

OSI's Democracy and Power Fund to Support State-Based Efforts in North Carolina and Texas

January 8, 2010

Dear Friend:

Greetings from the Democracy and Power Fund (D&P) at the Open Society Institute. I hope that you had wonderful, relaxing, and refreshing holidays and that your new year is off to a great start.

On behalf of the D&P team – including my colleagues, Cristóbal Alex, Patricia Jerido, and Rachel Pecker – I'm writing to share with you an update on our “building state-based power” portfolio, which complements our national grantmaking by investing in social justice capacity building, organizing, and advocacy in key states. Specifically, the Democracy and Power Fund now plans to make up to \$2 million per year, for the next few years, in multi-year, general operating support grants to state-based efforts in North Carolina and Texas.

This funding to build capacity at the state level reflects just one of the Democracy and Power Fund's five funding priorities and we will continue to fund – at roughly \$10 million per year – national organizations, including many who work in states across the nation. Additionally, this new funding for North Carolina and Texas based organizations relates solely to new, state-based grantmaking from the Democracy and Power Fund. Many other funds and campaigns here at OSI's U.S. Programs are also deeply committed to state-based grantmaking and have identified several states for their work, too.

While the Democracy and Power Fund's decision was not easy, we are excited to now begin deeper work and funding in North Carolina and Texas. We will next begin to spend much more time on the ground in each state as we continue to learn about the issues, policymaking contexts, leaders, funders, and organizations that will inform our non-partisan grantmaking. Among other considerations, both states have:

- rapidly changing political environments,
- large, fast growing, and very diverse populations,
- strong state-based organizations that know how to operate in often hostile policymaking forums and have won impressive recent advocacy victories,
- compelling political histories and historic barriers to equality that are steadily changing (although likely slower than leaders in the states would like),
- engaged local donor communities,
- connections to the shared advocacy interests of other OSI funding programs, and
- great opportunities for building long lasting state-based power among African-American, Latina/o, immigrant, and youth constituencies.

Over the past several months, our team has traveled to seven states – Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia – that we believe are facing

some of the greatest demographic and policymaking shifts and are places where issues of special importance to OSI, such as criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, and economic justice, present the greatest challenges and opportunities. Each of these states also presents great possibilities for increasing the capacity and power of people of color and immigrant community organizations that too often take on the greatest challenges with the least funding support.

In every state, my colleagues and I were honored to meet some of the most effective and inspiring state-based social justice leaders and funders in the nation. We've met with representatives from over 100 state-based and regional social justice organizing and advocacy organizations, donors, and foundations in Albuquerque, Alexandria, Denver, El Paso, Las Vegas, Miami, Raleigh/Durham, San Antonio, Santa Fe, and Tallahassee (and soon in Austin and Houston). While we know that there are still many more groups and leaders that we have yet to meet, we are grateful for the tremendous insights that we've received from state-based leaders and peer funders to help guide our future grantmaking.

While the Democracy and Power Fund will not engage in new, direct grantmaking in Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, and Virginia, there are many inspiring and high impact groups there that we'd be happy to share with anyone interested in learning more about the work in the states. From community, faith-based, and youth organizing groups to state-based think tanks, voter participation operations, and groups using arts, culture, and technology as vehicles to advance social change, there is some amazing work happening in the states that we at the national level often miss. My colleagues and I at OSI believe that state-based groups warrant strong support for they are effective changemakers providing dynamic leaders and innovative thinkers on the toughest issues. This work often happens in complex and unfriendly policymaking contexts with all too-limited resources.

We welcome your thoughts and will continue to share periodic updates from OSI's Democracy and Power Fund with you as we strive to have our grantmaking be informed by the people, organizations, and peer funders in the funding areas in which we work.

Thank you for your work and special thanks to everyone – organizers, advocates, youth leaders, elected leaders, funders, and informed observers – who took time to share wisdom, provide strategic recommendations, and offer warm welcomes to us. Your great barbeque recommendations were also heartily appreciated.

Best wishes to you for a happy and healthy 2010.

~ Bill

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