

2021 Advocacy Fellowships

Guidelines and Application

SOROS JUSTICE FELLOWSHIPS

Summary

The Soros Justice Fellowships seek applicants for its Advocacy 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 Advocacy Fellowships support outstanding individuals — including lawyers, advocates, grassroots organizers, researchers, and others with unique perspectives — to undertake U.S. criminal justice (or, as some people prefer to say, criminal “(in)justice”) projects at the local, state, and national levels. Projects may range from litigation to public education to coalition-building to grassroots mobilization to policy-driven research. Advocacy Fellowships are 18 months in duration, may be undertaken with the support of a host organization, and can begin anytime in the fall of 2021.

Individuals with projects that propose, as their primary purpose, the completion of books, print or radio journalism, documentary film or video, or other similar media should apply for the [Soros Justice Media Fellowships](#).

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.

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

Advocacy Track I comes with an award of \$94,500 over 18 months. Advocacy Track II comes with an award of \$127,500 over 18 months.

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 things that can be done to advance these broad goals — for example, challenging the extremely long prison terms that have become the accepted norm as a response to serious and violent crimes; ending the punishment and harsh treatment of youth who come into conflict with the law; combatting law enforcement abuses; and fostering health-informed responses to drug use.

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 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, and that teach us about what we don’t know but should.

We are interested in projects that experiment and push boundaries, challenge convention, and anticipate emerging issues. For example, at a time when certain jurisdictions are witnessing real gains in terms of shrinking or closing actual prisons and jails, advocates have also identified the pressing need to challenge the rapid encroachment of the surveillance state, where artificial intelligence and related technologies are being integrated into the criminal justice system and threatening to usher in a new era of “e-carceration.” On a more affirmative note, we are also seeing communities throughout the country questioning the very notion of relying on state entities and institutions to address violence, harm and abuse; and envisioning alternatives to our current systems and structures. It is this type of forward-thinking, visionary work that we remain interested in.

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.

Strategies Supported by the Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowships and Change to the Status Quo

Applicants may employ, either alone or in combination, any number of strategies to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in their projects. These strategies include but are not limited to: impact litigation, public education, strategic communications, policy advocacy, coalition-building, grassroots organizing and mobilization, and policy-driven research and analysis.

Regardless of the strategy employed, all Advocacy Fellowship projects must, during the term of the fellowship itself, actively seek some measure of change to the status quo. We generally define this as an effort to change to a policy, practice or system — whether formalized by law

or not — that has a particular effect on individuals, families, or communities. This can mean promoting or creating good policies, practices or systems, as well as changing or lessening the harmful effects of bad ones. In all cases, however, it involves an effort to move beyond what “is” toward what “can be.” Moreover, a change to the status quo should involve more than simply achieving a specific result for a specific person; instead, groups of people defined by certain characteristics or circumstances should benefit from achieving a particular change.

Intersectional Projects

We recognize that the issues fellows take on 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 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

Individuals can apply for one of two awards, depending on the applicant’s level of experience. Advocacy Track I comes with an award of \$94,500 over 18 months. Advocacy Track II comes with an award of \$127,500 over 18 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

Advocacy Track I

Advocacy 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). Advocacy 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 with a few years of work experience; and those beginning to work on the issue their projects take on after a career in another field or after some other life experience. Individuals who are between the ages of 18–25 and who have fewer than two years' experience should consider applying for the [Soros Justice Youth Activist Fellowships](#).

Advocacy Track II

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

Education

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

Time Commitment

Fellowships are 18 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.

Joint Applications

Under the Advocacy Fellowship category, the fellowships do not allow multiple individuals to apply jointly for a single Advocacy Fellowship.

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 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 Advisory Boards

Host Organization

Advocacy Fellowship applicants are encouraged, but not 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 — 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.

There should be a good “fit” between the fellowship project and the host organization. Often, this means that there is significant alignment between the proposed project and the host’s mission, substantive focus, track record, and capacity. But we’re also interested in situations where the fellowship project would introduce new thinking or approaches to a host’s work — for example, where an organization historically has provided direct services but hasn’t engaged in the type of advocacy work that a proposed fellow would take on; or if an organization doesn’t work on criminal justice reform directly but where a fellow’s project would offer a useful or complimentary perspective or capacity.

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.

Advisory Board

Regardless of whether they partner with a host organization, Advocacy Fellowship applicants must assemble an advisory board for the project. The advisory board must be comprised of a minimum of three (3) individuals who can lend guidance and expertise to the project.

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.

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 PDT)**. 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 Advisory Board Members, Names of Recommenders, and Name of Host Organization (if applicable). 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 (approximately three pages in 12-point font with one-inch margins) containing responses to the three (3) questions listed below in order, with the headings as listed below:

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 (where appropriate, you should use statistics, stories, or other types of information to explain the need for the project), a description of the people or communities affected by the issue the project seeks to address, and what you propose to do.”

Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to supplement their answers to this question by including a detailed timeline of project activities and desired outcomes; and will also be given an opportunity to provide any project updates and revisions.

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

Question 3 (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 the course of your fellowship, including the approximate time to be devoted to these responsibilities or commitments."

- Names and affiliations of at least three (3) people who would serve on your **ADVISORY BOARD**. While we don't require that you obtain firm commitments from proposed advisory board members by the time you submit your application, applicants selected as finalists will be asked to provide further details about these members, e.g. whether they're confirmed, their expertise, how they would contribute to your project, etc.
- 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.
- Name and contact information for proposed **HOST ORGANIZATION** (if applicable). Applicants selected as finalists 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.

If you choose to proceed without a host and you are selected as a finalist, you will be asked to supplement your application with an explanation of why the project does not require the infrastructure and support of an institutional base or organizational home.

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*