

Call for Proposals

Policy Fellowship Initiative 2017

The Open Society Foundations in Armenia (OSFA) works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Among the Foundations' core areas of concern are human rights, government transparency, access to justice, promotion of civil society and social inclusion. In the framework of its Policy Fellowship Initiative OSFA invites applications from policy researchers eager to carry out rigorous and innovative study identifying the most critical open society challenges, developing practical solutions and advocating towards their implementation. The fellowship aims to enhance the capacity of researchers to influence the public policy-making process and encourages proactive cooperation between independent researchers, civil society organizations and decision-makers to reach higher quality of policy research and data-based dialogue.

Eligibility The fellowship program is open for civil society representatives, university faculty, policy researchers, analysts, policy advisers and related specialists. At least an MA degree in Public Policy and Administration, Political Science, Law, Economics, International Relations, or any other related field is required. Experience in policy formulation and analysis, advocacy, and implementation is desirable. Strong and proven research writing and methodological skills are highly valued. Availability of the fellows to devote significant time to the fellowship is a must. Fellowship applications for projects shall last up to 5 months and will be accepted from individuals only.

Fellowship expectations and work product The Fellowship seeks for proactive people able to challenge conventional wisdom, advocate for their research findings, with a strong determination to communicate results of their work to broader audiences. It is expected that fellows will produce policy papers and briefs with concrete recommendations, within 10,000 word limits. Most importantly prospective fellows are expected to efficiently utilize collected analytical materials to make proactive interference in the policy making cycle. Methods for that may include active media campaigns, partnership and advocacy coalitions, advocacy groups, targeted consultations with the government, various formats of public communication of project findings and shall not be limited to public discussions and/or presentations only. Prospective projects can but are not limited to formulate policy problems from the perspective of general themes suggested in Appendix 1. Policy Fellowship applicants are highly encouraged to propose projects focusing either on a selected policy in the framework of general themes of Appendix 1, or any other policy research projects that seek to find innovative policy solutions to problems hindering development of open society in Armenia.

Application Procedures. Application to the Fellowship is a two-stage process. During the first stage applicants are required to submit a filled in Letter of Inquiry which is a one page formulation of the proposed policy problem, its policy relevance and urgency along with its methodology and expected outcomes¹. Successful shortlisted applicants will pass to the second stage of the selection process where they will be required to submit a full application. All applicants will be informed about the results of competition in a period of six weeks after the program deadline.

Fellowship Budget Fellows will receive individual grants up to 3000 USD to cover research-related costs associated with the implementation of the project. Fellows will be requested to submit all such costs in an itemized budget table if their application is shortlisted.

Training Apart from fellowship grant OSFA will provide assistance in policy analytical capacity building and development for fellows. All successful fellows will undergo a mandatory two-three day seminar in Yerevan on the value of policy analysis, problem formulation and methodology as well as advanced experience in policy intervention and advocacy. For fellows who pass an additional selection process, the Program will also provide an opportunity to participate in regional (Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) networking and capacity building seminar to be organized by the Central European University in Budapest. Fellows are also expected to actively participate and contribute with their expertise to the policy discussions and meetings organized regularly by the OSFA and other partner civil society organizations.

Application Deadline and Contacts All interested applicants are required to submit the filled in Letter of Inquiry in Appendix two to OSF-Armenia via register@osi.am by **17.00, January 25, 2017**. Electronic submission of application is a must, while additional, not mandatory hard copies are also being accepted by the address: 7/1 Tumanyan str., 2nd cul-de-sac. You have to receive an electronic confirmation of your application receipt to your e-mail, in a period of two working days after submission; if you don't please contact us. For questions and additional information you can contact Policy Fellowship Program Coordinator, Mariam Matevosyan via tel. 53-38-62; 53-67-58 or email: mmariam@osi.am. Please note that the OSFA office will be closed for holidays from December 29, 2016 to January 8, 2017.

A seminar will be held to answer questions from potential applicants at 17.00, January 16, 2017 in Vivaldi Hall, Royal Golden Tulip Hotel, 14 Abovyan St., 0001 Yerevan.

¹ See the Letter of Inquiry form in Appendix Two.

