



Open Society Institute

# Information Program

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*Content, tools and networks for open society*

**Strategy**

**2001-2002**

*Discussion draft for OSI board  
Budapest  
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## ❖ Introduction

The OSI Information Program is based on three premises. First, that human beings are not passive subjects or only economic agents seeking personal gain, but civic beings who share a world which they have the power to shape. Second, that the ability to exchange ideas, knowledge and information is the lifeblood of citizenship and participation in a shared public sphere. And third, that while traditional media remain essential to citizenship, new digital technologies hold potential for enhancing civic life that is still largely untapped. They also entail dangers that are not yet fully understood.

Knowledge is not sufficient to create open societies. But given adequate economic resources, and a serviceable legal and institutional environment, access to knowledge in all its forms is possibly the single most important factor in determining the success or failure of open society.

Over the past five years or so, the predecessors to the Information Program have done much to provide open access to knowledge and information in previously closed societies. The *Internet Program* has helped to introduce internet connectivity in more than 35 countries, and has been at the forefront of funding for internet policy for human rights and independent voices online. The *Library Program* has helped libraries transform themselves into truly public, service-oriented centers for their communities. The *Center for Publishing Development* aided publishers in postcommunist countries in the transition to market-based publishing, supported several thousand translations of core books for education and public debate, and nurtured a new electronic publishing industry in the region.

In November 2000, the decision was taken to merge these three programs and to create a new, integrated Information Program. In the ensuing months, we have taken the opportunity to rethink OSI's involvement in the 'information for open society' area through an intensive process of research, discussion and planning. We conducted interviews and conversations with more than fifty leading thinkers, activists and institutional leaders in this area\*. This paper is a distillation of the ideas that the process produced.

The new program will build on the legacy of its precursors, with a much stronger focus on exploring and taking advantage of the open-society potential of digital technologies. The program is structured around the three fundamental dimensions of these technologies – the capacity to deploy *content*, *tools* and *networks* in ways that are fundamentally new (these are examined in more depth in the 'Conceptual Map' section at the end of the paper).

Operationally, the new program will focus on using the convening power of the OSI/Soros Foundations network. This means a greater emphasis on building external capacity and strategic partnerships for program delivery. It also means that grantmaking will be used not merely to fund projects, but as a tool to foster collaboration and create new linkages.

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## ❖ Mission

The mandate of the OSI Information Program is to assist with the more equitable deployment of knowledge and communications resources – providing access to content, tools and networks – for civic empowerment and less ineffective democratic governance.

A secondary mission of the program is to enhance the effectiveness of other OSI/Soros foundations programs through the use of knowledge media and ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies).

Initiatives in related areas such as economic development and e-commerce, distance education, public health, or culture are pursued in close partnership with other OSI programs.

The program's geography, degree of local engagement, and the particular sectors and social groups it addresses are determined by the overall priorities of the OSI network.

The Information Program is not primarily an information *technology* program. The program's mission is social. Technology is an important tool for achieving this mission, but not the only one; the program uses the most appropriate combination of new and traditional media, as well as policy advocacy, training and institution-building, to pursue this mission.

# Program Areas & Strategic Objectives



## ❖ Program Areas and Strategic Objectives

The program is structured around three basic features of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies): their capacity to deliver content, to provide tools, and to build networks for civic empowerment and effective governance. The program will have five components built around these features.

1. A **policy** component, which aims to develop an environment that makes it possible for civic actors and governments to take advantage of the democratic capacity of ICTs in three ways: policy advocacy to enable and encourage investment in infrastructure, to protect basic liberties in the new media environment, and to enhance access to public-sector information.
2. A **content** component: provide access not by funding content directly, but by developing global consortia for affordable access to content.
3. An initiative to develop robust, low-cost **ICT toolsets** for civil society, governance and learning applications.
4. An ICT **networking** project to empower civil society and to provide ICT support for the nonprofit sector, enabling civic actors to take full advantage of new technologies.
5. A **local community informatics** project, which will apply the integrative capabilities of information policy and technology to particular communities.

Projects to be supported will be of three kinds:

- ❖ initiatives which produce a systemic effect by changing the environment in which ICTs are deployed (e.g. policy advocacy)
- ❖ projects which are highly scalable (like consortia) or have a powerful multiplier effect (like new toolsets)
- ❖ pilot or demonstration model projects, which can then be replicated by others (like ‘digital communities’)

Each component of the program will operate on a timeline of two to four years, after which it is either phased out or refocused on a new set of priorities. A ‘New Opportunities Fund’, described separately, will be available to pilot and develop new program areas for the future. The program will also support a small number of legacy projects carried over from previous programs.

## A. Core components for 2001 - 2002

### ❖ 1. Information Policy

There are three focal areas of information policy that are critical to open society development on which the OSI Information Program will focus, aiming to:

- a. enable investment in access infrastructure*
- b. protect data rights and civil liberties on the internet*
- c. promote access to public-sector information*

Each of these tracks entails different priorities, program modalities, and partnerships. They are outlined separately below.

