

2021 Youth Activist Fellowships

Guidelines and Application

SOROS JUSTICE FELLOWSHIPS AND YOUTH EXCHANGE

Summary

The Soros Justice Fellowships seek applicants for its Youth Activist Fellowships. Applications are due on **February 17, 2021 (11:59 pm PST)** and must be submitted online through the application portal. The application portal can be accessed through the Soros Justice Fellowships website: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/soros-justice-fellowships>. *Please note that the portal will open on February 1, 2021.*

This document contains the eligibility Guidelines and Application.

General

The Soros Justice Youth Activist Fellowships, in partnership with Open Society’s Youth Exchange, will support outstanding individuals aged 18 to 25 to take on projects of their own design that address some aspect of the U.S. criminal justice (or, as some people prefer to say, “criminal (in)justice” or “criminal legal”) system. Projects can range from public education and training, to grassroots organizing and policy advocacy, to social media campaigns and other forms of creative communications. Youth Activist Fellowships must be undertaken in partnership with a host organization. Projects can be full-time or part-time, 12 or 18 months, and can begin anytime in the fall of 2021.

Youth Activist Fellowships come with an award of \$57,500 for full-time, 18-month projects (the award is pro-rated for part-time or 12-month projects).

1. Guidelines

1.1 Fellowship Projects

Project Focus

We will consider projects that focus on one or more of our broad criminal justice goals: reducing the number of people who are incarcerated or under correctional control, challenging extreme punishment, and promoting fairness in the justice system in the United States. Whether it’s efforts to combat police abuse, to end the punishment and harsh treatment of youth who come into conflict with the law, to dismantle the barriers that people face following a period of incarceration, or to challenge harsh and punitive responses to drug use, there are countless ways to advance these broad goals.

However, we don’t have a defined list of topics or issues that we’ll consider. Instead, we expect applicants themselves to make the case that their projects have the potential to make an important contribution to a particular issue or in a particular place. In this way, the fellowships are designed to be flexible and open — a space for projects that build effectively on work that has come before, explore new and creative ways of doing things, take risks, offer new insights and perspectives on what we thought we knew, and teach us about what we don’t know but should.

Of course, we are living in unprecedented times, where issues of inequality have created a new racial reckoning to address issues of injustice. As such, to the extent that it's relevant to applicants' proposed work, we encourage applicants to demonstrate how their projects fit within the current social and political moment. We know that toxic narratives, racialized anxiety, economic insecurity, militarized policing, and an ongoing health pandemic have reinforced divisions and the systems that perpetuate inequities. It is in this context that, where appropriate, we encourage applicants to place their projects and explain how and why their projects are necessary to counter these threats and move toward a more inclusive multi-racial democracy.

What We Are Looking For: Young People with Potential

Beyond the basic requirement that projects focus on one or more of our broad criminal justice goals, we're also looking for young people who: demonstrate a passion for and commitment to social justice but who are at the earliest stages of their careers and are just now learning about what it takes to be most effective as an activist; show strong signs that, if given the time, opportunity, and exposure that the fellowships offer, they have the potential to develop into the kind of leader that the field needs; would bring fresh thinking and fresh perspectives to the work; and would teach us (and the field) some important lessons about how to best identify and support the next generation of activists leaders.

In addition, we're looking for candidates who have not had easy access to existing leadership pipelines or other paths to achievement and accomplishment, but who nonetheless have the drive, aptitude, savvy, and tenacity to seize upon opportunities for growth and development.

Activities Supported by the Soros Justice Youth Activist Fellowships

Applicants may engage in, either alone or in combination, any number of activities to achieve the goals set forth in their projects, including but are not limited to: public education, curriculum development and training, social media campaigns and other strategic and creative forms of public communication, policy advocacy, coalition-building, grassroots organizing and mobilization, and research and analysis. Ultimately, we look to applicants to make the case that the activities they undertake — whatever those activities may be — are the most promising ones for accomplishing their fellowship goals.

Regardless of the activities undertaken, all Youth Activist Fellowship projects should, during the term of the fellowship itself, actively seek to change the status quo. In other words, their projects must, in some way, seek to change the world as it presently is — and represent an effort to move from what “is” to what “can be.”

Intersectional Projects

We encourage applications that demonstrate a clear understanding of the intersection of criminal justice issues with the particular needs of low-income communities; BIPOC communities; immigrants; LGBTQ people; women and children; and those otherwise disproportionately affected by harsh or unfair criminal justice policies. We also welcome projects that cut across various criminal justice fields and related sectors, such as education, health and mental health, housing, and employment.

Directly Affected Individuals

We in particular welcome applications from individuals directly affected by, or with significant direct personal experience with, the policies, practices, and systems their projects seek to address. This includes but is not limited to applicants who have themselves been incarcerated; applicants who have a family member or loved one who has been incarcerated and whose fellowship project emerges from that experience; and applicants who are survivors of violence and crime. It also includes people with deep ties and connections to the communities or constituencies that are the focus of their projects.

