession.
- We train OSI staff to assess the management, governance and operational practices of our grants by providing a concrete menu of support strategies, including establishing goals for increasing leadership of underrepresented groups.
- We provide technical assistance to grantees to help them become more inclusive.

U.S. Programs continually seeks to identify the most critical and urgent threats to open society and to respond nimbly and flexibly to emerging challenges. We take on controversial issues and support innovative solutions.

- We partner with groups on the ground to identify critical threats and support innovative strategies.
- We map the resources and power of the fields we support to determine where OSI resources can be most effectively deployed.
- We continually seek out new knowledge generated by the fields we support.
- We invest funds in research and analysis which we share with internal and external partners.
- We support the development of paradigm-shifting frameworks for solving entrenched social problems.
- We encourage and support public debate on challenging and unpopular issues.
- We reserve a substantial portion of our grantmaking budget to support rapid response needs and opportunities.

U.S. Programs develops grantmaking guidelines that are transparent and accessible, and engages in affirmative outreach efforts to ensure a broad and diverse pool of grantees.

- We are transparent about our own theory of change and the specific goals of our funds and campaigns.
- We publish our requirements for general support, project grants, and the approval process.
- We have clear guidelines for responding to Letters of Inquires and soliciting proposals.
- We share information with grantees about all of our funds and campaigns and encourage them to apply to multiple programs where appropriate.
- We are clear about staff roles and responsibilities and key points of contact for grantees.
- We have guidelines regarding the frequency of site visits and we strive to avoid favoritism or special treatment.
- We provide training to our staff about grantmaking practices and procedures.
- We safeguard against having an undue influence that undermines candid discussion, capacity, strategies, and leadership in the fields we support.
- We facilitate and convene activities in a manner that maximizes the field's expertise, resources and impact.

U.S. Programs evaluates the impact of our programs and asks our grantees to do the same. We believe that evaluation should not be burdensome, but designed to ensure that we learn from our experiences and continue to improve our strategies for social change.

- We have an obligation to evaluate our impact and continually reflect on our practices.
- We are transparent about USP goals and benchmarks that we are seeking to achieve.
- We provide training and other resources to our staff and grantees to foster a learning environment and build capacity for effective evaluation of the work.
- We look at outcomes from a field-wide perspective rather by individual organization, and we use this information to identify gaps and re-examine our strategy.
- We ask grantees to identify what success looks like and how it should be measured.
- We ask grantees to identify their strategic goals and interim benchmarks of progress.
- We ask grantees to track their outcomes.
- We ask grantees to assess U.S. Programs and communicate the results of this feedback back to our grantees.

U.S. Programs encourages and rewards effective collaboration between organizations, communities, constituencies, and sectors. We dedicate time and resources to create opportunities for organizations and leaders to share ideas and develop new strategies.

- We map our grantmaking activity across issues, fields, strategies, and geographic locations to facilitate collaboration.
- We help to connect grantees in different fields who are working toward similar goals.
- We provide assistance and training around effective collaboration.
- We determine grant allotment based on collaboration.
- We engage in joint strategic planning across Funds and Campaigns.
- We streamline our interaction with grantees to make it more efficient for staff and grantees to collaborate.
- We dedicate time in staff meetings and site visits to discuss and plan collaborations.

- We invite staff from other Funds and Campaigns to meetings with grantees.
- We participate in joint site visits to grantees across programs.

U.S. Programs partners with a wide range of organizations and supports a multitude of strategies, including advocacy, organizing, field building, public education, research and litigation. We support the creation of robust, strategic and interconnected fields capable of achieving systemic change at the national, regional, state and local level.

- We engage in resource and power mapping of the fields we support to determine where OSI resources can be most effectively deployed.
- We assess whether resources are directed at the right mix of strategies.
- We share knowledge about effective strategies across programs.
- We help fields establish their own long-term theories of change using multiple strategies.
- We work to ensure that strategies reinforce each other.
- We host practitioner panels where strategy experts share their expertise with staff and grantees.
- We partner with a wider range of organizations to support the development of new ideas and responsible policy solutions at the national, regional, state and local level.