#### ***A. Enabling investment in infrastructure***

##### **Strategic Objective.**

To build local (in-country) capacity for medium-term policy assessment and advocacy encompassing both the private and public sectors, in about 5 countries per year, with the aim of reforming local legislative and regulatory frameworks and investment environments.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Public policy is the single most important factor in hindering or promoting the infrastructure investment that is needed to provide low-cost access to the internet and to other knowledge resources such as libraries and textbooks. In a majority of the countries where we are active, there is a policy vacuum in this area, especially in internet regulation\*. Policymakers often do not appreciate how the internet is different from traditional telecommunications, or are shifting from benign passivity in internet regulation towards control and intervention. The policy vacuum is also present in the civic sector; in most countries, no one is yet active at the local level to develop detailed agendas for policy reform based on rule of law, democratic principles, and market-based solutions, and to bring together major stakeholders across sectors (ISPs, content providers, foreign investors, telecommunications and wireless service providers, NGOs, government officials, and public information institutions such as library systems).

OSI initiatives in this area will be guided by the basic principles of reliance on market-driven solutions based on privatization, competition, and transparency/predictability in business regulation; and open networks and universal service in telecommunications policy. They will also emphasize public intervention to secure infrastructure access for marginalized and disadvantaged groups like ethnic minorities and the physically disabled.

There are other donors and organizations involved in this area. However, at the country or regional level, their activity is largely restricted to one-off workshops or consultations limited to a single sector (usually government officials). The OSI network is well-positioned to build local capacity in coordination and partnership with other institutions and funders. More generally, development of access infrastructure is essential for many other OSI objectives.

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\* This section borrows ideas and language from the Global Internet Policy Initiative proposal prepared by James Dempsey and others at the Center for Democracy and Technology and at Internews.

**Implementation Model and Geography.** Implementation of this project will be through external partners internationally and locally. At the international level, OSI has initiated the creation of an independent center of expertise in the form of a Global Internet Policy Institute, which will focus first on the Caucasus and Central Asia, then on Russia and Ukraine. (The Institute is also involved in South Asia, Africa and Latin America with funding from other sources.) Further work will depend on needs in particular countries, and commitment from national foundations. Considerable needs exist in South-Eastern Europe, although these may partially be met by the Stability Pact's 'e-Balkans' initiative which we are following closely. There is less need in the EU accession countries. At the moment no new activity in Southern or West Africa or other areas is planned.

**Partnerships.** Potential co-funders for OSI-supported projects include the European Commission, NATO, the US State Department, the European Internet Foundation and a variety of corporate and private foundations. Potential for G8 DOT Force funding should be explored. In no case should OSI be the sole or primary funder. The main implementation partner is the Global Internet Policy Institute, currently under formation, as well as the UNDP and CEENet.

## ***B. Protecting data rights and civil liberties on the internet***

*Cyberspace, left to itself, will not fulfill the promise of freedom; left to itself, cyberspace will become the perfect tool of control.*

Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*

### **Strategic Objectives**

1. Support global centers of expertise and regional networks to expand monitoring and advocacy, especially in OSI's target geographies
2. Help to diversify funding sources for major players in this area.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** The two basic open society issues here are the protection of unfettered expression and communication, and protection of personal data privacy. Threats and opportunities in this area come from several directions: government control, censorship and surveillance; private sector surveillance and manipulation of data; private litigation which impacts on freedom of expression; and the development of new technologies and technical standards which threaten or protect data rights and freedoms.

Given the rapid penetration of digital networks into all areas of social life, these are becoming issues of long-term, civilizational import. In the case of privacy, for example, the ability to collate and analyze personal data (medical history, financial data, credit card records, phone logs, etc.) to form detailed profiles of individual behavior has created a potent tool for manipulation and intimidation that did not exist in the past.

The importance of technical standards is often overlooked. The lauded free and open architecture of the internet rests on standards which make it difficult to identify, track and control users and content. But new standards currently under development (e.g. IPv6 – Internet Protocol version 6), which are intended to enable e-commerce, may also have profound implications for free expression and privacy.

OSI has emerged as the single most significant supporter of ‘internet rights’ advocacy internationally in the past two years, due to its institutional commitment to promoting civil liberties and its engagement in internet issues. OSI has the comparative advantage of flexibility and a faster response time than most other donors, which is critical in an area where new challenges and opportunities can emerge in a matter of weeks or months. Support by other funders of uncompromising monitoring and advocacy of privacy and civil rights issues is limited.

**Implementation Model and Geography.** All work in this area will be done through supporting specialist institutions, think tanks and networks. (OSI is not and should not become an advocacy group itself.) The focus of support will be global and regional institutions, networks and initiatives that can also anticipate and respond to local issues in our priority countries when needed. This area does not require broad involvement of national foundations, except in cases where there are local issues to be addressed.

**Partnerships.** OSI’s main implementation partners in this area have been the Global Internet Liberty Campaign (a broad coalition of groups in the US and Europe), the Electronic Privacy Information Center which is spearheading a Public Voice coalition that includes Europe and the Middle East, and the Association for Progressive Communications, which is running an Internet Rights project in several geographies (the European component is supported by OSI). Within OSI, COLPI, the Network Media Program and possibly the CEU Legal Studies and Human Rights programs will be more closely involved in these initiatives. The potential for future external funding partnerships needs to be explored.