Not Sure if Your Project Fits? Submit an Email Inquiry

Applicants who are uncertain whether some aspect of their proposed project fits within the parameters of the fellowships guidelines or whether the project is otherwise likely to be of interest may submit an email inquiry. The email should provide a brief (no more than 200 words) description of the proposed project, as well as some background information on the applicant, and should be sent to: sorosjusticefellowships@opensocietyfoundations.org. We will do our best to respond to all email inquiries within a week of their receipt. Those who submit email inquiries but do not receive a timely response will have to make their own determination of whether the proposed project fits within the guidelines.

Please be aware that an email inquiry does not constitute an application.

1.2 Awards

The fellowship comes with an award of \$57,500 for full-time, 18-month projects (the award is pro-rated for part-time or 12-month projects), plus project-related expenses, as well as access to a range of training and professional development opportunities.

These award amounts are all-inclusive, i.e. they are intended to cover a fellow's living expenses, project-related expenses, travel, conference fees, health insurance, etc. We do not provide additional funds beyond the fellowship award (we do, however, cover any costs associated with attending fellowship-related conferences, gatherings or events that we in the fellowships program organize).

Fellowship awards are considered public information, and the fellows' names and project descriptions will be included in the Open Society Foundations' tax returns, as required by Internal Revenue Service regulations.

1.3 Eligibility

Experience

The Youth Activist Fellowship is likely a good fit for a range of people at different points in their activist lives, including but not limited to: people just entering the field following post-secondary education; people both working and attending college part-time; people who've had some relevant volunteer or internship experience; and people joining the activist world after some other type of life experience (e.g. post-incarceration). However, the ideal candidate will be someone who isn't already deeply entrenched in a particular body of activist work or obviously in a leadership pipeline or on a clear path to further achievement and

accomplishment. And while we don't have a rigid cut off, in terms of the number of years of experience or types of experiences that would make someone "too experienced" for the Youth Activist Fellowships, those with more than two (2) years of full-time experience as an activist or advocate, as well as those who have completed or are soon to complete graduate school, are unlikely to be well suited for this fellowship. People with more than two years of full-time activism or advocacy experience should consider applying for the [Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowships](#).

Age

Applicants must be between the ages of 18 – 25 at the time of application.

Education

There are no minimum education requirements.

Time Commitment

Fellowships are either 12 or 18 months in duration and can begin anytime in the fall of 2021. Projects can be either full-time (minimum of 35 hours/week) or part-time (minimum of 20 hours/week). Fellows cannot be full-time students or have full-time jobs during their fellowships, even if the fellowship is only part-time.

Joint Applications

The fellowships do not allow multiple individuals to apply jointly for a single Youth Activist Fellowship.

Enrollment in an Academic Institution

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

Project Location

Projects must be based in the United States (including U.S. territories).

Lobbying

Projects that include lobbying activities will not be funded. Please carefully review the [Tax Law Lobbying Rules](#) before applying. If awarded a fellowship, applicants must agree to refrain from engaging in restricted lobbying activities during the term of the fellowship.

1.4 Host Organizations and Mentors/Supervisors/Champions

Host Organization

Youth Activist Fellowship applicants are required to secure a host organization. Host organizations — which can be advocacy or community groups, scholarly or research institutions, government agencies, or other nonprofit organizations or associations — should provide access to resources such as office and meeting space, technology (computer, internet

access, phone, etc.) and networks (i.e. connections to other individuals and organizations), as well as supervision, mentoring and guidance.

Prior to submitting an application, applicants and host organizations can develop fellowship projects in any number of ways (e.g. a project may be developed entirely by applicant, developed jointly by applicant and host, or initially developed by host organization but tailored to suit applicant's skills and interests). The main thing is that applicants select host organizations that they feel will be a good fit with the project they have in mind and that can provide the kind of infrastructure and support they think they'll need throughout the fellowship.

If awarded a fellowship, grant payments must be passed through the host (unless there are compelling reasons to pay the fellow directly), which means that the host must have the appropriate organizational status, as well as grants management and finance/accounting systems and safeguards to be able to receive the grant award and make regular payments to the fellow, e.g. 501(c)(3) or supported by a designated fiscal agent; and must agree that the grant award is made to the host on the fellow's behalf. We do not provide the host organization with supplemental funds.

While applicants can be currently employed or contracted by their proposed host organization, fellowship projects cannot duplicate the host organization's existing work; and fellowship funding cannot be used to replace, supplant, or supplement funding for activities or projects already being, or reasonably expected to be, carried out by the host organization.

Mentor/Supervisor/Champion

Applicants should identify at least one person (and up to three people) who will provide them with advice, guidance, and support on a consistent basis throughout the project — someone who would be considered an applicant's mentor, supervisor, or "champion." This person can but is not required to be from the host organization; and can but is not required to be the fellow's actual supervisor. This should be someone who is familiar with the applicant's fellowship project and who will be committed to helping them achieve the project's goals and objectives, as well as to supporting the fellow's growth and development as an activist. Also, this person ideally will have deep familiarity with the issue that is the focus of the fellowship project or with the geographic location of the fellowship project work.

