

# **2024 SOROS JUSTICE FELLOWSHIPS**

**Deadline: January 31, 2024**

### **Fellowship Overview and Applicant Deadlines**

The Open Society Foundations seek applicants for its Soros Justice Fellowships, which provide grants in the amount of \$100,000 - \$140,000 to individuals taking on full-time projects that address some aspect of the U.S. criminal legal system. Applications are due on **January 31, 2024 (11:59 pm EST)** and must be submitted online through the [application portal](#). This document contains the Guidelines (Part 1.) and Application (Part 2.).

## **General**

The Soros Justice Fellowships support outstanding individuals—including lawyers, advocates, grassroots organizers, writers, print and broadcast journalists, artists, filmmakers, and other individuals with distinctive voices—to undertake full-time projects that engage and inform, spur debate and conversation, change policy or practice, and catalyze change around the U.S. criminal legal system at the local, state, and national levels. Fellowships can be either 12 or 18 months in duration, may be undertaken with the support of a host organization, and should begin in the fall of 2024.

There are two fellowship tracks: Track I, which is for people at the earlier stages of their careers and who demonstrate the potential to develop into leaders and important voices in their respective fields; and Track II, which is for more experienced individuals with a proven record of achievement and expertise.

Track I comes with a grant of \$100,000 over 18 months and Track II comes with a grant of \$140,000 over 18 months (grants for both tracks are prorated for 12-month projects).

Through the Soros Justice Fellowships and our partner fellowships within Open Society-U.S.—the [Soros Equality Fellowship](#) and the [Leadership in Government Fellowship](#)—the Open Society Foundations aim to provide a network of leaders with the resources to effectively address injustice and inequality, and the space to imagine a more just and equitable future. Given the overlapping goals and strategies across the different fellowships, we may, with applicants' permission, refer applicants to other fellowship programs within Open Society-U.S. should they be deemed a better fit (all three fellowship programs have the same application deadline and roughly the same selection timeline). *Applicants, however, cannot apply to more than one fellowship program.*

# 1 Guidelines

## 1.1 Fellowship Projects

### Project Focus

The Soros Justice Fellowships will consider projects that focus on any aspect of the U.S. criminal legal system—which we broadly see as a set of institutions and actors (law enforcement, courts, prosecutors, and corrections) and a related set of policies, practices, narratives, and orientations that exert coercive control over individuals and communities in this country. Regardless of a project’s focus, we expect applicants to make the case that their projects have the potential to contribute something valuable 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, that explore new and creative ways of doing things, that offer new insights and perspectives on what we thought we knew, that push boundaries and challenge convention, that anticipate emerging issues, and that teach us about what we don’t know but should.

### Meeting the Moment: Threats to Democracy

As noted above, we see the Soros Justice Fellowships as a flexible, open space for projects that reflect the issues and approaches applicants, based on their experiences and expertise, see as important. However, we also recognize that we are living in what feels like unprecedented times, where toxic narratives, the rapid erosion of civic norms, racialized anxiety, economic insecurity, militarized policing, the normalization of authoritarian tendencies, and global conflagrations (war, climate, public health) have reinforced divisions and the systems that perpetuate inequities, and have dangerously eroded some of the pillars upon which we seek to build a more just and equitable future.

Indeed, a core vision animating so much of Open Society’s work in the U.S. and our “North Star” as we move forward—building a truly inclusive, multi-racial democracy that serves the interests, needs, and aspirations of all people and that has the power to advance open society at home and abroad—faces a mortal threat. Because of this, we are keenly interested in projects that address the current social, political, and ecological moment and that contribute to what we call “democracy-building” efforts.

The connections between democracy and the criminal legal system are often seen through issues like felony disenfranchisement and civic engagement—and rightly so, as the right to vote and have a voice are bedrock principles for a functioning democracy. But we also know that the connections between the criminal legal system and democracy go much deeper than that — understanding that “democracy” and “democratic practices” are so much more than what happens in a voting booth on election day. We believe that efforts to combat different aspects of mass incarceration, extreme punishment, and criminal legal system dysfunction/failure are inextricably linked to an expansive vision for an inclusive, multi-racial democracy; and that just as the criminal legal system manifests how our aspirations for democracy have failed, so too can the people advancing efforts to challenge injustice define the very notion of democracy itself. These are the connections and linkages that we are especially eager to see through the Soros Justice Fellowships.

### **Intersectional Projects**

We recognize that the criminal legal system is an exceptionally complex array of policies, practices, institutions, and beliefs that are deeply rooted in white supremacy and this country’s legacy of slavery, conquest, and colonialism; and that the system involves a range of interrelated social, economic, political, and historical dynamics. We therefore encourage applications that demonstrate a clear understanding of how the criminal legal system intersects and interacts with the needs of low-income communities; BIPOC communities; immigrants; LGBTQ people; women and children; and those otherwise disproportionately affected by harsh or unfair criminal legal system policies and practices. We also welcome projects that cut across various fields and related sectors, such as education, health and mental health, housing, and employment.