## *C. Promoting access to public-sector information*

### **Strategic Objectives.**

1. Identify and promote good practice in access to government information, especially implementations using new ICT applications
2. Promote models of the innovative use and exploitation of public-sector information by civic actors.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Many countries in the postcommunist region have adopted FOI (freedom of information) legislation in the past five years. But what happens once these laws come into force?

When it is properly implemented by governments and used by civil society, open access to public-sector information can be a powerful tool for civic engagement in the policymaking process and a check on corruption. But implementation of the new FOI laws by governments at national and local levels, as well as active exploitation by civic groups of the opportunities they afford, are lagging. Internet-based technologies offer a range of new possibilities to turn these laws into powerful tools of open governance and civic engagement.

Two areas or directions need be pursued at both national and local government levels. First, to promote effective models of access to public-sector information and services using ICTs. Second, to enhance civic participation in decision-making and deliberation about policy through consultative venues and tools.



# Information Policy



A few governments in the postcommunist region (e.g. in the Baltics) have gone to considerable lengths to put information online. But there is little being done to aggregate and disseminate best practice knowledge in this area and to promote effective models of implementation and civic use of the information. The Information Program, working together with the new Information Policy Fellows, can bring to bear its ICT expertise to build on the work of other OSI programs (COPLI and Media), which have supported advocacy for the adoption of FOI legislation.

**Implementation Model and Geography.** This area will be driven by the interest and involvement of national foundations. Obviously, this area is especially sensitive to the willingness of local and national governments to widen access, although the experience of introducing new FOI legislation has shown that pressure from well-organized local advocacy groups can be effective. Initial mapping of models and opportunities, and development of project possibilities, will be conducted by the 2001 OSI information policy fellows. Internally, this project will be developed in tandem with the Network Media Program, COPLI and LGI.

**Partnerships.** Possible collaboration with the UNDP, the European Commission's DG Information Society, and private foundations needs to be explored.

## Freedom of Information Laws

Country	Date introduced
Hungary	1992
Ukraine	1992
Russia	1995
Lithuania	1996
Albania	1999
Czech Republic	1999
Latvia	1999
Bulgaria	2000
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2000
Estonia	2000
Georgia	2000
Moldova	2000
Slovakia	2000
Armenia	none
Azerbaijan	none
Belarus	none
Central Asia	none
Croatia	none
Macedonia	none
Montenegro	none
Poland	none
Serbia	none
Slovenia	none

Source: Media Law Program, OSI, 2001

## ❖ 2. Global Consortium Development

### Strategic Objectives

1. Transform EIFL into an independent, self-financing global consortium which is owned and governed by member institutions and national consortia, and which will maintain a close strategic partnership with OSI, in three years
2. Expand EIFL geographically, to encompass about 75 countries in three years
3. Expand range of Western/Northern content and services offered through the consortium, as determined by user needs
4. Use EIFL to facilitate lateral content production and distribution: South-South, East-East and South-East, as well as from poorer to richer countries
5. Explore and implement other possible functions of the consortium, as well as its use as a platform or partner for other OSI programs.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Much of the most useful online information is expensive and unaffordable to users in poorer countries. The EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) consortium launched by OSI in late 1999 provides a powerful structural solution to the 'digital divide' in content access. The consortium, which now includes close to 2000 libraries and public information institutions in 39 countries, enables low-cost access to several thousand social science and business journals through the EBSCO service. A second component, providing premium medical journals and databases, is being piloted in partnership with the World Health Organization.

The project is based on leveraging two features of digital information (see the 'conceptual map' section later in this paper for a more detailed discussion of these features). First, the internet's network effect enables demand aggregation on a very large scale: a large consortium of individually poor consumers acquires significant negotiating power. Second, the marginal cost of digital data is zero, so that additional units of high-value digital commodities produced for affluent markets can be resold to less affluent markets at negligible cost to the producer, as long as the transaction cost to the producer is kept low.

EIFL began as a top-down virtual consortium and is now being re-engineered as a bottom-up multi-country network of national library consortia, which are beginning to take ownership of the project. It is set to expand geographically and to broaden the range of content and services it provides.

EIFL was made possible by capitalizing on the local presence of the OSI/Soros network in more than 30 countries, on the program's knowledge of information markets and connections to the library community internationally. It will gradually be spun off as an independent, self-financing entity, although it will maintain a close working relationship with OSI.

**Operating Model and Geography.** OSI's current role is to provide start-up funding, policy guidance and advice, contact facilitation, and initial training. One task force drawn from leading member institutions is examining options for future content provision. A second group will be developing a business plan for turning EIFL into a global coalition of consortia owned and governed by member institutions and consortia.

# Global Consortium Development



The consortium now encompasses close to 40 countries with a total population of about 800 million. The larger it is, the greater its negotiating power with suppliers. Of the 200 or so countries in the world, about 150 cannot afford broad, direct access to information resources of the kind EIFL is providing, and the project could in principle expand to encompass most of these countries.

