

HISTORY OF THE OSI U.S. PROGRAMS

GEORGE SOROS'S GLOBAL FOUNDATION NETWORK started in 1984, with the establishment of a foundation in his native Hungary, several years before the democratic revolutions of 1989.

In the mid-1990s, Soros launched two New York-based initiatives focused on the United States: the Lindesmith Center, to spark debate about, and reform of, misguided approaches to drug policy; and the Project on Death in America, to improve care at the end of life.

George Soros's work in the United States grew out of his experiences with philanthropy abroad. Appalled by the response of the United States and other Western nations to the humanitarian crises in Bosnia and Rwanda, he began to question the strength of open society values in the world's leading democracy. Consulting a number of scholars and activists, he launched a broader U.S. program in 1996.

Though the United States did not fit the closed society model that characterized the countries in which the Soros foundations worked abroad, evidence was mounting that many open society values were in disrepair. In response, the U.S. Programs focused on two broad areas: inner-city problems that contribute to the hardening of racial and class divisions, such as the booming incarceration rate or the failure to assist families and provide community support for education; and the promotion of noncommercial approaches to culture, journalism, and professions such as law and medicine, and the reinvention of professional, civic, and political ethics and community service.

In 1996, OSI launched the Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, to deal with the causes and consequences of the appallingly high incarceration rate in the United States, and announced the first competition for OSI fellowships. In 1998, we took the first major steps in what would become the Governance and Public Policy program, with large multi-year grants for campaign finance reform and organizing by low-income groups working to influence the redesign of state welfare programs. To address the unjust treatment of legal immigrants cut off from government benefits by the 1996 welfare reform bill, Soros created the \$50 million Emma Lazarus Fund to provide naturalization and other services, and to support advocates working to change the policy. In 1997, OSI launched the Program on Law and Society, dealing with access to justice, independence of the judiciary, and professional values and standards; a Baltimore office to offer an integrated approach to a variety of connected open society issues—including education, drug treatment, and workforce development—relying on local leadership and partnerships; an urban debate program; an arts initiative; and a reproductive rights program. In 1998, OSI created the Medicine as a Profession program, promoting physician-consumer partnerships and greater opportunities for public service and advocacy by physicians; Community Fellowships to support social change entrepreneurs in New York City and Baltimore; The After-School Corporation, with a challenge grant to create universal access to quality programs for young people; and with the Irene Diamond Fund, OSI created a Funders' Collaborative for Gun Violence Prevention. In 2000, OSI launched initiatives on indigent defense, youth media, and, in collaboration with the Carnegie Corporation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reform of urban high schools. In addition, OSI dedicated funds for a special initiative to support organizations working on democracy and justice issues in the U.S. South.