

Open Society Institute

Request for Proposals: Supporting State Alliances to Advance Transparency, Equity, and Accountability in the Economic Recovery (Sept 2009)

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q1. What's the origin of this project?

A. This project grew out of a new, temporary, one-time fund, the "Seize the Day Fund," created earlier this year by OSI's U.S. Programs staff to help organizations tackle the problems created by the economic crisis and seize the current moment to advance longstanding priorities of U.S. Programs. U.S. Programs staff representing a range of open society concerns came together to develop this rapid response grantmaking fund, a piece of which has been set aside to fund groups explicitly working at the state level.

Q2. Which states are eligible to apply under this project?

A. Initially this RFP targeted six states: California, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin. In August, OSI was pleased to be able to expand the fund to include three more states: Colorado, Florida, Louisiana.

Q3. Why did OSI select these nine states?

A. These nine represent either states in which U.S. Programs staff have begun to make state-level grants on a range of issues, or states that staff are considering in their future grantmaking. The results of this process will help to inform grantmaking strategies in these states.

Q4. How is OSI defining the following terms?

Alliances – At least two state-based organizations working together to advance transparency, equity, and accountability in the economic recovery.

Transparency – When government decision-making is transparent, the public is more likely to trust the process and engage in it meaningfully, whether on policy issues or at the ballot box. It is critical that people have access to all data and information related to recovery spending, to inform their advocacy as they press for the equitable distribution of recovery funds.

Equity and Equity Spending – OSI believes it is critical to apply an equity lens to economic recovery spending. Our specific objective is to ensure that recovery funds

benefit those communities most in need, namely low-income communities (both urban and rural), immigrants, women, LGBT individuals, youth, and people of color. Our overarching goal is to ensure equal treatment and an equal voice in decision-making for historically excluded groups, and to demonstrate that all members of our society have a shared interest in just and inclusive government policies.

Accountability – Our system of checks and balances permits the public to hold answerable those responsible for distributing the federal recovery dollars. Transparency in spending by state and municipal governments will help ensure their accountability to those they serve – the public.

Q5. My organization is not based in one of your targeted states, but we partner with other organizations from those states. Is my organization eligible to apply as the lead organization?

A. No, lead organizations must be based in one of the nine targeted states. However, if your organizations can demonstrate a strong presence in a particular state, you may be eligible for funding as an alliance partner organization.

Q6. Our alliance doesn't currently include strong representation from OSI's priority constituencies, including people of color, women, immigrants, youth, and low-income people, but we have plans to do so. Should we bother to apply?

A. Yes, OSI would like to see state-based groups use OSI support to bring organizations together to form new, often unlikely alliances, and to strengthen existing ones. Every proposal will be judged on its ability to clearly define the role and contribution of each partner.

Q7. Will priority be given to alliances resulting from new partnerships or to those that deepen existing ones?

A. Priority will not be given to one or the other. Rather, every proposal will be assessed in terms of its ability to outline a clear and compelling plan for meeting its goals with an eye toward creating opportunities for capacity building.

Q8. Will the foundation consider funding an explicit planning grant to bring key groups together?

A. No, while the foundation appreciates the need for good organizational planning and often support planning grants through some of its other programs, the intent of this project is to support groups already prepared to work together to assure greater transparency, equity, and accountability in the economic recovery at the state level.

Q9. Does OSI have specific national organizations or coalitions you want to encourage us to work with?

A. OSI does fund a number of national watchdog groups and national coalitions that can provide state-based groups with good information and data on how the federal stimulus dollars are being spent in your state.

Some of these groups include: the STAR Coalition, www.AccountableRecovery.org, the Coalition for an Accountable Recovery www.coalitionforanaccountablerecovery.org, OMB Watch, www.ombwatch.org, National Institute for Money in State Politics, www.followthemoney.org, InterAlliance Dialogue or www.citiesforprogress.org, Policylink's, Demand Equity Now Recovery Briefing Series, www.policylink.org. Partnering with these national groups, however, is not required for funding under this RFP.

Q10. What if we are already an OSI grantee? Does that strengthen or weaken our case?

A. It depends on the strength of the proposal. OSI is open to funding existing grantees as well as organizations it has never funded before. OSI is not open to funding groups through this process that we have already funded to do this work.

Q11. How will the final funding decisions be made? Who is involved?

A. A number of people will be involved in the decision-making process. OSI's consultant is responsible for reviewing each proposal and assessing them in accordance with the criteria outlined in the RFP. Her recommendations will go to the "Seize the Day Fund" team, led by the Executive Director of U.S. Programs. Once that team has approved a set of finalists, final recommendations will go to OSI's President for approval. Grant awards for Colorado, Florida and Louisiana will be announced by mid December 2009.

Q12. What is the size of the fund?

A. \$4 million total to support work in the nine targeted states.

Q13. What is the size of the grants?

A. OSI will consider grants of up to \$500,000 per state to be distributed over two years. Given the level of interest this RFP has generated so far, we anticipate a particularly competitive process.

- Q14. Is OSI open to receiving a proposal that focused exclusively on one key area of ARRA investment, for instance, education?
- A. We certainly recognize the inherent tension in this RFP between breath and depth and strongly encourage alliances not to exceed their capacities, not to spread themselves too thin. If groups do not feel equipped to address a wider range of ARRA issues, and instead decide to focus on one specific area of investment of stimulus dollars, we ask that you articulate the significance of this issue area for your state and its impact on a board range of constituents.
- Q15. Does an alliance that already has an active state funding partner receive preference?
- A. OSI is eager to benefit from the knowledge and experience of state and local funders. We are very interested in leveraging local resources for both the short and also the long-term sustainability of this work. That said, while we welcome proposals that can demonstrate interest and/or commitment from a state or local funding partner, proposal without such partnerships will not be penalized.
- Q16. What if I have additional questions?
- A. OSI has scheduled conference calls for interested organizations and funders, one per state, intended to describe the application process and field questions and concerns. Please find the schedule below:

Tuesday, Sept 15:	10:00 am CT/11 EST	Louisiana
Wednesday, Sept 16:	11:00 am EST	Florida
Thursday, Sept 17:	10:00 am MT/Noon EST	Colorado

If you weren't able to join a call or have more questions, please feel free to contact Helena Huang, OSI Consultant @ staterfp@sorosny.org