

2021 Media Fellowships Guidelines and Application

SOROS JUSTICE FELLOWSHIPS

Summary

The Soros Justice Fellowships seek applicants for its Media 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 Media Fellowships support writers, print and broadcast journalists, artists, filmmakers, and other individuals with distinctive voices proposing to complete media projects that engage and inform, spur debate and conversation, and catalyze change on important U.S. criminal justice (or, as some people prefer to say, criminal “(in)justice”) issues. The Media Fellowships aim to mitigate the time, space, and market constraints that often discourage individuals from pursuing vital but marginalized, controversial, or unpopular topics in comprehensive and creative ways. Media Fellowships are one year in duration, and fellows are expected to make their projects their full-time work during the term of the fellowship. Projects can begin anytime in the fall of 2021.

Also, while it is a separate and distinct fellowship program within the Open Society Foundations, the [Soros Equality Fellowship](#)’s goals do intersect in important ways with those of the Soros Justice Fellowships. Accordingly, with applicants’ permission, we will share Soros Justice Fellowship applications with the Soros Equality Fellowship (and vice versa), to the extent that fellowships staff feel like an application might be a better fit for a different fellowship program.

Individuals with projects that seek, as their primary purpose, a specific reform goal or objective, should determine whether their work is better suited for [the Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowships](#).

There are two Media Fellowship tracks: Track I, which is for new and emerging media makers; and Track II, which is for more experienced individuals, i.e. those with at least ten (10) years of full-time work as a media maker. The award for Media Track I is \$63,000 over 12 months. The award for Media Track II is \$85,000 over 12 months. Up to three people can apply jointly for a single fellowship, but joint applications carry a single award.

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 and accountability in the justice (or “criminal legal”) system in the United States. In our view, there are a number of issues that relate in important ways to these broad goals — for example, the extremely long prison terms that have become the accepted norm as a response to serious and violent crimes; the punishment and harsh treatment of youth who come into conflict with the law; the rapid encroachment of the surveillance state, where artificial intelligence and related technologies are being integrated into the criminal justice system; law enforcement abuses; and draconian responses to drug use; as well as efforts to envision and create alternatives to our current systems and structures.

However, for the fellowships 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 contribute something valuable to the debate and discussions around mass incarceration, extreme punishment, and fairness and accountability in the justice system. 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, that explore new and creative ways of doing things, that anticipate emerging issues, that offer new insights and perspectives on what we thought we knew, and that 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.

Types of Media

We will consider a wide range of media projects and products, including but not limited to: print and broadcast journalism, documentary films, books, digital media, as well as projects that utilize a mix of platforms or mediums. We neither require nor expect Media projects to reflect or endorse a particular viewpoint or position on any policy or practice that relates to our criminal justice reform goals; and we accommodate a wide range of perspectives and professional orientations to the issues that are the subject matter of applicants’ work. We will consider work that remains decidedly neutral, as well as work that explicitly seeks to achieve or otherwise contribute to particular advocacy objectives. The overriding consideration is

whether the project is likely to engage and inform, spur debate and conversation, or catalyze change.

Intersectional Projects

We recognize that criminal justice issues are exceptionally complex and involve an array of interrelated social, economic, political, and historical dynamics. We therefore 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 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

Individuals can apply for one of two awards, depending on the applicant's level of experience. The award for Media Track I is \$63,000 over 12 months. The award for Media Track II is \$85,000 over 12 months.

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

Applicants are ideally full-time writers, print or broadcast journalists, filmmakers, artists, or other media makers, with well-established records of publication, exhibition/performance, dissemination, or broadcast in local, regional or national markets, or among targeted audiences or constituencies. Applicants who are not professional writers, journalists, filmmakers, or other types of media makers must demonstrate that they nonetheless have the experience and capacity to accomplish the project.

Media Track I applicants must have at least two (2) years of relevant full-time experience. Media Track II applicants must have a minimum of ten (10) years of relevant full-time experience. Applicants with fewer than 10 years of relevant full-time experience may nonetheless be considered for a Media Track II fellowship, provided they can demonstrate that they have truly distinguished themselves over the course of their careers.

Education

All applicants must have at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Time Commitment

Fellowships are 12 months in duration and can begin anytime in the fall of 2021. Applicants must be able to devote at least 35 hours per week to the project if awarded a fellowship; and the project must be the applicant's only full-time work during the course of the fellowship. Fellows cannot be full-time students during their fellowships.

Proposed Project Deliverables

Applicants must propose deliverables or work product that reflect a year's worth of full-time work. We leave it up to each applicant to determine the scope of the project deliverables and to make a convincing case that the work is sufficiently ambitious. However, in all cases, deliverables must aim to reach audiences during the term of the fellowship itself, i.e. we will not support projects that involve only research, planning, or other activities that simply "lay the groundwork."

Additional Requirements for Book and Documentary Film/Video

Book projects must either have a publisher in advance of applying for the fellowship or demonstrate strong interest from publishers; and must include plans, during the term of the fellowship itself, to publish, broadcast, lecture, or otherwise reach audiences around work related to the subject matter of the book.

