

## 2010 Soros Justice Fellowships Program Media Fellowship Guidelines

**Application Deadline: Wednesday, October 14, 2009 (11:59pm EST)**

### General

**Overview.** The Soros Justice Fellowships Program's Media Fellowships support writers, print and broadcast journalists, bloggers, filmmakers, and other individuals with distinct voices proposing to complete media projects for local, regional and national markets that engage the public and provoke policy responses to one or more of the Open Society Institute's U.S. criminal justice priorities. The fellowship program intends to mitigate the time, space, and market constraints that often discourage individuals from pursuing important but marginalized, controversial or unpopular issues in a comprehensive manner. Media Fellowships are one year in duration, and fellows are expected to make their projects the primary focus of their work during the term of the fellowship. Projects can begin in either April or September of 2010.

Photography projects (production or distribution) are not eligible for funding. For information on support for this type of project, please see OSI's [Documentary Photography Project](#).

Note: Please be aware that the Soros Justice Fellowships Program is separate and distinct from the [Open Society Fellowship](#), an OSI program that supports individuals seeking innovative and unconventional approaches to fundamental open society challenges. While both fellowship programs share a common interest in open society issues generally, the Soros Justice Fellowships have an express focus on U.S. criminal justice issues.

### Fellowship Projects

The Soros Justice Fellowships Program is part of the [Criminal Justice Fund](#), housed within the Open Society Institute's [U.S. Programs](#). All Media Fellowship projects must reflect one or more of the Criminal Justice Fund's priorities (see "Criminal Justice Fund Priorities" below).

**The Problem: Mass Incarceration, Harsh Punishment, and Unequal Justice.** The Criminal Justice Fund seeks to promote open society values by reducing the destructive impact of current criminal justice policies on the lives of individuals, families and communities in the United States. In the U.S., almost 1.6 million people are in prison. Another 723,000 people are in local jails. In a nation of 230 million adults, this means that one in every 99 people is behind bars. The number of adults on probation or parole exceeds five million.

These statistics paint a disturbing picture. This country's over-reliance on incarceration and correctional control is driven by a culture of punishment that includes heavy-handed law enforcement practices, lack of adequate legal assistance, and the criminalization of immigration status. Harsh and excessive sentences, including the death penalty and life without the possibility of parole, are among the drivers of this problem. Well-documented, too, is the fact that the costs of these policies are borne most heavily by individuals and communities already pushed to the margins of American life—residents of low-income communities, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals suffering from mental illness and drug dependency.

**Criminal Justice Fund Priorities.** The Criminal Justice Fund takes aim at these problems by pursuing three broad but interrelated goals: reducing mass incarceration, eliminating harsh punishment, and eliminating racial disparities and securing a fair and equitable system of justice. In support of these goals, the Criminal Justice Fund prioritizes efforts to:

- Attack the excessive and economically destructive costs of incarceration
- Eliminate harsh and unjust sentencing practices
- Reform parole and probation policies and practices
- Foster new approaches to drug policy
- Combat the criminalization of marginalized populations, e.g. people with mental illness, homeless individuals
- End punitive school disciplinary policies



- Eliminate unreasonable barriers to the reintegration of people returning from prison, as well as challenge the stigmatization of people with criminal records
- End the treatment of children as adults in prosecution and sentencing
- Abolish the death penalty
- Reform policies that criminalize immigrants
- Reform police and prosecution practices
- Improve indigent defense services and systems

**Intersectional Projects.** We encourage applications for projects that emphasize the intersection of the above priorities with the particular needs of the following specific constituencies: low-income communities; communities of color; immigrants; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people; and women and children.

**Directly Affected Individuals.** We in particular encourage applications from individuals directly affected by, or with significant direct personal experience with, the issues their projects seek to address.

**Projects that Seize Upon a “Transformational Moment.”** By all accounts, we are living through a period of tremendous economic, social and political change. While the Soros Justice Fellowships Program will continue to support projects that address long-standing, deeply entrenched problems in our criminal justice system, the program is also keen to receive applications that seek to capitalize on this transformational moment. To that end, we encourage projects that are explicitly attuned to, and concern themselves with, opportunities and challenges associated with the current environment (e.g. the economic crisis, the changing political and policy landscape, the “post-race” frame emerging from Obama’s election).

**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 Media Fellowship guidelines may submit an email inquiry before proceeding with the full online application process. The email should provide a brief (no more than 500 words) description of the proposed project, as well as some background information on the applicant, and should be sent to: [sorosjusticefellowships@sorosny.org](mailto:sorosjusticefellowships@sorosny.org). Our response will not address whether we feel a proposed project is strong or weak; only whether it technically fits within our guidelines. Please note that the Fellowships Program will do its best to respond to all email inquiries within a week of their receipt; however, 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 program guidelines.

