

Fellowship Guidelines

The Open Society Fellowship supports individuals seeking innovative and unconventional approaches to fundamental open society challenges. The fellowship funds work that will enrich public understanding of those challenges and stimulate far-reaching and probing conversations within the Open Society Foundations and in the world.

A fellowship project might identify a problem that has not previously been recognized, develop new policy ideas to address familiar problems, or offer a new advocacy strategy. Fellows should take advantage of the considerable intellectual and logistical resources of the Open Society Foundations and expect to contribute meaningfully to the Foundations' thinking in return.

In evaluating each proposal, the selection committee weighs three factors: the applicant, the topic of the project, and the work product.

The Applicant

The Open Society Fellowship chooses its fellows from a diverse pool of applicants that includes journalists, activists, academics, and practitioners in a variety of fields. Applicants should possess a deep understanding of their chosen subject area and a track record of professional accomplishment.

The fellowship seeks “idea entrepreneurs” from across the world who are ready to challenge conventional wisdom. Successful applicants will be eager to exploit the many resources offered by the Open Society Foundations and be prepared to engage constructively with our global network. Ideal fellows are specialists who can see beyond the parochialisms of their field and possess the tenacity to complete a project of exceptional merit.

The Topic of the Project

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Among the Foundations' core areas of concern are human rights, government transparency, access to information, access to justice, the promotion of civil society and social inclusion. Project themes should cut across these areas of interest. Applicants are encouraged to explore this website to acquaint themselves with the panoply of themes and geographic areas that fall within [the Foundations' purview](#).

Open Society Fellows are currently investigating the unexpected commonalities and differences among seven illicit economies, the corrosive effect of secrecy in post-apartheid South Africa, the role of investigative reporting in combatting the resource “curse” in East Africa, and the pervasive inequalities embedded in Pakistan's justice system.

What these projects share is a zeal for problem-solving, the confidence to test hypotheses against observed reality, and an impatience with conventional or clichéd thinking.

Applicants who are uncertain whether their topic fits within the Foundations' focus areas are invited to submit a brief **letter of inquiry**, accompanied by a CV, before proceeding with the online application process. That letter of inquiry should be addressed to: OSFellows@opensocietyfoundations.org. Letters of inquiry must be submitted at least one month before the next application deadline.

The Work Product

Successful projects should push the boundaries of current thinking and carry lessons that can be applied to a variety of settings. Applicants should carefully consider the impact they want their work to have and the audiences they wish to reach. They should then think creatively about the activities and work products that will reach these audiences most effectively.

Fellows may produce a variety of work products, including publications such as books, reports, or blogs; innovative public-education projects; or the launch of new campaigns or organizations. They may also engage in activities such as hosting panel discussions, traveling to conferences, participating in policy debates, and aggressively promoting their ideas in public venues.

Fellowship projects can include photography, outreach and advocacy around documentary film, and other forms of cultural production. Applicants in the arts must demonstrate rigorous and original thinking about the nexus of cultural expression and social change.

Fellowship Expectations

At the heart of the fellowship are the Open Society Foundations themselves. Fellows are invited to join the rich and diverse Foundations community, a global network of activists and institutions dedicated to defending civil society and improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable citizens.

Fellows are expected to take full advantage of the Foundations' expansive reach and work to bring new people and fresh ideas into the organization's ambit. The program anticipates that most fellows will spend a portion of their fellowship term at one of the organization's main offices, in New York, Washington, London, Brussels, or Budapest, or at a regional foundation. While in residence, they are strongly encouraged to organize and participate in conferences and program events and may be asked to run a seminar involving Foundations staff and outside colleagues. Ultimately, fellows should sharpen the organization's thinking, question its assumptions, and broaden its understanding of pivotal political and social problems.

In order to facilitate these interactions, proficiency in spoken English is required.

Fellowship Placement and Term

The fellowship considers applicants from all parts of the world. Most fellows spend a portion of their term in one or more Open Society Foundation offices. Fellows may work out of multiple offices during their term.

Fellows who wish to work on their project in a country in which they do not have citizenship must satisfy and comply with applicable visa requirements. The fellowship program will help fellows obtain necessary visas and covers all associated costs.

Though most fellowship terms are for one year, the program will consider requests for shorter or longer durations. Slight preference is given to applications for full-time fellowships, but the program will consider applicants who can only work part-time on their projects. The program encourages submissions from applicants with families and will work with fellows to devise a schedule that meets their needs and the program's expectations.

Fellowship Support

Full-time fellows will receive a stipend of \$80,000 or \$100,000, depending on work experience, seniority, and current income. Stipends will be prorated for part-time fellows. The stipend does not necessarily equal the applicant's current salary. In certain cases, fellows will receive additional financial support to enable them to meet the residency expectation.

In most cases, the program will advise fellows on ways to communicate their work to a broader audience and influence current debates. Staff also work to integrate fellows into its networks of individual and organizational partners and grantees.

In addition to the stipend, fellows will receive a project budget. That budget may include expenses such as travel (including airfare and hotel), visa costs, part-time research assistance, conference fees and health insurance. Fellowship expenses should not include operational or programmatic costs, such as employees and physical infrastructure. The purpose of the fellowship is to support individual fellows; therefore the program will only cover individual expenses.

The fellowship does not fund enrollment for degree or non-degree study at academic institutions, including dissertation research.

Please note that under federal tax rules applicable to U.S. private foundations, the Open Society Foundations cannot support lobbying activities. Projects that include lobbying activities will not be funded.

Application and Selection

All interested applicants should complete the online application form listed on the fellowship homepage and submit supporting materials for consideration. Please read the [Tips for a Robust Proposal](#) before applying. Applicants may submit a project proposal or other materials in a language other than English, as long as they also submit an English translation. Certified translations are strongly recommended.

Once the initial information has been entered, applicants receive login details and an ID number that allows them to make additions and revisions to the form until materials are submitted. The ID number should be quoted in any correspondence.

The program strongly encourages applicants to submit only electronic supporting materials. However, if applicants have hard copy materials that they feel are essential to the evaluation of their project, they can list these at the end of the project proposal. Fellowship staff will reach out to applicants should it be necessary to review these materials.

Note: Only applicants without Internet access may send an application by post. A PDF application form can be downloaded below. All others must apply online.

Applications are reviewed year round. Fellowship staff evaluate applications in consultation with Foundation colleagues and outside experts. Reviewers consider whether the applicant's background, track record, and depth of expertise give reason to believe that the project will be successfully completed and whether the applicant offers persuasive evidence that the fellowship project will significantly inform and challenge the Open Society community.



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A small number of applicants are selected as finalists. These finalists are considered by an outside selection committee, which meets twice a year. Applicants should consult the deadlines posted on the fellowship website. Proposals will be evaluated within four months of the deadline for submissions.

The fellowship program considers applications subject to funding availability.

Contact Information

For more information please contact: OSFellows@opensocietyfoundations.org.