Documentary film or video projects must be in post-production or distribution stages; and must primarily seek support for the promotion, outreach, and audience engagement plan

associated with the film/video. Research and pre-production film or video proposals are not eligible.

Joint Applications

Up to three (3) individuals can apply jointly for a Media Fellowship. However, joint applications carry a single award. For joint applicants, the “full-time work” requirement does not apply to each applicant; instead, the applicants’ combined time spent on the project must be at least 35 hours per week (see “Time Commitment” above).

Host Organizations

Unlike for the Advocacy Fellowships, Media Fellowship applicants do not have host organizations. While applicants are welcome to explain any relationships or collaborations they may have with specific entities, networks or organizations, the expectation is that Media Fellowship applicants will be operating without any formal connection to an existing organization.

Enrollment in an Academic Institution

The fellowships do not fund enrollment for degree or non-degree study at academic institutions, including dissertation research. Also, as indicated above (see “Time Commitment”), fellows cannot be full-time students during their fellowships.

Past Soros Justice Fellowship Recipients

Past recipients of a Soros Justice Fellowship are not eligible to apply.

Projects Based Outside the United States

Applicants may be based outside the United States, as long as their work directly relates to a U.S. criminal justice issue.

Lobbying

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

1.4 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.

In addition, applicants who give permission for us to share their application with the Soros Equality Fellowship (see “General” at Page 1 above), in order to be considered for that opportunity, could conceivably receive further consideration by that fellowship.

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, which 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.*

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 certain documents and information that must be uploaded to or otherwise entered into the online application system: Resume, Proposal, Names of Recommenders, and Samples of Previous Work. Below is more information on each of these items:

- **RESUME** of no more than five (5) pages that includes a list of your most relevant published and broadcast work. Include the story titles, publications or outlets where the pieces appeared, and the dates of publication or broadcast. Although applicants are welcome to include both a resume and a bio within the five pages, applicants should not submit only a bio.
- Single-spaced **PROPOSAL** of no more than 1500 words (approximately three pages in 12-point font with one-inch margins) containing responses to the five (5) questions listed below in order, with the headings as listed below:

Question 1 (Project Synopsis): “Provide a synopsis of the project that describes: the issue your project will address and why this issue is important, your methods for addressing the issue, and how you expect your project to be one that will inform and engage, spur debate, open up new conversations, or catalyze action.”

Question 2 (Story Treatment): “Provide a story treatment outlining your approach to the issue, your expected final products or deliverables (e.g. a list of tentative themes of the stories you plan to write or produce), and how the stories or series will be structured (e.g. potential subjects, planned locations, possible conclusions).”

Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to provide a detailed timeline for their project activities, as well as any relevant project updates and revisions.

Question 3 (Communications and Distribution/Outreach Plan): “Describe in detail the specific audiences you hope to reach, how you intend to reach them, your decision to focus on them, and what you expect or hope will result from their engagement with you and your work.”

Question 4 (Personal Experiences, Skills, and Attributes): “Explain how, based on your experiences (personal, professional, academic, etc.), skills and attributes, you are the right person to carry out this particular project.”

Question 5 (Budget and Revenue): “Briefly outline a budget that shows any project-related expenses, including research and travel costs, supplies, and finishing and distribution costs, as well as expected income or revenue from sale of stories or from other funders. In other words, what are the full costs associated with a completed project? The project budget does not necessarily need to align with the fellowship award and can be more or less depending on the needs and activities of a given project. Also, to the extent you anticipate any revenue associated with the project (whether pre-, during, or post-production), please explain (a) the sources of that revenue and (b) how you expect the revenue to contribute to the overall goals of the project.”

Question 6 (Time Commitment): “Describe any non-fellowship work responsibilities (e.g. freelance work, consulting, hourly project-based work, etc.) or educational commitments (e.g. classes for a post-secondary degree) that you expect to have during the course of your fellowship, including the approximate time to be devoted to these responsibilities/commitments.”

- 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. Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to supplement their applications by providing actual letters from two of the three people named. Joint applicants will be asked for three letters.
- **FOR BOOK PROJECTS ONLY:** If proposing a book project, include with your application the name of the publisher that will be publishing the book (or which publishers have expressed interest or are likely candidates). If selected as a finalist, you will have to provide a letter from the publisher(s) confirming its commitment/interest.
- **SAMPLES** of your previous work / proposed project:

Print applicants (print journalism or books) should upload three (3) samples of previous work (applicants proposing books should include excerpts of the book, if available, as one of the samples). Each sample should be of no more than ten (10) pages.

Radio or audio applicants should upload three (3) samples of previous work.

Film and video applicants should upload the proposed project (fine cut or rough cut) and an additional sample of previous work.

Applicants proposing projects involving other forms of media should upload three (3) samples of previous work.

Applicants proposing projects that involve multiple forms of media (e.g. print and radio) should themselves determine which types of samples to upload; but in no case should more than three (3) samples be uploaded, whatever the media format (e.g. 2 print and 1 radio).

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*