## Awards

The award for the Media Fellowship consists of the following:

- Stipend and project budget of \$45,000;
- \$2,500 for health insurance;
- Funds to attend gatherings sponsored by the Soros Justice Fellowships Program
- Access to ongoing technical assistance resources.

## Eligibility

**Experience.** Applicants must either have: (a) well-established records of publication, dissemination or broadcast in local, regional or national markets, or among targeted audiences or constituencies (e.g. professional associations); or (b) otherwise relevant experience reflecting an ability to carry out the proposed project (i.e. applicants who are not professional writers, journalists or filmmakers must demonstrate that they are nonetheless able to accomplish the project).

### Proposed Project Deliverables.

- Print journalism projects must propose no fewer than five (5) articles to be published in newspapers (local or national) or mainstream magazines.
- Radio or audio journalism projects must propose stories that will be broadcast nationally, regionally or in targeted markets.



- Book projects must either have a publisher in advance of applying for the fellowship or demonstrate strong interest from publishers; and must include plans to write two (2) companion magazine or newspaper articles on the topic.
- Documentary film or video projects must be in post-production or distribution stages and a polished rough-cut or fine-cut must be submitted with the proposal (research and pre-production film or video proposals are not eligible and will not be reviewed).
- Projects involving other forms of media not covered by the above list must propose deliverables in sufficient quantity so as to reflect a substantial part of a year's worth of work on the project.
- Photography projects (production or distribution) are not eligible for funding. For information on support for this type of project, please see the Open Society Institute's [Documentary Photography Project](#).

**Time Commitment.** Fellowships are one year in duration and should begin in either April or September of 2010. Fellows are expected to make their projects the primary focus of their work during the term of the fellowship. Also, if awarded a fellowship, applicants must be available to attend two fellowship-related gatherings: the New Fellows meeting (tentatively set for March 2010 in New York City; exact dates to be announced) and the annual Soros Justice Fellowships conference (tentatively set for June 2010; exact date and location to be announced).

**Joint Applications.** Up to three (3) individuals can apply jointly for a Media Fellowship. However, joint applications carry a single stipend.

**Host Organizations.** Unlike for the Advocacy Fellowship, Media Fellowship applicants do not have host organizations. While applicants are welcome to explain in their project proposals 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 Fellowship Program does not fund enrollment for degree or non-degree study at academic institutions, including dissertation research.

**Past Soros Justice Fellowship Recipients.** Past Soros Justice Fellowship recipients are not eligible to apply.

**Lobbying.** Under the federal tax rules applicable to U.S. private foundations, OSI cannot support lobbying activities. Projects that include lobbying activities will not be funded. Please 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 OSI's General Counsel's Office.

## Selection Criteria and Process

Applications will be evaluated on the extent to which the applicant possesses the vision, drive, and skills needed to generate compelling stories that will broaden public understanding and prompt policy responses on the issues at the heart of the Open Society Institute's U.S. criminal justice priorities. A reading committee consisting of foundation staff and outside experts in the field will review proposals and nominate finalists. Finalists will be invited to interview with a selection committee consisting of foundation staff and outside experts in the field.

Note: OSI reserves the right, at any point in the selection process, to request that applicants have their applications considered under a different fellowship category (e.g. Advocacy vs. Media).

In evaluating applications, the program will consider:

### Project Treatment:

- Does the project treat an issue that is relevant (i.e. involves one or more of the Open Society Institute's U.S. criminal justice priority areas)?
- Is the project treatment of the issue effective (i.e. it offers an in-depth treatment of an important current issue or a new angle on an issue related to the foundation's U.S. criminal justice priorities)?
- Is it strong (i.e. it reflects good background research or reporting and a clear understanding of the issue)?

### Project Viability:



- Is the project sufficiently engaging (i.e. original, compelling, and timely enough to interest editors, publishers or broadcasters, and appeal to broad or targeted audiences)? In other words, will this project see the light of day and serve to inform and potentially move the public and policymakers?

**Project Dissemination:**

- Given the applicant's track record and the proposed project, is the distribution plan realistic (i.e. the stories will likely reach their intended audience; the plan involves strategic collaborations; in the case of documentary projects, the distribution plan reaches creatively beyond traditional broadcast outlets)?
- Is it sufficiently ambitious?

**Project Budget:**

- Is the plan for the budget reasonable given the scope of the project?
- Does the timeline reflect a professional understanding of the requirements of the project?