1.5 Application and Selection Process

There are three stages to the application and selection process. First, all applicants must submit a full application by the application deadline. Second, from the pool of applicants, we will select a group of finalists, who'll be invited to interview with a selection committee consisting of Open Society Foundations staff and outside experts (finalists will also be asked to submit additional materials to supplement their initial applications). And finally, from the pool of finalists, we will select 12 – 15 individuals to receive fellowships (this final number of fellowships — which is contingent on availability of funding — will be a mix of Advocacy, Media and Youth Activist Fellowships).

We reserve the right, at any stage of the application and selection process, to request that an applicant be considered for a fellowship category (Advocacy, Media, Youth Activist) or track (Track I, Track II) different from the one for which the applicant applied.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO APPLY

2. Application

2.1 Application Information

The application deadline is **February 17, 2021 (11:59 pm PST)**. Incomplete applications will not be given full consideration.

Online Submission

Applications must be submitted online via the application portal, accessed through the Soros Justice Fellowships website: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/soros-justice-fellowships>. *Please note that the portal will open on February 1, 2021.*

All communications with applicants will be sent to the email used to register with the online system, so applicants should ensure that emails from us do not end up in their “Junk Mail” or “Spam” folder.

Content of Complete Applications

Complete applications consist of the following documents and information that must be uploaded to or otherwise entered into the online application system: Resume, Proposal, Names of Mentors/Supervisors/Champions, Names of Recommenders, and Name of Host Organization. Below is more information on each of these items:

- **RESUME** of no more than three (3) pages. Although applicants are welcome to include both a resume and a bio within the three pages, applicants should not submit only a bio.
- Single-spaced **PROPOSAL** of no more than 1500 words (about three single-spaced pages in 12-point font) containing responses to the four (4) questions listed below in order, with the headings as listed below. While you can provide written responses to all of the questions below, for Questions 2 and 3 you have the option to instead provide a video of you verbally responding to the question. We consider each video response to equal approximately 500 words of the 1500 word limit (e.g. if you respond to one question via video, then you’d have 1000 words left for your remaining written responses).

If submitting responses in video format, you can either attach a video file or a Word or PDF document with a link to the video (e.g. Vimeo, YouTube). In all cases, your response to any single question should not exceed three (3) minutes.

Question 1 (Project Description) [WRITTEN]: “Provide a detailed explanation of the project, why it’s needed, what you propose to do, and the change you hope to achieve through your work. Where appropriate, you should use statistics, stories, or other types of information to explain the project and why it’s needed.”

Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to provide a detailed timeline for their project activities. They will also be asked to provide any project updates or revisions.

Question 2 (Why You) [WRITTEN OR VIDEO]: “Explain why, based on your experiences (personal, professional, academic, etc.), skills, interests, and attributes, you are the right person to carry out this particular project. You should also explain how you are connected to the community where your project will take place or to the people that your project serves.”

Question 3 (Your Future) [WRITTEN OR VIDEO]: “What do you hope to be doing as soon as the fellowship is over? How about several years from now? And how will the fellowship help you with your future plans?”

Question 4 (Non-Fellowship Commitments) [WRITTEN]: “Describe any non-fellowship work or educational (or other) commitments that you expect to have during the course of your fellowship, including the approximate time to be devoted to these commitments.”

- Names and affiliations of up to three (3) people who you consider to be your **MENTORS, SUPERVISORS OR CHAMPIONS**. See page 5 above for what we’re looking for.
- Names, affiliations, and contact information of three (3) people — ideally, current/former supervisors or close colleagues — who would provide **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** (we don’t need the actual letters at this stage in the process). These people can be the same people you listed as “Mentors, Supervisors, or Champions,” but they don’t have to be.

If selected as a finalist, you will have to provide letters from two of the three people named.

- Name and contact information for proposed **HOST ORGANIZATION** (if applicable).

If selected as a finalist, applicants will be asked to supplement their applications with a host organization commitment letter. This letter should be written by a senior staff member of the organization or someone otherwise authorized to commit the organization to serving as a host for the project. The letter should describe the following: host organization’s mission and existing work; how the proposed project fits with the organization’s mission and existing work; support provided to the applicant, if awarded a fellowship; in-kind contributions provided; and any other resources provided to the fellow. The letter must also include a confirmation that the proposed project will not duplicate the host organization's existing efforts and that fellowship funding will not be used to replace, supplant or supplement funding for activities or projects already being, or reasonably expected to be, carried out by the host organization.

2.2 Application and Selection Timeline

Application Deadline:	February 17, 2021 (11:59 pm PST)
Finalists Notified:	April 2021* (all applicants will be notified via email whether they have been selected as a finalist)
Supplementary Materials Due:	May 2021* (those selected as finalists asked to submit letters of recommendation, host commitment letters, advisory board details, and detailed project timeline, as well as any project updates)
Finalist Interviews:	June 2021* (all finalist interviews will be held via videoconference)
Selected Fellows Notified:	July 2021*
Projects Begin:	Fall 2021

**Dates subject to change*