In its initial iteration, the consortium is a West-to-South/East conduit for journals and databases in the social sciences, public policy, business and medicine. This content base will be expanded to include science and technology journals, richer resources for medicine and public health, and premium bibliographic services such as citation indexes and abstracting databases; it could include access to new digital monograph collections and aggregators of e-books like NetLibrary or Questia.com, as well as online news databases like Factiva or Lexis-Nexis.

A second function of the consortium will be to act as a conduit for lateral information exchange, facilitating East-East, South-South and South-East content flows. It will also be a platform for developing local digital content which feeds into the consortium.

Third, the consortium could become a bulk buyer of low-cost hardware and software applications for its member institutions, and an infrastructure for delivering training. At a later stage, it could begin to function as a network for dissemination of policy knowledge and participation in national and global information policy formation.

The funding model for the EIFL project has changed significantly since the project was launched. In 2000, OSI paid the full subscription of \$2.93 million for all participating countries. Foundations were then asked to seek ministerial support to recoup the cost. \$1.5 million was secured in 2000, entailing a \$1.43 million direct start-up cost to OSI. From 2001 onward no Soros funds will be spent to support EIFL subscriptions and all participating countries will pay out of ministerial and institutional library procurement budgets. Over 50% of the EIFL countries have already secured local funding for 2001, and in the future OSI will not provide any direct subsidies for content. For example, the WHO/OSI Health Information Project, launched in late 2000, is being piloted in 8 countries at no direct cost to OSI or WHO; the retail value of the medical data provided is estimated at \$2.3 million. Similarly, intended expansion to include science and technology electronic information will be paid for by participating institutions, their ministries and private sector sponsors.

Beyond the EIFL project, the Information Program will be examining other possibilities of initiating similar large-scale consortial structures for other types of intellectual property procurement or open society applications.

**Partnerships.** Possible implementation partners for the EIFL consortium are INASP (the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications), ISTEAC in Latin America, the British Council, and the World Bank's Global Development Learning Network. Funding partners for expanding and consolidating the consortium could be the Carnegie Corporation (which is developing library systems in Africa), the Mellon Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

## ❖ 3. ICT Toolsets

### **Strategic Objective.**

Participate in partnerships to develop 3-5 mission-critical software applications per year for niche sectors of civil society that are especially relevant to OSI priorities.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Re-engineering in the corporate sector in the past decade has been made possible by the deployment of sophisticated information technology systems, custom-designed to fit the needs of individual firms. Most non-profits do not have the resources to develop and build such systems, especially in postcommunist and developing countries. While some use off-the-shelf applications for ‘back office’ functions like accounting, project management and simple communication, they cannot afford applications designed specifically for their core business processes, which could greatly increase productivity and efficacy. They also lack the technology to enable large-scale information sharing and collaboration across organizations.

A number of organizations, mostly in the US and Western Europe, are beginning to develop robust but low-cost applications designed for the ‘mission-critical’ needs of non-profit organizations. These are usually based on open-source programming approaches and are designed for particular niches of the NGO sector.

The ASP (Application Service Provider) model is a promising way to make these applications available at low cost: applications are owned by the service provider, maintained on a remote server, and accessed by users over the internet for a monthly subscription fee. Users do not have to deal with system maintenance, and do not have pay for software upgrades; ICT costs become predictable. With many organizations sharing the cost of software through the ASP, small-scale users can afford powerful, state-of-the-art applications. By some estimates, subscribing to applications provided by an external service provider may cost 20-50% less than providing them in-house, especially for small organizations. Applications will also be available off-line for those countries that lag behind in the development of connectivity.

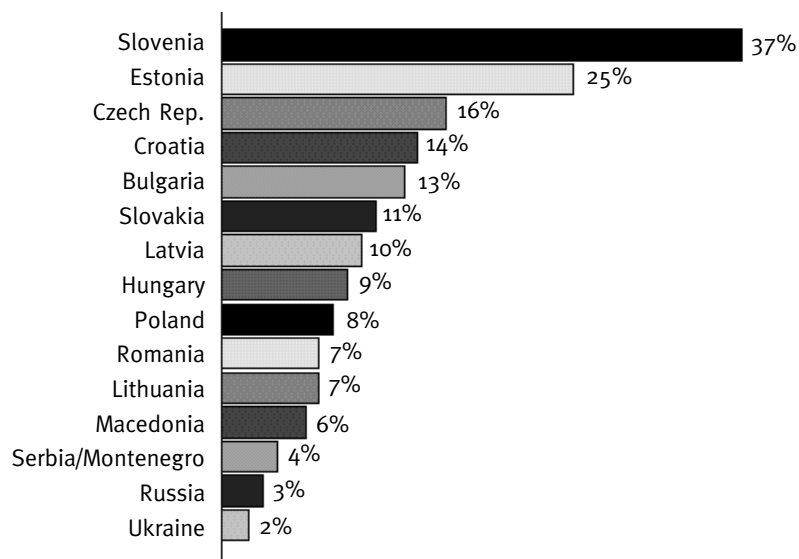
By taking part in these pioneering initiatives to develop applications and ASPs for the non-profit sector, OSI will build close relationships with global centers of innovation, enabling us to identify models and technologies that can be applied to the needs of civil society in other parts of the world. Through participation in early design stages of these technologies, we can influence the direction of innovation and ensure that new models can be adapted and disseminated in our target countries.