**Applicant:**

- Does the applicant possess the credentials, professional skills, and discipline needed to accomplish the project?
- Does the applicant have the talent and commitment to getting and telling compelling stories, as well as the ability to work independently to accomplish this project?
- Does the applicant have the necessary professional connections to ensure that the proposed project will be published or broadcast by the proposed outlets?

## Application Information

The application deadline is **Wednesday, October 14, 2009 (11:59pm EST)**. Incomplete applications will not be given full consideration.

**Fellowship application materials must be submitted online** (with the exception of the samples of previous work, which must be mailed in). To submit an online application, go to <http://oas.soros.org/oas/>, where you will have to "Register an Individual Account," select a user name and password, and provide basic personal information. All communications from OSI regarding applications will be sent to the email used to register that account (so please ensure that email communications from the foundation do not end up in your "Junk Mail" folder).

Note: Our online system will begin accepting applications on August 5, 2009.

Complete applications consist of the following:

**Completed online:**

- **Application form**

**Uploaded online** (as either PDF or Word documents – but if using Word documents, please do not upload any files with the ".docx" file extension; our online system can presently only read ".doc" files):

- **Resume or CV** that includes a list of your published and broadcast work. If you have published or broadcast extensively, please limit your list to two (2) pages of your most relevant work published within the last five (5) years. Include the story titles, publications or outlets where the pieces appeared, and the dates of publication or broadcast.
- **Five-page, single-spaced proposal** in 12-point font with one-inch margins containing the following items in this order (with the headings as listed below, e.g. Project Synopsis, Story Treatment, etc.):

Project Synopsis: A synopsis of the project that reflects extensive background research and reporting, and a clear understanding of the national or regional impact of such a project on current discussion of the issue;



**Story Treatment:** A story treatment outlining your approach to the issue, your expected final projects (a list of tentative themes of the stories you plan to write or produce), and how the stories or series will be structured (potential subjects, planned locations, possible conclusions);

**Communications (and Distribution or Outreach) Plan:** A description of the specific audiences you hope to reach, your reasons for focusing on them, and how you intend to reach them;

**Budget:** A budget reflecting the project activities, including your stipend, research and travel costs, cost of supplies and equipment, finishing and distribution costs, and expected income from sale of stories or from other funders;

**Timeline:** A timeline that explains the project's specific activities and reflects all phases of the project and the time you will allocate to meet your goals and achieve your expected outcomes;

**If you are not a professional writer, journalist or filmmaker:** A discussion of why you are the right person to carry out this project and how your experience reflects an ability to successfully accomplish the project.

- **Two (2) letters of recommendation from editors, supervisors or close colleagues.** The letters should address your talent, professionalism, and demonstrated ability to work independently to complete long-term, in-depth projects. Letters should not be more than two (2) pages in length. We encourage you to share your proposal narrative and the Fellowship Program's selection criteria with those who write on your behalf.
- **For book projects only:** If proposing a book project, please include a letter from your publisher endorsing the project or two (2) letters from publishers that have expressed strong interest in the project. Letters should not be more than two (2) pages each.

**Mailed** (postmarked by October 14, 2009):

- **Samples of your previous work / proposed project** (please note that samples sent in excess of the requirements listed below will not receive consideration):

Print applicants (print journalism or books) should submit seven (7) copies each of three (3) samples of previous work. Clips should be photocopied onto 8.5" x 11" paper. Each sample should be of no more than ten (10) pages.

Radio or audio applicants should submit seven (7) copies of audio CDs each containing three (3) samples of previous work. Be sure to label all copies with your first and last name, as well as the title of the sample.

Film and video applicants should submit seven (7) DVD copies of the proposed project (fine cut or rough cut) and seven (7) DVD copies of an additional sample of previous work. Please label all copies with your first and last name, along with the title of the sample.

Applicants proposing projects involving other forms of media should submit seven (7) copies each of three (3) samples of previous work, on either 8.5" x 11" paper, audio CDs, or DVDs (depending on the type of media). Please label all audio CDs or DVDs with your first and last name, along with the title of the sample.

All copies of samples should be **marked with your name and the title of the sample, and mailed to:**

Christina Voight  
Soros Justice Fellowships  
Open Society Institute  
400 W. 59th Street  
New York, NY 10019



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Note: Due to the volume of materials received, we are unable to return any copies of samples that are mailed to us.

## **Application and Selection Timeline**

<b>Application Deadline:</b>	<b>October 14, 2009 (11:59pm EST)</b>
Finalists Notified:	Mid-November 2009
Finalist Interviews:	Mid-December 2009
Selected Fellows Notified:	Late-January 2010
Projects Begin:	April or September 2010