### **Directly Affected Individuals**

We 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](mailto: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 Grant Amounts**

Individuals can apply for one of two fellowship grants, depending on the applicant's level of experience. Track I comes with an grant of \$100,000 over 18 months, and Track II comes with a grant of \$140,000 over 18 months (grants for both tracks are prorated for 12-month projects).

These grant 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 meetings organized by the fellowships program).

Fellowship grants 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**

### **Track I**

Track I applicants must have at least two (2) years of relevant experience, which may include: full-time and part-time employment; paid or unpaid internships; sustained volunteer work; or other pertinent experience (e.g. advocacy while incarcerated). Track I is for people at a range of phases in their careers, including but not limited to: people just entering the field following post-graduate education; advocates or media makers with several years of work experience and some degree of achievement; and those beginning to work on criminal legal issues after a career in another field or after some other life experience.

### **Track II**

Track II applicants must have at least ten (10) years of relevant experience. Track II is for seasoned, established, and accomplished leaders and voices in the field—ideally people who have distinguished themselves on a local, state, or national level; and who have the kind of stature, record of accomplishment, experience, and capacity necessary to have a meaningful impact on the issue or issues their projects seek to take on.

### **Education**

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

### **Time Commitment**

Fellowships can be either 12 or 18 months in duration and should begin in the fall of 2024. 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 fellowship. Fellows cannot be full-time students during their fellowships.

## **Proposed Project Approach and Deliverables**

Applicants must propose deliverables or work product that reflect 12 or 18 months' 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, as well as to show that the proposed approach (i.e. the method for doing the work) is the right one. However, we want to see deliverables that aim to reach audiences or effect change during the term of the fellowship itself, i.e., we are least interested in projects that involve only research, planning, or other activities that simply “lay the groundwork.”

## **Additional Requirements for Book and Documentary Film**

Book projects must either have a publisher in advance of receiving 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 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 proposals are not eligible.

## **Joint Applications**

Up to two (2) individuals can apply jointly for a fellowship. However, joint applications will share a single fellowship award. A joint application should be completed together as a single submission. For joint applicants, the “full-time work” requirement does not apply to each applicant. All other restrictions associated with an individual application still apply. Be sure to explain why this partnership is necessary to fulfill the objectives of the project and how responsibilities will be distributed.

## **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 or with a Global Focus**

Applicants may be based outside the United States and projects may have a global focus or perspective, as long as their work has some meaningful connection to a U.S. criminal legal issue and they are able to demonstrate a proficiency in spoken and written English.

## **Lobbying**

Projects that include electioneering, lobbying, or other activity that does not fall within IRS 501(c)3 guidelines will not be funded. Please carefully review the Tax Law Lobbying Rules before submitting an application. If awarded a fellowship, applicants are required to attend a training session on the tax law lobbying rules, conducted by the Open Society Foundations' General Counsel's Office; and must agree to refrain from engaging in restricted lobbying and political activities during the term of the fellowship.

## 1.4 Host Organizations

Fellowship applicants are permitted, but not required, to carry out their fellowship projects with the support of a host organization. Host organizations—which can be advocacy or community groups, scholarly or research institutions, government agencies, or other nonprofit organizations or associations—can provide access to resources such as space, technology, and networks, as well as mentoring and guidance. They can also enhance the credibility and raise the profile of the project.

If awarded a fellowship, applicants with host organizations can choose to receive grant payments directly or have the grant payments passed through the host. Under the latter arrangement, the host must have the appropriate organizational status, as well as grant 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 payments are made to the host on the fellow's behalf. While we encourage host organizations to provide in-kind contributions such as office space and necessary overhead, as well as to augment the stipend award and provide other benefits, we do not provide the host organization with supplemental funds.

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.

## **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 will be invited to interview with a selection committee consisting of Open Society Foundations staff and outside experts. And finally, from the pool of finalists, we will select 12 – 15 individuals to receive fellowships (the final number of fellowships awarded is contingent on availability of funding and subject to change).

Depending on the composition of the applicant pool, we will consider adding a stage to what is described above by holding a round of “semi-finalist” interviews, from which we would then select a smaller number of candidates for the finalist interviews.

We reserve the right, at any stage of the application and selection process, to request that an applicant be considered for a fellowship track different from the one for which the applicant applied.

Also, as noted above, due to overlapping goals and strategies, the selection committee may refer applicants to other fellowship programs within Open Society-U.S. should they be deemed a better fit.

***PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO APPLY***

## 2 Application

### 2.1 Application Information

The application deadline is **January 31, 2024 (11:59 pm EST)**. Incomplete applications will not be given full consideration.

#### Online Submission

Applications must be submitted online through the Open Society Foundations [web portal](#). To submit, first-time applicants will have to provide basic contact information and register in the web portal. Once registered, applicants will be able to proceed to the application itself. All communications with applicants will be sent to the email used to register with the online system.