Appendix 1

Proposed Thematic Areas

Government accountability and corruption prevention in the good governance framework. Studies of the systemic causes of corruption indicate that problems of low scale bribes or grand corruption can be understood within the broader framework of checks and balances between democratic institutions, political strategies as well as general rules and procedures of the public sector. In the given context fellows are encouraged to evaluate accountability and oversight mechanisms as well as dependence paths between different branches of the power in the context of revised Constitution and organic laws under development². Fellows are also encouraged to investigate the functioning of institutions and policies designed to fight corruption. For example, projects can evaluate criminalization of illicit enrichment, conflict of interest legislation, implementation of Anticorruption Strategy and its Action Plan for 2016, as well as effective functioning of the Anti-Corruption Council, the Commission on Ethics of High-Ranking Officials, the State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition, and the Control Chamber. Projects can also concentrate on the analysis of the budget cycle starting from state revenue policies (i.e. tax collection, sharing or transferring of national budget funds to lower levels of government), through budget allocation and spending (i.e. effectiveness and efficiency of public spending, procurement, contracting in selected budget areas). Separate policy research projects can concentrate on the analysis of budgetary processes from the perspectives of its normative approval, National Assembly's role in budget policy i.e. how the budget is presented, discussed and approved in the absence of program budget indicators.

Policies and Strategies to Promote Human Rights. Number of policies and strategies serve as a roadmap for coordinated action by public institutions towards fulfilling the state obligation to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such strategies and policies include but are not limited to Human Rights Protection Strategy, Judicial and Penitentiary Reform Programs. Particularly researchers are encouraged to look at the judicial oversight mechanisms in the framework of the new Constitution and in the context of the new Judicial Code under development. Another area for policy research intervention can be the analysis of strategic documents and measures to address corruption in penitentiary institutions and resulting violations of the rights. Additionally researchers can assess the idea of bridging Armenia's human rights protection and security strategies, with particular reference to human rights protection mechanisms in the army, and the ways the security policy and its implementation mechanism could be reviewed based on human rights principles.

Economic and Social Policies. High rates of poverty and unemployment create a strong necessity for targeted and inclusive social policies. In this context there is need to assess the work of several government mechanisms such as the Law on Social Assistance, the work of shelters envisioned under the Law on Social Assistance, introduction of integrated social services, annual program for employment and implementation of 2013-18 employment strategy. There is also an urgent need to explore institutional framework to protect labor rights and analyze existing obstacles for effective judicial protection of labor rights. Researchers are also encouraged to assess implementation of the National Programme for the Protection of Children's Rights for 2013-2016, Programme of State Support to Graduates of Child Care Institutions for 2004-2015 and Programme on De-institutionalization of Children Care for 2004-2015 and their follow up programs with a special emphasis on access to education, forced labor, child poverty, ill-treatment in child care institutions.

Health Rights. In this area researchers are encouraged to look at the health budget, transparency of its allocation, procurements in the field versus assessment of the needs and priorities identified in strategic policy documents of the field. Other areas for policy research can include the volumes of preventive healthcare services for the population; free medical healthcare for selected vulnerable groups; access to quality healthcare in closed and semi-closed institutions; medical service provision and need for confirmation of clinical indicators, definition of the data that constitute a medical secret, concrete legal regulation of means of transmission of medical data, quality control in drug markets and employment of independent control mechanisms to eliminate corruption risks in the drug market.

Equity, equality, and access to quality education for all. Education in Armenia is declared by the government as one of prerequisites for sustainable development of the country, preservation of human capital and its reproduction. Despite large reforms supported by international donor community, numerous studies point to backsliding in equity, quality, access and integrity in education. The reforms at secondary and higher education directed at the overall improvements

² i.e. Law on Constitutional Court, Judicial Code, Law on Local Self Governance, Law on Procuracy, Law on TV and Radio, Law on Control Chamber etc.

of the education system do not seem to mitigate social inequalities in access and quality of education; rather they are designed in a way to further exacerbate them. In this context applicants are recommended to analyze existing policies, development and reform programs, state budget allocations and expenditures in education and their impact on growing inequality and disparity in education opportunities for different marginalized groups, particularly, for rural children, girls, children from socially vulnerable families, children with disability and/or special education needs, refugees, etc. Successful applicants are proposed to come up with policy recommendations and alternative policy solutions to reinforce social justice and equity in education and mitigate integrity and corruption risks in higher and secondary education sectors.