**Operating Model and Geography.** The main vehicle for OSI partnerships will be ASPiration, an arms-length entity established together with the Horowitz foundation, which will act as a broker between clusters of non-profits with similar needs, the software development community, and other funders. ASPiration will focus on NGOs working in the area of human rights, access to justice, and independent media to develop 3-4 ASP-based applications in the first two years of operation. These will be designed first for early-adopter organizations in the US, but will be adaptable and translatable for use in other geographies. The Information Program may also partner with other organizations to develop applications outside of these areas.



Initially, the focus will be on the needs of the civic sector, although a similar approach could be taken later to develop applications for governance and learning. All projects will be supported by a consortium of funders, so that in no case will OSI be the sole or primary supporter; we will generally require at least a 1:2 or 1:3 match from other funders.

## Internet Users in Eastern Europe, as a % of the population 14 and over



Source: Mediaresearch, 2000

## ❖ 4. Civic Networking and ICT Support

### Strategic objectives

1. Create ICT-enabled regional civic networks in high-priority issue areas, working directly with other OSI programs. 5 or 6 of these projects will be developed per year. For 2001 collaboration is already underway with the East-East program, the Roma Programs, the Women's Program, and an OSI human rights initiative.
2. Build local capacity to deliver strategic ICT consultancy, support and training tailored for the non-profit sector. This project will be carried out by sub-region, launching in one cluster of 3-5 countries per year.
3. Make available resources (online guides, training materials, and distance learning courses) that facilitate strategic ICT deployment by the non-profit sector.

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Just as non-profits lack the resources to develop customized applications, their restricted organizational capacity also prevents them from taking advantage of the full potential of new technologies.

This is especially true for one of the most powerful uses of digital technologies: building networks. Individuals and organizations in isolation are weak; they are empowered by linking to networks that enable them to share knowledge, pool resources, and coordinate action. Although it is rarely described in these terms, much of the Soros foundations support for civil society and policy reform is based on building and strengthening such knowledge networks, linking local nodes to each other and to hubs of regional and global expertise.

The information technology revolution has provided powerful tools for building such networks. But the mere availability of computers and internet connections is not sufficient. The transformative power of ICT-based communications is unleashed only when the organization's structure and culture changes to work in a networked mode, and when staff are trained to make full use of these new possibilities.

*Networking.* Most OSI programs and Soros foundations are already deeply engaged in developing issue-focused knowledge networks, but these efforts are often based on antiquated organizational approaches and do not take advantage of advanced low-cost technologies that have the potential to make these networks far more effective. There is a need to apply new models which allow non-profit organisations to utilise technologies for collaboration and mobilization around specific themes, whether these be online think-tanks or knowledge sharing systems. Strategic engagement in this area by OSI will strengthen local civil society and help integrate it into regional and global civil society, and will increase the effectiveness of other OSI and national foundation programs.

*ICT support.* There is a severe shortage of local capacity in ICT-oriented strategic consultancy, awareness raising, support and training designed specifically for non-profits. The benefits of this have been proven in the commercial sector through corporate consultancies like McKinsey or Cap Gemini who provide ICT strategic planning, implementation, training and support. However, these services are unaffordable to NGOs in our target region. Moreover, the needs and management models of non-profits are different than those of the commercial sector. OSI is well-positioned to draw on emerging centers of expertise in non-profit ICT consulting to seed a network of similar specialists and support organizations in the countries where we are active.

# Civic Networking and ICT Support

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## **Operating Model and Geography.**

*Civic networking* projects will be implemented together with OSI programs (which determine the geography according to their program priorities) and national foundations, partnering with international leaders in the relevant sectors.

*ICT support* capacity will be developed outside of OSI and the national foundations, building on existing local capacity. Internationally, there are several organizations and resources that will be key implementation partners: primarily the APC, a global leader in NGO technology support, as well as the new generation of non-profit ICT support organizations such as NPower, Bellanet, Project Alchemy, and Compumentor/Techsoup. The development of local centers will depend on the interest and involvement of the national foundations, and should focus on those countries where the local non-profit sector is mature enough to sustain such services. There is also potential for partnering with others to create a larger global network of ICT support centers and resources.

**Partnerships.** Most organizations working in transition and developing countries face the same obstacles (lack of local ICT capacity in the nonprofit sector), therefore there is scope for attracting funding partners in this area, such as the World Bank, HIVOS, the UNDP, and other foundations engaged in ICT programs. Discussions are underway with some of them.

