

**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**

Section 172 Report

Open Society Foundation London

October 2021

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This is the Section 172 report of Open Society Foundation London.

Open Society Foundation London works in close alignment and collaboration with the Open Society Foundations global network to further its objective “to promote open society values worldwide.” The company’s sole member is Open Society Institute, based in the United States.

Key stakeholders

As a grant-making foundation, our key stakeholders are our grantees and staff.

Grantees

The Open Society Foundation London awards grants, scholarships, and fellowships to organizations and individuals who share Open Society values, who have a vision, and whose efforts will lead to lasting social change. Building long-term relationships of trust with the organizations we support, and understanding their health, effectiveness, and resilience is a core element of our approach to organization-centered grant making. This understanding enables staff to make better decisions about if and how to provide funding to help organizations develop, achieve their aspirations, and contribute to our short- and long-term goals. We provide different types of grants, from project-level grants to general operating support covering the day-to-day costs of operations with an emphasis on maximizing flexible funding. Guided mostly by our programme staff, the kind of grants any Open Society programme makes depends on its strategy and its vision of how to use its budget most effectively. We also offered a range of scholarships and fellowships to individuals.

The Open Society Foundation London works in collaboration with other grant-making entities within the network to promote open society values. The Open Society Foundation London’s own grantmaking has focused on facilitating our Scholarships and Economic Justice Programs.

Information about the vast majority of Open Society grants awarded since 2016 is available on our [website](#) with details on 2020 grants expected to be published later in 2021. The database contains as complete a picture as possible of our grant making, although we do omit grants and modify descriptions under some circumstances, including where it is necessary to comply with personal data

protection laws, and when disclosure may put at risk the safety or work of a grantee or the Open Society Foundations.

We expect that employees and others acting on our behalf operate in a manner that is fair, respectful, and cooperative with those we serve. The Open Society Foundations maintain ombudspersons to receive complaints about abuse of authority, including by Open Society programs and national or regional foundations, or by members of Open Society boards or staff. The principal responsibilities of ombudspersons involve investigating complaints, facilitating the resolution of disputes, identifying particular abuses or patterns of abuse that warrant attention by the president or Global Board, and making recommendations to the president and/or Global Board that are intended to stop or reduce abuses.

There is a guide and protocol that staff are required to follow when responding to allegations of discrimination, including sexual harassment, within grantee organizations. Our website makes available a [policy](#), setting out our expectations of organizational grantees in handling such allegations within their organizations, as well as providing information about how the Foundations approach these situations.

Staff

The focus in 2020 was to keep staff safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to COVID-19, staff who were travelling were repatriated and the office closed shortly before the U.K. government announced the first lockdown. The office remained closed throughout 2020 and will be re-opened when it is safe to do so in a phased manner to accommodate staff needs and provision of a safe workplace. Ergonomic assessments of home working were made for all staff and equipment and furniture supplied as needed. All international travel was stopped and measures put in place to support the health and mental well-being of staff, such as reduced hours on Fridays.

Key decisions

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

We are rethinking Open Society’s strategic focus and priorities, to better equip us to address the challenges of a vastly changed landscape today. While our mission remains the same—to build vibrant and inclusive societies—we will be making difficult choices on how we focus and structure our work for greater impact. This will result in continuing to work on certain portfolios while significantly decreasing or winding down work on others.

Open Society over the years has taken on a wide range of issues, and we believe a greater focus in fewer areas will help increase our impact. We plan to coordinate our global work around key areas with significantly larger commitments, a more integrated approach, and a strengthened ability to pivot quickly and take risks on cutting-edge issues. We plan to work with partners in developing short-term, high-impact campaigns and longer-term global initiatives. We also plan to set aside a greater portion of our budget in reserves to respond quickly to emerging circumstances.

Under this new vision, our core priorities will fall under three enduring commitments framed to address the most profound challenges and opportunities for open societies: Justice (advancing societies characterized by the rule of law and fairness and empowering civil societies to hold governments accountable); Equity (ensuring the protection of universal basic rights and freedoms, including equal access to resources, services, and opportunities; and addressing the unequal burdens of global challenges, such as the climate crisis or migration); and Expression (broadening public access to information and ideas, defending freedom of thought and artistic expression, and cultivating and encouraging heterodox viewpoints, particularly in closed societies).

COVID-19 RESPONSE

In April 2020, the Open Society Foundations announced a commitment of \$130 million as an initial emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic, part of a phased response focusing on the most intense flashpoints. Given the massive disruption caused by the pandemic to our previous projections, the president of the Foundations asked thematic, regional, and advocacy programs and regional foundations to transfer a significant portion of their remaining 2020 budgets to a central reserve to free up resources to fund this and future responses. Some of the diverted funding came from the suspension of planned grants that could not

proceed under current circumstances—such as funding for grantee travel, or for events, convenings, or field research. However, the transfer of funding to a central reserve did affect some grants that were under advanced discussion with grantees—some of them directly related to the COVID-19 response. Affected grant seekers were advised as rapidly as possible. In the context of global action, the Open Society Foundation London also increased its commitment to grantmaking locally and made an additional £300,000 available for grant making in London.

In recognition of the unique challenges posed by the pandemic for our grantees, in March 2020, the Open Society Foundations signed [A Call to Action: Philanthropy’s Commitment during COVID-19](#) and the [European Philanthropy Statement on COVID-19](#), pledging, together with hundreds of other foundations, to act with urgency to support its grantees, as well as the people and communities hit hardest by COVID-19. The commitments included loosening restrictions on current grants where possible; making new grants as unrestricted as possible; reducing what we ask of grantees; and learning from these emergency practices so we may consider adjusting our practices in the future.

In order to implement these commitments, we have updated policies and practices, communicated with organizational and individual grantees, and provided detailed guidance to programme staff. Programs were encouraged to make grants in 2020 as flexible as possible and, where funds were available, provide multi-year support.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

The global environment has taken a sharply illiberal turn, and threats to open societies and democratic principles abound, including a resurgence in censorship and repression of scholars. These developments suggest a different direction for Open Society’s involvement with universities as change agents, causing us to reconceive our involvement with scholars.

With this in mind, the difficult decision was taken to wind down our Scholarship Programs in 2021. It is never easy to end an area of work, especially one of such undisputed quality. However, we do not engage in any field or programme without end, and, we are committed to optimizing our impact through a more limited set of strategic priorities going forward. The decision reflects our strong desire to be responsive to the overwhelming challenges threatening democracy and human rights today, with careful prioritization of our finite resources. Our

proposed way forward will of course honor our commitments to current and upcoming scholars through the end of their cycle.

We remain enormously grateful for all the incredible work our Scholarship Programs colleagues have done, to take the message of open society into regions where democracy and human rights do not usually flourish.

We are cognizant as well of the university colleagues, private donors, and partner organizations whose shared values and significant financial and professional contributions have been essential to the success of the Scholarship Programs. Perhaps most importantly, we acknowledge with respect the thousands of scholars, students, and activists who slogged through rigorous competitions and went on to contribute their unique experiences, learning, and ideas to the benefit of their home and hosting countries. We salute their persistence, resilience, and courage; the program's closure will not diminish our pride in having been part of their journey.