

**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**

Section 172 Report

Open Society Foundation London

December 2020

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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 chair of the Open Society Foundation London is the Open Society Foundations president and 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 program staff, the kind of grants any Open Society program makes depends on its strategy and its vision of how to use its budget most effectively. We also offer 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 2019 grants expected to be published later in 2020. 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.

In September 2019, we launched a new guide and protocol that staff are required to follow when responding to allegations of discrimination, including sexual harassment, within grantee organizations. We simultaneously launched a [policy](#), available on our website, 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

In February 2020, the office moved to new premises in the Farringdon area of London, which were designed from the outset to be inclusive. We incorporated input from a disability specialist consultant on how to make the office accessible, ranging from accessible refreshment points to door openings and toilet facilities to hearing loops. We also provided working spaces for a range of working styles, recognizing that some people work well in an open plan environment while others need quiet to concentrate. A contemplation room was provided to provide a place for prayer and meditation. We created rooms for lactation and for wellness, to cater to staff well-being. A sanctuary with sleeping pods was provided for rest. A co-working space is available for our grantees and partners to work from our premises in a comfortable and productive environment. In addition, the new office was designed to be environmentally friendly and we are applying for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold status.

In order to provide holistic support to our staff, we make available a full-service Employee Assistance Program in addition to other offerings and resources such as counseling and meditation support. We engage with our staff primarily through a Staff Association and conduct an annual staff survey.

Our staff travel to many locations around the world; we, therefore, employ International SOS, a company that offers a multitude of benefits that assist in the management of health and safety risks facing international travelers. All travel to high-risk destinations and/or that which includes high-risk activities needs pre-approval from a regional director and completion of Hostile Environment Awareness Training.

In response to COVID-19, staff who were travelling were repatriated and the office closed shortly before the U.K. government announced the lockdown. The office 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.

Key decisions

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 program staff. Programs were encouraged to make grants in 2020 as flexible as possible and, where funds were available, provide multi-year support.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Open Society Foundations are active in more than 120 countries around the world. Our national and regional foundations and thematic programs give thousands of grants every year towards building inclusive and vibrant democracies. Our vision is a call for change—change in the way we think about others, and in the ways we work together—changes now more pressing than ever amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We work in the following seven regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, Eurasia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, and the United States; and on the following 10 themes: Democratic Practice, Early Childhood and Education, Economic Equity and Justice, Equality and Antidiscrimination, Health and Rights, Higher Education, Human Rights Movements and Institutions, Information and Digital Rights, Journalism, and Justice Reform and the Rule of Law.

The directors of Open Society Foundation London will consider how to address these themes and regions through Open Society Foundation London’s activities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Shortly after George Soros established the Open Society Foundations, he recognized the fundamental connection between early childhood development and the ability to nurture and sustain open societies. Since 1994, George Soros made a visionary investment that established the Step by Step Program—a USD 100 million initiative that transformed early education systems across Central Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Haiti, and Mongolia. Step by Step introduced early childhood interventions through quality, child-centered and family-based approaches to early education. These priorities have continued to guide the expanded global work of what later became the Early Childhood Program.

Over the past decades, the early childhood development field has been powerfully transformed. Many donors are committing significant resources in this area, at a scale far beyond our current commitments. Throughout this time, the program has been a powerful catalyst, helping to unlock the investments, advocacy, and public policies that advance the rights of children.

Therefore, while celebrating the exceptional accomplishments of the Early Childhood Program since 1994, we have concluded that our contribution in this field no longer requires a distinct thematic program; thus the Early Childhood Program will be wound down by December 31, 2020.

OUR WORK ON INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM AND INFORMATION

Over the last two decades, digital technology has accelerated its revolutionary transformation of the public sphere, creating both opportunities for freedom of expression and thought, and new, dangerous challenges to open society values. The outcome of this process is of vital importance to all of us, and the close interplay between technology, political accountability, and free expression makes strong coordination of our journalism and information strategies essential.

In order to respond effectively to these opportunities and challenges, we are merging the Program on Independent Journalism and the Information Program. Through this merger, we will continue our support to the field of independent journalism while boosting that commitment through additional investments, action, and advocacy to strengthen the governance and regulation of digital platforms and the accountability of governments to curb their digital power.

This integration will ensure that key opportunities at the intersection of the journalism and information fields will be identified and advanced through merged strategies and that these distinct areas of work will be retained and deepened. Integrating our efforts and investments in the media and digital sphere will enable us to better address major threats to the very foundations of open society, and seize opportunities to defend democracy.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

We have launched a new Economic Justice Program that brings together the work of our former Fiscal Governance and Economic Advancement programs.

The objective is to take a more integrated and effective approach to our grant making, advocacy, and impact investing. This is an approach that will strengthen

our ability to identify and focus on priority issues and geographies, and bring to bear a broader range of economic and financial expertise.

This is built on the premise that political and social justice cannot be separated from the need for economic justice. Ultimately, a just economy is one that serves society. Far too often, this is not the case. Whether we are considering securing workplace rights or basic income, or combating inequality or corruption, we believe economic justice can only be achieved through the advancement of open society objectives.

CLIMATE

Most immediately—and as part of the global \$130 billion COVID-19 response package—\$16.95 billion will be spent by the Open Society Foundations globally to advance urgent climate priorities linked to COVID-19, like advancing “green” economic stimulus plans.

We are also aware we need to manage our own environmental footprint and the Open Society Foundation London is contributing to a global project to measure our impact, understand its primary drivers, and reduce it.