## ❖ 5. Local Community Informatics



### **Strategic Objectives.**

1. Initiate 3-5 'digital communities' demonstration pilots in two years
2. Extend the model public libraries initiative to the Caucasus, SE Europe and Central Asia creating 15 models in two years
3. Build cross-border networks to link and support the digital communities and model libraries

**Issue Definition and Rationale for OSI Involvement.** Abstract ideas like open society and access to knowledge become tangible in the context of physical communities. The Local Community Informatics project will build on other Information Program components and services to create integrated models of how ICTs can be used in a particular community to enhance local democracy and civic participation.

Several localities will be selected for pilot 'digital communities' projects, which will take an integrated approach to encompassing the entire 'information ecology' of the community, including the reform of information policy and involving local enterprises, schools, NGOs, libraries and other public institutions. They will be modeled on successful experiments in Western Europe over the past five years, in which ICTs are used as the basis for the overhaul of the local information flow in an entire community, usually a medium-sized town. These pilots may also include an economic development component. This initiative is being planned with the assistance of the five 2001 Information Policy Fellows, under the guidance of program fellow Balint Magyar.

OSI will underwrite only the research and preparatory phase; local and external third-party funding will be sought to support implementation. The aim will be to create demonstration models adapted to local conditions, which can be replicated with existing resources on the basis of small adjustments in public funding.

The project will use ICTs to integrate several streams of different OSI programs that focus on local community development. It will also build on a two-year initiative by the former Network Library Program to develop model libraries which function as civic information centers. In 1999 and 2000, fifteen such model libraries were supported in eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. Each was required to secure matching support from local government. Most have been successful in becoming a key asset to the local community, bringing together local authorities, NGOs and private-sector employers. In the next two years, this model will be extended to countries further east, and a network will be established to share resources and best-practice information.

**Operating Model and Geography.** Both components – 'digital communities' pilots and model libraries – will require strong commitment from local government, and interest on the part of the relevant national foundation. The digital communities pilots will be conducted first in EU accession countries where internet connectivity is best, and there is potential for securing European Commission financial support. Model library-as-civic-center projects will focus on the Caucasus, SE Europe and Central Asia.

**Partnerships.** The possibility of EU funding for the digital communities pilots is being investigated; the managers of the 'Atlantis' project, an ICT-based territorial development initiative in Sardinia funded by the EU, have expressed strong interest in cooperation. The possibility of a partnership with the Gates foundation will be explored to support the model public libraries network. Internally, these projects will be developed together with relevant network programs, especially LGI.



## ❖ B. New Opportunities Fund

The OSI Information Program is operating in a rapidly evolving environment. This means that the overall strategy of the program should be reviewed and revised once a year, and that most of the program's components will have lifespans of two or three years. It also means that the program requires the capacity to experiment and innovate within the context of the five program areas. To be effective, the program has to be focused on a limited number of interconnected areas and objectives.

The Information Program will include a New Opportunities Fund to make available small and medium-sized grants exclusively for pilots and models that could form the basis of new network-wide projects. Some of the areas where we may be looking for future opportunities are:

- ❖ *e-democracy*: the application of new technologies for enhancing deliberative/participatory democracy and open policymaking, especially ones designed for inclusion of marginalized groups
- ❖ *e-government*: the integration of internal government functions and provision of services through internet technologies
- ❖ ICT applications for curbing *public-sector corruption*
- ❖ *distance education*: the agenda should be set by OSI education policy and the CEU; the Information Program can help to identify and make available appropriate low-cost applications and platforms
- ❖ *intellectual property conservancies* operated on a consortial basis
- ❖ in cooperation with the Economic Development Program, there may be policy-level activities and/or model projects that could be implemented in the *e-business* area
- ❖ the use of new technologies to tap into *global diasporas* as informational and economic resources
- ❖ *socially responsible design* initiatives; seeding a network of media labs in the postcommunist region
- ❖ *orphan technology redeployment*; making available socially useful technologies which have been developed but not marketed because the target market (e.g. poor countries or marginalized groups) is too small for the corporate sector
- ❖ deployment of low-cost access technologies for the *physically disabled*

## ❖ C. Legacy Projects

The library, publishing and internet programs are being discontinued as separate operations. A few of the most effective projects which fit into the new information program priorities will be continued this year and phased out in the near to medium term.

Total spending on these projects will be reduced to \$2.35 million this year, as shown in this summary table of projected legacy project expenditures over the next three years (the first column shows budget figures which were proposed initially in November 2000):

*Table 1: summary of legacy project expenditures, 2001-2003*

	<i>2001 initial</i>	<i>2001 new</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
1. library program	1.8 M	1.1 M	200,000	0
2. publishing/translation program	1.6 M	1.25 M	800,000	700,000
3. internet program	1.8 M	100,000	100,000	100,000
<b>Total</b>	4.2 M	2.35 M	1.1 M	800,000

The breakdown of legacy spending across the three former programs is structured as follows.

### 1. Library Program

Projects with library associations and core collection development planned for this year will be terminated. Training center development expenditures will be reduced from \$690,000 planned for this year to \$300,000 to ensure completion of mid-stream projects. Projects developing library access for disadvantaged groups, implemented with matching funds from national foundations, will be maintained at \$800,000 this year and phased out thereafter. The 'libraries as community information centers' will be absorbed into a new local community informatics project with input from 2001 Information Policy Fellows.

