

Conversation with Open Society Foundations, Campaign for a New Drug Policy on November 19, 2012

Participants:

- Andy Ko, Campaign Manager
- Jamie Wood, Program Associate
- Cari Tuna, Good Ventures
- Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Andy Ko and Jamie Woods.

Summary: Good Ventures and GiveWell spoke with the Open Society Foundations (OSF) to learn about giving opportunities in the area of drug policy reform. Topics that were touched on included: the program areas of OSF's Campaign for a New Drug Policy, the charities and funders in the area of drug policy reform, funding opportunities, and the successful campaigns to legalize recreational marijuana in Washington state and Colorado.

History: Philanthropist George Soros and OSF have supported drug policy reform since the mid-1990s. OSF is one of the largest funders of work in this area. The Campaign for a New Drug Policy is an initiative of OSF's United States Programs and has been staffed since November 2010.

Purpose: Campaign for a New Drug Policy supports efforts to effectively address the health, safety, and social harms associated with drug use and drug markets, while reducing the high levels of incarceration, racial injustice and violation of individual rights associated with current drug policy.

Program areas:

Campaign for a New Drug Policy has three broad program areas:

1. Support for reform organizations: The Drug Policy Alliance is OSF's biggest grantee in this area.
2. Drug policy focused on health and harm reduction. Community Catalyst, a key national group advocating for health care reform, is one of OSF's grantees in this area. This organization is currently focused on implementation of the Affordable Care Act.
3. Community level alternatives to punitive drug policies. This area is important because members of a community are most in touch with the problems associated with drug use and drug markets in their community. OSF is funding a pilot project called Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) in Seattle. LEAD is a

partnership of local government, including police and prosecutors, civil liberties advocates, community groups and social service providers that moves people arrested for drug possession or low-level sales into a program that addresses the underlying reasons for their illegal activities *without* booking them into the local jail. The program is intended to address community needs, save law enforcement dollars and resources, and break the cycle of arrest and imprisonment.

Individual charities

Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) is the largest and most influential national drug policy reform organization. Its staff has a high level of expertise and experience. DPA is headquartered in New York City, but has local programs in California, New Jersey, New Mexico, Colorado and New York state.

Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) is a national organization that works on reducing the harms experienced by those who are unable or unwilling to stop taking drugs. Rather than insisting on absolute abstinence, harm reduction approaches to drug use seek to prevent overdose death and the transmission of disease, such as HIV and hepatitis.

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition is an organization consisting of current and former police, prison guards, prosecutors and judges who believe that drug use and markets should be controlled through regulatory measures, not the criminal justice system. They speak with credibility on account of experience enforcing the laws that they now believe are ineffective and, in fact, harm society more than drug use itself.

The San Francisco Drug Users' Union, Voices Of Community Advocates & Leaders (VOCAL-NY), People's Harm Reduction Alliance (PHRA) and Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users are some examples of membership organizations through which drug users advocate for their own needs and rights. Holly Bradford at the San Francisco Drug Users Union would be a good person for Good Ventures and GiveWell to talk to.

Communities of color have historically been wary of proposals for drug policy reform. Some initiatives that OSF has funded to change attitudes within their communities are the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and Institute of the Black World 21st Century.

Parents are often opposed to drug policy reform, perhaps preferring known policies that they acknowledge are unsatisfactory to proposed reforms that are unfamiliar. OSF funds Mothers Against Teen Violence to make parents and the general public aware that existing drug laws pose a serious, but avoidable, threat to their children.

General support grants

OSF gives DPA and HRC general support funding. OSF believes that well-established reform organizations are often in the best position to decide how to use funds and should

have the ability to respond to emergent opportunities. When OSF gives grants to organizations that are not exclusively focused on drug policy, it generally earmarks them for specified projects. For example, OSF gave a grant to the NAACP to fund participation by their members in the 2011 Drug Policy Alliance conference. Often OSF plays a supporting role in the projects that it funds, with OSF staff providing drug policy reform and public health expertise to augment the capacity of the Campaign's grantees.

Other funders in the area of drug policy

Some other important institutional funders in the area of drug policy are the DPA grantmaking program, the Riverstyx Foundation, and Libra Foundation.

Best opportunities for funding

Community level alternatives to punitive drug policy could use a lot more funding.

Strategic advocacy connected with the Affordable Care Act deserves high priority because the best opportunities to support the law's full implementation will disappear by 2014.

Legalization of recreational marijuana in Washington and Colorado

In the 2012 election, voters passed laws in Washington state and Colorado legalizing the use of recreational marijuana.

The campaign in Washington: The state campaign raised \$6 million for the campaign. The average initiative campaign in Washington state has historically cost \$2-\$3 million, although others have been substantially more costly.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Washington (ACLU-WA) was a key organizational supporter of the marijuana reform ballot measure. Beginning with a startup grant from OSF, the ACLU-WA has had a staffed drug policy reform project since 2001. The organization's core drug policy work since the OSF grant was completed has included a major effort toward marijuana reform led by Drug Policy Project Director Alison Chinn Holcomb. Ms. Holcomb temporarily left the ACLU to lead the I-502 marijuana reform campaign, gathering the support of former Republican United States attorney John McKay, television personality and travel writer Rick Steves, a retired head of the FBI's Seattle office, both sheriff candidates for King County in Washington, churches and other faith-based communities, most major newspapers and Washington state Children's Alliance. Such broad based support gave the proposition legitimacy in the eyes of the voters, and guarded against the possibility of a last minute scare campaign.

The campaign in Colorado

In Colorado, the campaign had more limited resources, but was similarly successful. Some of the supporters actively involved in the campaign were the Marijuana Policy Project, Safer

Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation, DPA, and lawyer and long-time drug policy reform advocate Brian Vicente.