

Criteria for OPSEU Social Justice Fund Project funding

OPSEU has long been involved in solidarity work and financial assistance to non-governmental organizations. In the early 1980s, a resolution was passed at the OPSEU Convention committing the Union to solidarity with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and included within that resolution was a decision to donate \$5,000 per year “until it was no longer necessary”! This was a historic act of solidarity and ended only when Nelson Mandela walked to freedom in 1990. Shortly after that, Mandela became the first recipient of the OPSEU Stanley Knowles Humanitarian Award. This tradition of solidarity has continued up to the present. Last year, our Union gave over \$60,000 to the fight against HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, primarily through the highly respected Stephen Lewis Foundation.

Working people everywhere share common goals and the cry of “An Injury to One is an Injury to All” still applies today. As public sector workers, we want to strengthen the global movement against privatization and build linkages with other workers in developing countries in the struggle against public service reductions, lower labour standards, wages and the erosion of full-time jobs.

There are many fronts to work on. Whether we are talking about trade union leaders under threat of death in Colombia for engaging in the same kind of work we do on a daily basis defending our members, or indigenous communities, workers and peasants in Guatemala resisting the attempts by Canadian mining corporations to destroy their lands and livelihood, or the “Gogos” (grandmothers) in Southern Africa who are the only ones left to raise the orphaned children after HIV/AIDS has decimated their communities – the needs are too great to ignore.

Our major principle is solidarity- we are inextricably linked together in our fight against corporate power and state terror. Race and class issues must be dealt with in any discussion of solidarity and OPSEU will rise to the challenge. Wherever possible, we will look for projects to support that are supported by or housed within the progressive trade union movement of that particular country. In addition, we recognize that many grassroots community organizations and credible non-governmental organizations already have a direct link with the communities involved in important struggles. We recognize the need to support those fighting for human rights, economic, trade union and political rights - and in particular, those who would not normally receive funding from other sources.

One of our main goals is to involve OPSEU members in the Social Justice Fund work as much as possible. This will be done through worker education as well as worker-to-worker exchanges in some cases. Only then can true solidarity between sisters and brothers be realized first hand. OPSEU sisters and brothers have as much to learn as those we work closely with in developing countries.

We will also liaise with our national union – National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) and in turn the Public Services International (PSI) with a potential for partnering on some specific projects.

We are looking at three areas of concentration:

1. Union education and training/ solidarity exchanges - these would include capacity-building of all kinds.
2. Direct funding to development projects which focus on the four areas of education, health, water and fighting poverty which are identified in the objectives of the Social Justice Fund. Here too, the emphasis would be on attacking the roots of poverty and inequality.
3. Emergency and humanitarian solidarity – especially to those most vulnerable in the societies affected. Although there are in fact, “natural disasters”, from the knowledge we have of global warming and the examples of environmental degradation we have witnessed, the recognition that power and greed have made the situation worse for those living in poverty is crucial. We know that this kind of funding is also based on true solidarity.

Geographic areas will include but will not be restricted to:

- Africa – to support trade union and community projects
- The Caribbean and Latin America – focusing on trade union rights and indigenous rights under attack
- Asia – focusing on support for those most vulnerable to human- and naturally caused “disasters”

In each case, we will be calling for a detailed financial report and an outline all of the activities these groups have been engaged in up to this point in time.

As well, we will evaluate our involvement in projects on the following basis:

- How effective the project is as a community organization, based upon its financial and other kinds of reporting;
- The project's capacity to monitor and review the work being done as it relates to the objectives set out by OPSEU;
- How the project will involve the active participation of OPSEU members;
- How successfully we can evaluate the impact on the whole community and in particular an organization's success in defending the community against the interests and actions of major corporate powers.
- The extent to which an organization may need long term commitment, e.g. if hospital equipment is donated, OPSEU may need to commit on a long term basis to ensure upkeep of equipment.
- How the goals of the particular organization meld with the goals of OPSEU.

We will solicit applications from unions and grassroots community organizations as well as non-governmental organizations here in Canada. We are open to the possibility of partnering with other Canadian based unions if there is a demonstrated need.

We will begin by considering applications for funding for amounts up to \$10,000 per year and this shall be communicated to all of the potential groups/unions we may work with.

Funding for worker-to-worker projects may be dealt with in a slightly different manner – i.e. partly funded by OPSEU and perhaps partly funded by another NGO.

During this year – 2007 - OPSEU will begin a new era of active engagement in trade union solidarity through funding worthwhile international projects, but also through worker-to-worker exchanges and visits to solidify our links with grassroots organizations in many different regions.