*Table 2: library project expenditures, 2001-2003*

	<i>2001 initial</i>	<i>2001 new</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
core collections	300,000	terminated		
library associations development	50,000	terminated		
access for disadvantaged (w NFs)	800,000	800,000	terminated	
training centers	690,000	300,000	200,000	terminated
libraries as community centers	400,000	transform to community informatics project		

## 2. Publishing Program

The Translation Project will be restructured as follows: The CEU Translation Project includes two streams: core books in the social sciences for higher education, and new books on emerging open society issues. The core books mission is largely accomplished in the EU accession countries and Russia, and will be phased out there at the end of 2001; support of translations of new books on emerging issues will continue, on a smaller scale. In Central Asia the CEU project will be terminated due to very weak infrastructure; in Central Asia publishing activities should be focused on producing a small number of carefully selected textbooks. The separate OSI translation project, which supports titles on policy, human rights and minority issues will continue. Total spending on translations will be gradually reduced over the next three years.

The Electronic Publishing grants program, matched with national foundations, will be phased out in 2001.

Publishing training will be ended in most countries in 2001, with the exception of Central Asia and the Caucasus, where the focus is exclusively on developing textbook publishing capacity.

The Program will continue to oversee spending on the Regional Pushkin Project and the management and updating of the Russian-language "World Around Us" Encyclopedia which was published in 2000.

A small new Roma Publishing Project launched in 2001 will be continued.

Table 3: publishing project expenditures, 2001-2003

	2001 initial	2001 new	2002	2003
translations	985,000	900,000	750,000	650,000
electronic publishing grants (w NFs)	400,000	200,000	terminated	
training	169,000	100,000	terminated	
Roma-language publishing	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000

## 3. Internet Program

The '.CORG' and 'focused capacity building' lines initially proposed for 2001, totaling \$1.8 million, will not be pursued. Other elements will be refocused on new program priorities and incorporated into the new program structure. The only traditional element to be maintained is an internet infrastructure development partnership with NATO in the Central Asian republics (presently being negotiated), where an OSI contribution of \$100,000 per year may leverage a \$2.5 million investment by NATO over three years.

## ❖ Operating Principles

The Information Program will maintain a strong and visible presence in the US to maintain and expand strategic connections with US-based foundations, development agencies, and ICT developers. Through entities like ASPiration, OSI will be able to ensure that new ICT applications for the non-profit sector are developed in a way that takes into account the needs of user communities in other parts of the world and makes it easier to adapt for use outside the US. We will be well-positioned to identify emerging models and technologies and to ensure their rapid dissemination through the OSI/Soros Foundations network.

The program will build closer ties to the international development community, which has undergone a wave of ICT-driven reinvention in the past decade. Much of this innovation has bypassed OSI's main constituency in the postcommunist region; indeed, the region is largely off the agenda in major forums like the Global Knowledge Partnership convened by the World Bank. One of the Information Program's goals will be to raise the profile of the region in these networks.

The program will also expand project-level ties with the European Commission, particularly the Information Society Directorate General. There is considerable scope for increasing East European participation in, and leveraging funding from, ICT-based EC projects and policy networks in governance, public access, education and culture, and the 'e-Europe' initiative launched in 2000. We also have potential to shape the agenda of the 6th Framework Programme for ICT development policy that takes effect at the end of 2002. Finally, large-scale EU structural funds will probably begin to be made available to Eastern Europe around 2006; we may have a role to play in helping to prepare these countries for the intelligent use of structural funds for ICT-based infrastructure, governance and development projects.

The OSI network's greatest strength, however, is the local knowledge and social capital (credibility and access to networks) that it has accumulated. This resides both at the national foundations and within the former network programs.

### **1. Build on the convening power of the OSI Network**

Most institutions tend to work in a restricted geography or with a limited group of partners; a great deal of latent potential can be unleashed by building conduits and connections between these isolated networks (e.g. creating intersections between policy activists and software developers; between development experts in the South and civic groups in Eastern Europe; between the library and internet communities; between for-profit and non-profit sectors).

The main operating principle of the Information Program will be the exploitation of synergies between these networks. In this perspective, convening actors and facilitating the transfer of knowledge is as important as direct funding of projects. Through strategic grantmaking, we will seek to build durable connections between global centers of innovation and excellence and local knowledge networks; to facilitate new collaborative relationships between networks which have similar goals but operate in different geographies or sectors; and to ensure that the needs and capabilities of local communities are adequately represented at the global level.



## 2. Shift from operating to strategic grantmaking

In the past, OSI programs and national foundations have built internal capacity to operate programs themselves; this was often the most expedient way to deliver results. This approach has sometimes had the unintended consequence of stunting or marginalizing external capacity in surrounding civil society. But as our network has a limited lifespan, it is important to externalize our accumulated knowledge and to build capacity outside of our own institution. The Information Program will move away from direct operation of programs and will build the capacity of external specialist partners for program delivery. This entails two complementary approaches:

- ...✦ build regional or global partnerships for delivery of programs, for policy work, training, funding of infrastructure and capacity building
- ...✦ act as a catalyst and facilitator for large-scale programs and investments by other institutions

In short, the program will focus on convening, brokering, seeding then scaling, not on operating or implementing projects ourselves.