Three important notes regarding the portal

- When you register, please be sure to click “Individual” and not “Organization.”
- Once registered, please do not fill out the information for the “Bank Accounts,” “Academic History,” and “Work Experience” tabs in your user Profile.
- You can start applications and come back to continue working on applications by logging back into the Portal. Please make sure to hit submit when you are ready to submit your completed application to the Open Society Foundations.

#### Content of Complete Applications

For all applicants, a complete application consists of a **Resume** and a **Cover Page + Proposal Narrative** that must be uploaded. Applicants proposing arts, media, technology, film, or other similar projects must also upload **Samples of Previous/Proposed Work**. Further information on these items is provided below:

- Upload a **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.

- Upload a completed **COVER PAGE + PROPOSAL NARRATIVE of no more than 2000 words** which asks for the following information (applicants should use the template that can be downloaded from the Soros Justice Fellowships webpage [here](#)).
  - Single-spaced **Cover Page** that includes the following information:
    - Name
    - Email address
    - Phone number
    - Mailing address
    - Project Title (or a one-sentence description of the project)
    - Project Summary (no more than 100 words)
  - Using the **Proposal Narrative Template**, provide single-spaced responses to the following questions:

*Question 1 (Project Explanation): “Provide a clear, detailed, and focused explanation of the project, including the change you hope to achieve through your work, the need for the project (i.e., why you believe this work is important), a description of the people or communities affected by the issue(s) the project seeks to address, and what you propose to do, including where applicable the audiences or constituencies you hope to reach and how you plan on reaching them.”*

Your response to this question should reflect a thorough understanding of the issue or issues your project seeks to address, as well as a sufficient understanding of the work that others have done or are doing on the issue(s); and should suggest how your project fills a gap or otherwise represents an important additional contribution to, or departure from, similar/related work.

*Question 2 (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, as well as how you see this fellowship project fitting into your personal or professional trajectory or future plans.”*

If you are a Track II applicant, please be sure to describe the specific accomplishments and experiences that make you qualified for that track (see Eligibility—Track II above for more detail on the expectations for Track II applicants).

*Question 3 (Democracy-Building): “In thinking about the notion of ‘an inclusive, multi-racial democracy,’ please explain how you believe your project is responsive to the tumultuous moment we are in (politically, socially, ecologically) and how your project advances the vision of democracy that you see. In your response, please also explain the principles, ideals, or frameworks that ground or otherwise animate and guide your work and vision.”*

*Question 4 (Timeline): “Please provide a timeline that sets forth the project’s specific activities and reflects all phases of the project, including what you hope to accomplish at different stages of the project.”*

We do not expect a particular format for the timeline that you submit. It simply should provide an adequate “roadmap” for what you hope to do and accomplish by when, over the course of the fellowship project; and should have enough detail to allow someone reviewing your proposal to have a clear understanding of how you hope the work will unfold over 12 or 18 months.

*Question 5 (Budget and Revenue): “As noted in the guidelines, the fellowship award is all-inclusive (i.e., it is intended to cover a fellow’s living expenses, project-related expenses, travel, conference fees, health insurance, etc.). However, if there are costs associated with your project that exceed the amount of the fellowship award, please describe what those costs are and the source of revenue for those additional costs (or plan for securing that revenue). Also, if your project is expected to generate any revenue, please describe what that revenue-generating activity will be and how that revenue will contribute to the overall charitable goals of the project.”*

*Question 6 (Time Commitment): “Describe any non-fellowship work responsibilities (e.g., consulting, hourly project-based work, etc.) or educational commitments (e.g., classes for a post-secondary degree) that you expect to have during your*

*fellowship, including the approximate time to be devoted to these responsibilities or commitments.”*

*Question 7 (Letters of Recommendation): “List the names, affiliations, and contact information of three (3) people—ideally, current/former supervisors or close colleagues — who would provide letters of recommendation. We do not 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.”*

*Question 8 (Host Organization): “IF APPLICABLE, provide the name and contact information for proposed host organization. Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to supplement their applications with a host organization commitment letter.”*

For finalists, 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.

*Question 9 (Publisher Letter — 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 to express interest). If selected as a finalist, you will have to provide a letter from the publisher(s) confirming its commitment/interest.”*

- Upload **SAMPLES OF PREVIOUS/PROPOSED WORK—for arts, media, technology, film, or other similar projects:** If proposing an art, media, technology, film, or other similar project, you should include up to two (2) samples (or relevant links) of your work:
  - Print applicants (print journalism or books) should provide samples of no more than five (5) pages each (applicants proposing books should include excerpts of the book, if available, as one of the samples).
  - Video/audio samples should be no longer than five (5) minutes. If linked to a longer piece, provide a time stamp indicating where reviewers should begin viewing/listening.
  - Documentary film applicants should upload the proposed project (fine cut or rough cut) along with an additional sample 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.

## 2.2 Application and Selection Timeline

Application Process Open:	Week of November 27, 2023
Application Deadline:	<b>January 31, 2024 (11:59 pm EST)</b>
Finalists Notified:	June 2024*
Finalist Interviews:	July 2024*
Selected Fellows Notified:	August 2024*
Projects Begin:	Fall 2024

*\* Please note, dates subject to change.*