Equality and non-discrimination. Distribution of power in Armenian society gives birth to governance practices that in many ways restrict equal participation, broad membership and active constituency for many disadvantaged groups such as religious, ethnic and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, prisoners, people living beyond poverty line, etc. In the given context applicants are encouraged to comprehensively analyze discriminatory practices, policies and narratives based on religious, sexual and ethnic identity, health and social status. Areas of possible examination can include but are not limited to education, healthcare, employment and access to publicly available goods and services.

Inclusive and Participatory Policies for Women. Recent statistical data demonstrate that problems of domestic violence, economic independence and unequal participation for women do not show significant tendencies for improvement. In this context researchers are invited to study major government actions in the field stemming from the implementation of the 'Law on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Men and Women' (i.e. components of the law designed to provide for gender equality in public service, gender expertise of laws; prevention of gender based discrimination at work etc.). Researchers are also invited to assess implementation of the 'Strategic Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence'; 'Women and Men Equality Policy' that both ended in 2015, with an aim to offer alternative ones based on strongly measurable tools for their design and implementation structure. Other areas for study can include the work of 'Women and Men Equality Affairs Council' and its oversight functions; as well as the work of bodies responsible for implementation of gender policy at regional community levels, government's awareness raising measures in the field as well as a broader assessment of socio-economic costs stemming from limited participation of women.

Fiscal, trade, customs policies and market economy in the context of EU and EEU integration. Armenia's EEU membership poses a number of challenges for Armenian economy with the requirements to adopt the higher tariffs and more protectionist policies in line with other EEU member states. Researchers are encouraged to assess the impact of this integration and its effects on different sectors of the economy (i.e. IT sector). In the context of new Tax Code, researchers are encouraged to assess the chosen approaches of tax reform (i.e. higher taxation of consumption, stricter documentation requirements from big businesses for certain goods and services, clarification of legislation) in meeting general aims of attaining higher level of market competition, contraction of the shadow economy, encouraging the work of small and medium enterprises. Another way to look at the policies aimed at boosting competition could be to assess the role and functions of the state committee to protect economic competition and implementation of the law on economic competition.

EU Integration and Promotion of Democratic Reform. In the framework of this general thematic area researchers are encouraged to identify and evaluate implementation of selected aspects of EU led democratic reform in Armenia. General subthemes may include but are not limited to policy suggestions on implementation structure of Single Support Framework 2014-17; direct budget support in the field of human rights and its performance measures; visa liberalization process in view of promoting rights, governance and personal data protection reform in Armenia; revised public finance management strategy and its budget support. Applicants are also encouraged to investigate and evaluate the revised ENP structure and its priority areas as well as offer policy recommendations for the EU Armenia framework agreement.

Policy Research on Channels for Populism and Propaganda. Since the beginning of the crisis between Russia and Ukraine in 2013 there has been much policy discussion about the power of Russian propaganda particularly within the EU and in the region of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Populist tendencies are enhanced in the region with increasing normative pressure mostly exercised through promotion of anti-human rights, traditionalist, non issue-based narratives and policies. Populist tendencies are also absorbed and utilized by local authoritarian and semi-authoritarian governments to serve the needs of local regimes. In this context, prospective applicants are encouraged to investigate and assess the specific mechanisms of external and internal populist influence in Armenia in the context of regional developments.



Policy Fellowship Initiative 2017 Letter of Inquiry

Policy research problem formulation

Define the policy problem, present the context and nature of the specific policy problem and its major aspects/components along with the urgency of the problem; how the problem is affecting the Armenian society, who are the stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the problem. Indicate the questions you seek to answer and the policy(s)/policy alternative(s) that your paper will argue for? Please note that your proposal shall also necessarily have a descriptive and concise title (up to 350 words).

Methodology

Describe the methodology selected to answer the posed research questions (200 words).

Outcomes and Deliverables

Please describe your research outputs and project deliverables i.e. policy research papers, policy analytical paper with recommendations, briefs, infographics, presentations and debates, audio visual materials etc (up to 100 words).