

The Overbrook Foundation

Program Guidelines

Introduction

The Overbrook Foundation Board of Directors conducted a strategic review of mission and values, program priorities and management in 2010. The Board affirmed the Foundation's commitment to the Environment and Human Rights as the focus of its grantmaking. The guidelines which follow reflect the decisions and priority settings made by the Board during the strategic review process. The guidelines describe the directions given to staff for achieving the mission articulated by the Board for the Foundation:

The Overbrook Foundation is a progressive family foundation that supports organizations advancing human rights and conserving the natural environment.

Environment Program

The Overbrook Foundation has a long history of supporting the environment. In 2000, the Board refocused its efforts into two primary areas: Sustainable Production and Consumption in the United States and Biodiversity Conservation in Latin America. In 2008, the Board allocated funds to create a portfolio of grants around Climate Change; but, due to the economic downturn, the most relevant climate related grants were absorbed into an expanding Sustainability category. When possible, both focus areas attempt to make grants that support the Human Rights Program at the Foundation. The Environment Program makes occasional grants to media related endeavors and rare grants to projects that might fall out of the normal focus but are timely, topical and deemed important by the Board of Directors.

The Environment Program is especially interested in innovative ways of approaching environmental problems. We look to find new solutions to long existing problems and seek out organizations that possess a spirit of innovation. We are especially aware of risk taking and support groups that are unafraid of generating new ideas and visions when their existing programs do not adequately create the desired solutions.

Described below are the specific program areas supported by the Environment Program, along with some of the organizations recently funded to carry out this work. Program specific objectives are regularly revisited and modified. For example, for many years the Foundation funded work specific to electronic waste and extended producer responsibility. As more states have passed legislation in this area, the Foundation is shifting focus toward areas identified as needing more support, looking at new products and forms of sustainable product design, waste reduction and end of life product capture.

Sustainable Production and Consumption:

The Foundation's Sustainable Production and Consumption program supports a variety of efforts related to the design, manufacturing and disposal of consumer products. One of the Sustainable Production and Consumption program initiatives works on ending destructive forestry practices and unnecessary paper waste, with the goal of promoting a paperless society and a more responsible paper industry. Some of the organizations the Foundation supports for their efforts toward a sustainable pulp and paper industry are the Environmental Paper Network, Green Press Initiative and Catalog Choice, including that organization's 2010 Paperless Choice Contest.

The Foundation also supports policy efforts around extended producer responsibility and electronic waste take back laws. The Environment Program's goal is to help organizations achieve safe end of life solutions for electronics and other products, including bottle and can recycling. Some of the organizations supported for these initiatives are the Electronics TakeBack Coalition, Natural Resources Defense Council, Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition and Per Scholas.

And, with the realization that most environmental and social problems start at the stage of planning and design, the Foundation supports groups that work on sustainable materials, sustainable design, product certification and, to a lesser degree, environmental health. Clean Production Action, GreenBlue Institute, Health Care Without Harm and the Keystone Center are representative of organizations fulfilling the Foundation's sustainable design initiatives.

The Foundation looks for funding opportunities to leverage its limited funds, both by partnering with other organizations and looking for "tipping point" projects: those that can influence and create additional positive changes. For example, the Foundation has partnered with NRDC for its hybrid taxis and solid waste work, with the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City for its GreeNYC public survey, with Clean Air-Cool Planet to administer a small grants fund and, with a collaborative group of NGO and business leaders, to advance the Foundation's own Conservation 2051 project.

Latin American Biodiversity Conservation:

Since 2000, The Foundation has supported biodiversity conservation programs in Mexico, Brazil and Ecuador. On a limited, case-by-case basis, it now considers programs in surrounding Latin and Central American countries.

Foundation support is focused on local organizations working to conserve their natural resource base, typically either with forests, small scale agriculture or nontimber forest products. Some of the organizations supported for these efforts are IPAM (Brazil), Altropico (Ecuador), Sendas (Mexico) and the Amazon Conservation Team (Brazil), among others.

In an effort to develop innovative ways to conserve biodiversity, the Foundation funds groups that use voluntary standards and corporate campaigns to make change, such as

IMAZON, the Rainforest Alliance, ISEAL, Corporate Ethics International, Borealis, Forest Ethics, the Environmental Investigation Agency and the Rainforest Action Network, among others.

The Foundation funds a number of projects that create financial mechanisms to conserve biodiversity. These PES (Payment for Ecosystems Services) efforts are championed by several Overbrook Environment grantees, including Forest Trends, Wildlife Conservation Society and Nature and Culture International.

For many years, the Foundation partnered with Columbia University's Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC) on the Overbrook Foundation Fellowship Program, supporting Latin American Conservationists. Although the CERC collaboration is no longer active, the Foundation is committed to exploring new fellowship opportunities.

Public TV, Radio and Other Media:

The Foundation currently funds a select few public TV, radio and other media organizations tackling sustainability and conservation. In print media, some of the groups the Environment Program has supported are Demos, in a joint grant with Human Rights, Grist.org, Island Press and Environmental Health Sciences. Other media projects working on sustainability and conservation that are supported by the Foundation are The Story of Stuff and National Public Radio, specifically for its environmental reporting.