## 3. Base projects on two types of sustainability

Projects supported by the Information Program must either produce structural change and then be phased out (in which case proposals must come with an exit strategy) or they must have the potential to become self-financing (in which case they should be based on a business plan, not a grant proposal).

## 4. Use real-time evaluation

Projects supported by the Information Program will build learning mechanisms into projects from the outset, which will make it possible to modify design in mid-stream if necessary. These will make use of real-time, not after-the-fact evaluation approaches, focusing on outcomes and impact, not inputs.

## ❖ Next Steps

This paper presents a strategy – a broad outline of ends and means. It is not an action plan. Once the strategy has been approved by the OSI board and circulated to national foundations for discussion, senior program staff will be tasked with developing detailed implementation plans for each of the new program components. For those areas which will involve the national foundations, we will form working groups drawn from the foundations to work with network program staff to determine how the project will function in conjunction with the foundations.

## ... A Conceptual Map: Three Dimensions of Digital Technology

Information issues are often approached in terms of a content/infrastructure distinction. This distinction, rooted in traditional media, is of limited use, because it ignores two new dimensions of the social use of ICTs. This paper is based on the assumption that there are three basic dimensions of the way ICTs are used, each with a feature that makes them fundamentally different from all previous information technologies; to provide one-to-many **content**, to create **networks** for many-to-many communication, and to create **tools** that turn data into useful knowledge.

### *1. Content: Information chains*

Like traditional publishing and electronic media, digital media can act as efficient one-to-many conduits of information flow or 'content'. The underlying model here is the 'information chain' from the producer, through value-added processors like editors, publishers and aggregators, then through distribution channels to the end user, reader or consumer. This is the dimension in which the content/carrier distinction is significant, because the content of one-to-many information flows is usually a commodity governed by intellectual property regimes.

This dimension will always be part of the landscape of communication, because the distribution of knowledge will always be asymmetrical. A minority ('experts' such as journalists, scientists, researchers or policy analysts) will always possess information that is deemed valuable by the majority, necessitating one-to-many information flow structures. 'Publishing' in some form will always be with us regardless of technological change.

Although this dimension is structurally similar to traditional media, what makes internet-based digital media radically different is that the marginal cost of additional copies of digital information is close to zero, unlike, for example, in print media. This aspect of digital data has enormous social potential which is only beginning to be explored. It underlies several components of the OSI Information Program.

### *2. Networks*

Alongside their hierarchical, one-to-many 'information' function, digital media are also an efficient channel for peer-to-peer lateral communication. Part of this is the familiar one-to-one dimension which mimics the phone call or the letter. But unlike any previous medium, ICTs also open a new dimension of many-to-many communication, which in the past was possible only in a physically contiguous space. This network effect is a second fundamentally novel feature of digital media: the capacity to identify, link and aggregate like-minded individuals and groups, on a global scale and in real time.

The societal possibilities and implications of this many-to-many dimension are largely unknown. This dimension corresponds roughly to the "civic networking" program component described in this paper, where the emphasis is on using new media to enhance civic networks. But it may also include technologies that are utterly new, and whose civic applications are as yet unexplored.

# A Conceptual Map

Knowledge management tools are beginning to be widely used in business: what are their civic applications? What are the possible political or policy uses of "collaborative filtering," a technology developed for marketing purposes? What would a society in which information resources are broadly distributed and shared à la Napster look like?

### ***3. ICTs as constructive tools***

Although the new digital technologies are usually understood in terms of information and communications, they also have a dimension that goes beyond communication: a constructive capacity, which makes possible the creation of new knowledge and information through the processing and manipulation of raw data. This capacity complements rather than replaces human cognitive and creative abilities.

This capacity has in the past been a scarce commodity, based on human talent and labour, which was concentrated in centers of wealth and power. Digital technologies are democratizing this capacity – deconcentrating and distributing processing power to the peripheries of organizations, networks and societies, and changing the balance between the center and periphery of social and economic systems, with consequences that are still difficult to grasp. They are also creating completely new tools for turning data into useful knowledge, based on data mining, process simulation, visualization and modeling techniques, and other emerging technologies. Aside from obvious economic and research applications, these technologies will have an increasing practical effect on education and civic life.



# Program Budget

## ❖ Annex 1: Program Budget

all figures in USD millions

	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Policy	1	1	?
Global Consortia	.5	.5	?
ICT Toolsets	1	1.5	?
Civic Networking & ICT Support	.5	.5	?
Local Community Informatics	.5	1	?
New Opportunities Fund	.75	.75	.75
Legacy Projects	2.5	1.1	.8
Network Advisory Service	0.1	0.1	0.1
Contingency	0.2	0.2	0.2
administration	.95	?	?
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>		