Joint Funding with Human Rights Program: The objectives of the Environment and Human Rights Programs intersect in many ways. Initiatives within the Environment Program support green jobs, environmental health and community-based, indigenous conservation efforts in Latin America. While all of these categories yield distinct environmental improvements, they are inseparable from human rights issues and greatly benefit the communities in which they are active. To list a few examples: Green For All works to create a green economy that will eliminate greenhouse gas pollution while eliminating poverty. LAANE advocates for green jobs and policy change that will improve conditions for workers and the environment. Altropico empowers rural and indigenous communities through sustainable conservation and management. Imaflores helps local farmers meet international standards, linking producers with buyers while educating communities about biodiversity conservation.

Human Rights

With the recent completion of its strategic program planning work, the Board of Directors has moved the Foundation toward a more tightly focused Human Rights Program that domestically is committed to growing the emerging U.S. human rights movement, advancing gender rights by supporting both the reproductive justice community and the movement for LGBT equality and protecting the centrality of media in the democratic process.

Internationally, the Foundation's Human Rights Program seeks to support organizations in Latin America whose missions are to advance the movement for gender rights and/or to protect human rights defenders (activists working on the ground to advance the rights of individuals and groups often under attack from unsympathetic governments and/or predatory business interests.)

The Emerging U.S. Human Rights Movement

Beginning in 2005, The Overbrook Foundation assumed a leading role in developing the domestic human rights movement. It joined as a founding partner the U.S. Human Rights Fund to respond to the burgeoning interest among social justice organizations in using universal human rights standards and strategies to advance their social justice advocacy. The Fund and the Foundation believe that human rights values, strategies and standards (as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties) benefit progressive social justice work in the U.S. by enabling activists to campaign for affirmative domestic reforms. By invoking universal claims to dignity, equality and opportunity that go beyond civil rights protections contained in statutory law or the Bill of Rights, human rights empower vulnerable communities in the U.S. to define and lead their own campaigns against injustice.

The Foundation's Board affirmed its deepened commitment to the emerging human rights movement during its recent strategic review. The Foundation's grantmaking strategy includes support for:

- advocacy campaigns that promote the applied use of human rights to advance substantive policy and legal objectives in the United States;
- human rights training and education to build the base and capacity of activists and groups to actively engage in domestic human rights work across issues, strategies and sectors;
- stronger national and regional networks linking domestic human rights organizations to each other and the U.S. and international rights community;
- media expertise capable of developing powerful messaging and cross movement communication that amplifies and clarifies the shared human rights values uniting the movement across all issue areas and campaigns; and,
- attracting new resources and leveraging support of existing and new donors for the domestic human rights field.

Reproductive Justice

More than 35 years since Roe vs. Wade, American women and their families continue to face a wide range of reproductive challenges. These challenges are intensified in communities of color, where economic inequalities, health disparities and racial prejudice all play a role in compounding the pressures facing women seeking to maintain their health and the health of their families.

The Right is using attacks on sexuality, and abortion in particular, as a tactic for advancing a much bigger agenda. Control of the reproductive health of women of color has become one of its primary targets. While opposition to abortion was the initial, emotional starting place to draw in its base, the Right has expanded its agenda to include opposition to sexual education, family planning and even, unbelievably, contraception.

Historically, progressives focused on “choice” and the right to abortion which, especially because of public discomfort with abortion, isolated the reproductive rights movement from natural allies in the larger social justice and human rights movement. Today, there is a growing cohort of organizations that understand the limits of pursuing a strategy focused solely on fighting anti-abortion efforts. They are working to develop a reproductive justice movement that emphasizes all aspects of health for women and their families; e.g., family planning services, healthy environments for raising children, access to safe abortions, comprehensive sex education, LGBT inclusiveness, marriage equality, etc. that will allow them to reconnect with the broader social justice community and the emerging human rights movement.

Using a “Reproductive Justice” framework for identifying and linking cross-issue, cross-movement work, these organizations have created a broad progressive agenda and have broken open the polarization that came from the mono-focus on abortion. They are working with “nontraditional” allies to win reproductive rights battles that previously were unwinnable. The unifying characteristic of this movement—and the organizations that have joined its ranks—is a vision of the complete health and well being of all women, girls and families.

Overbrook’s grantmaking strategy for growing the reproductive rights and justice movement includes:

- Building the capacity and supporting leadership development of women of color-led reproductive justice organizations
- Increasing resources for these organizations so that they can grow to scale
- Supporting strategic campaigns or initiatives that deepen or expand alliances
- Identifying, nurturing and documenting advocacy wins

Advancing LGBT Rights

Over the more than 20 year period of continuous Overbrook support for LGBT-related issues, a fundamental and striking change has occurred in the movement to claim LGBT equality. Initially, LGBT organizations were on the defense seeking to stop punitive policies that put LGBT people at risk of physical harm, legal intimidation and/or demoted them to second-place status as citizens. However, the move towards full inclusion in civil society with the guarantees of access to the rights, privileges and responsibilities afforded all citizens is no longer defensive in nature. Instead, it has become a fully articulated campaign for equality.

No single issue demonstrates this move from a defensive to an offensive posture more succinctly than the campaign for marriage equality. It demands that same-sex couples be given access to the entire range of rights and protections civil marriage grants to couples and their children.¹ Overbrook became involved in supporting campaigns to achieve marriage equality, in part, as recognition that no single other action could achieve such a broad based advance toward equality.

Over the next several years, the Foundation will continue to support the movement for LGBT equality by offering support to those organizations whose work includes advocating for civil marriage as a central strategy for driving the movement toward LGBT rights and equality. Overbrook expects to continue its participation in the Civil Marriage Collaborative, a joint funding effort of eleven foundations to build and strengthen on a state-by-state basis a broad and diverse grassroots constituency to achieve marriage equality for same-sex couples in the United States. Combined with its support of Lambda Legal (much of which is devoted to Lambda's role in litigating for civil marriage rights), Freedom to Marry and potentially other organizations working on marriage as a pathway to full equality, the Foundation expects to remain at the center of the LGBT rights movement with its funding and leadership playing an important role in assuring that momentum for LGBT equality continues to advance. A caveat: The campaign for civil marriage is moving so rapidly that the Foundation must pay close attention to its progress and be prepared to refocus its efforts for LGBT equality and/or other human rights issues as opportunity and new challenges arise.

Media Initiative

Over the past decade, the Foundation sharpened its approach to support of not-for-profit media, in particular by looking for opportunities where support for media would advance the Foundation's objectives in Human Rights. As a result, support for longstanding media grantees was refocused to tie support of these groups to the human rights and environment objectives of the Foundation. With awards to new grantees, the Foundation sought to strengthen independent, alternative and ethnic Media, advance the national media reform movement and build a strong communications presence into the Foundation's strategy for building the domestic human rights community.

While advocates and non-profit organizations can provide powerful arguments and compelling data, it is media makers who create the window through which those arguments and data pass to the public. To truly move hearts and minds, artists, advocates and media makers must collaborate to fully develop ideas, those they share as well as those that inspire healthy debate. The identification of common goals and the creation of a coordinated set of strategies can only be achieved by insisting upon free, robust communication. New media vehicles like digital video, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, texting, Google mapping and the blogosphere have democratized and extended the potential for media production and dissemination. Developing strategies that effectively use both new and traditional media remains critical for advancing the culture of human rights at the core of the Foundation's work.

¹ Beside the 1,138 rights and responsibilities that are bestowed on married couples by the federal government, there are another 1,324 rights and responsibilities that come from New York State government with a marriage license.

Because of its importance to the Overbrook mission and to the missions of its grantees, the Foundation will continue to support efforts that protect the centrality of media in the democratic process and that explore the evolving relationship of new and traditional media to our human rights and environment programs. In looking forward, the Board of Directors will advance those efforts through grantmaking that:

- support projects at the national level that are intended to strengthen public media, produce new business models for commercial news, advance inclusion of the ethnic media sector and promote universal access to a free, open and affordable internet.
- use new and traditional Media to advance the Foundation's Human Rights and Environment Mission. Foundation support of its longstanding media grantees will be built upon partnerships that direct its funds toward activities that advance the Foundation's Human Rights and Environment objectives.

Human Rights in Latin America

International concerns, including a focus on human rights, have been a part of the Foundation's grantmaking since its inception. Today, the Foundation's Human Rights Program presently devotes approximately 70% of its human rights grantmaking to domestic organizations and 30% to international grantmaking. Since 2000, the international focus has turned increasingly toward human rights grantmaking focused on Latin America.

By limiting its geographic focus to Latin America, the Foundation is able to demonstrate its support for global human rights while advancing issues that reflect the Foundation's domestic human rights agenda. The deep economic, cultural and political ties that exist between the U.S. and Latin America link the development of human rights across the Americas with advances or set-backs in one region often influencing how rights issues are considered in the other. While Overbrook's investments in Latin America are modest, they carry greater weight because of the relatively low involvement of private philanthropy in this region. (According to the Index of Global Philanthropy, Latin America falls behind sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific as a recipient of philanthropic dollars.)

Moving forward, the Board recognizes two areas of continuing involvement for Foundation grantmaking: gender rights and defending human rights defenders.

- Overbrook will continue its support of varying approaches to defending human rights defenders active in Latin America. These strategies for defending human rights activists on the ground range from physically extracting activists who find themselves in dangerous situations and organizing campaigns to call attention internationally to activists under attack to providing them with training on how to operate safely on the internet and maintain secure and private communications with their fellow activists and avoid government spying.
- Paralleling the Foundation's domestic focus on gender, Overbrook will support organizations working on these same issues in Latin America. In both the U.S. and Latin America, there has been very interesting progress in advancing gender

rights and significant setbacks. In both regions, concerted attempts at limiting women's access to reproductive health services are on the rise. Interestingly, in recent months LGBT rights, especially in granting same-sex couples access to civil marriage, have seen important advances with both predominantly Catholic Mexico and Argentina granting marriage rights to same-sex couples.

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