

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

POLICY FELLOWSHIP INITIATIVE SPRING 2018

The Open Society Foundations Armenia (OSFA) works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies with governments accountable to their citizens. Human rights, transparency, access to justice, promotion of civil society and social inclusion are among Foundations' core areas of concern. Aiming to provide a rapid response to the challenges of open and pluralistic society, and in its quest for an empowered civil society, OSFA announces Call for Proposals for the Policy Fellowship Initiative (PFI) Spring 2018. The Initiative invites applications from policy researchers who are willing and prepared to carry out rigorous and innovative research identifying the most critical open society challenges, developing practical solutions, and advocating for such by maximizing the impact of their research. The fellowship also aims to enhance the capacity of researchers in influencing public policy-making processes, and encourages proactive cooperation between independent researchers, civil society organizations, and decision-makers to reach a higher quality of policy analysis and research-based dialogue.

Eligibility

The PFI Program is open to civil society representatives, university faculty, policy researchers, analysts, policy advisers and specialists. The applicants must have at least an MA degree in Public Policy and Administration, Political Science, Law, Economics, International Relations, or any other related field. Experience in policy analysis and advocacy is desirable. Strong research skills are highly valued. Availability of fellows to devote significant time to the fellowship is a must. Fellowship applications for projects last up to five months and are accepted from individuals only.

Expectations

Applicants are expected to identify and conceptualize specific problems in the framework of bigger challenges in Armenia today,¹ conduct policy research and contribute to public discourse by promoting policy concerns, and proposing solutions to identified problems. Fellows are expected to question policies and reforms, formulate concerns based on reasoned arguments and apply appropriate methodological techniques. Fellows should provide a structured and informed reporting in the form of a policy paper (within 10,000 word-limit) and a policy brief with clear recommendations. The promotion of public discourse is characterized by effectively impacting decision-making. Fellows are expected to delegate time to advocacy of their research. To promote a policy concern, Fellows are expected to design and follow an advocacy plan, including identifying relevant decision-makers, groups and allies, initiating targeted consultations, engaging in various formats of public communication and networks to stay updated on the policy developments.

¹ Applicants are encouraged to formulate concerns based on, but not limited to, issues identified in thematic areas in Appendix 1 (page 3) of PFI Call for Proposals Spring 2018.

Application procedures

Applicants are required to submit Policy Fellowship Initiative Spring 2018 Application Form² by carefully addressing the specific framework designed for proposal submission and evaluation. All applicants will be informed about the results of competition in a period of six weeks after the submission deadline. Shortlisted applicants might be invited to attend an interview.

Budget

Fellows will receive individual grants up to \$3,000 (USD) to cover research-related costs.

Training

OSFA provides assistance in policy analytical capacity building and development for Fellows. All successful Fellows participate in a mandatory seminar in Yerevan on the value of policy analysis, problem formulation and methodology, and are exposed to an advanced experience in policy intervention and advocacy. On a competitive basis, and per requirements of the policy concern and advocacy, the Program also provides an opportunity to participate in regional (including participants from Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) networking and capacity building seminar organized by the Central European University in Budapest. Fellows are 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 Application Form (Appendix 2) and supporting documents (resume and a sample of previously conducted research) to OSF-Armenia via email: register@osi.am by:

February 12, 2018 17:00

Applications are submitted electronically. Applicants will receive an electronic confirmation of application receipt to their e-mail in a period of two working days after submission. If no confirmation email is received – contact us. For questions and additional information, please contact Policy Fellowship Initiative Coordinator Valentina Gevorgyan by email: valentina@osi.am or phone: (+374 10) 533 862; 536 758.

² See Appendix 2 (page 7) for Application Form.

Appendix 1 Thematic Areas

Policy Fellowship Initiative Call for Proposals Spring 2018

Independence of Judiciary

Independent, impartial and accountable judiciary is the foundation for the protection of citizens' constitutional rights. In a democracy, the performance of judiciary is an indicator of the extent of country's commitment to the rule of law. For Armenia, in this period of critical juncture: defined as the change of governmental system with undergoing radical changes in the sphere of judiciary, the applicants are encouraged to develop research assessing the performance of judicial system, and the field of criminal justice to reveal the policy issues in the respective procedures and their possible solutions according to the obligations assumed under the international law. Applicants are also encouraged to assess the effectiveness of policy changes in the fields of deprivation of liberty, right to be free from torture, rights to fair trial and property, which derive from the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights against Armenia.

Government Accountability, Transparency and Corruption Prevention

To effectively address the problem of corruption, Armenia needs a thorough commitment to the application of anti-corruption mechanisms in the variety of spheres. Failure to uphold integrity by eliminating corruption leads to institutional dysfunction and generates barriers in advancing good governance. The applicants are encouraged to develop policy research examining efficiency and implementation integrity of foreign aid disbursement and formulating mechanisms to hold the government accountable for spending of IFI's loans and EU grants. The applicants are encouraged to develop measures and indicators for assessing implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy Action Plan in the spheres of healthcare, police and state revenue collection, or in selected aspects of these spheres. Research can focus on corruption risks in the governance of public health (to assess how corruption manifests in the sector and where risks exist with particular emphasis on allocation of state funds). A proposed research can be a comparative analysis of methodologies to assess the level of shadow in economy and their results. Applicants are also encouraged to analyse country's progress towards implementation of core international anti-corruption obligations and conventions in the framework of GRECO, GSP+, OECD, UNCAC and assess effectiveness and impact of EITI for in-country implementation, identifying risks and weaknesses of extractives regulatory. Separate policy research projects can concentrate on the analysis of functioning of policies designed to fight corruption, e.g. including but not limited to conducting assessment of illicit enrichment criminalization, conflict of interest regulations, beneficial ownership, whistle-blower institution etc.

Discrimination and Domestic Violence

To ensure protection of minority and vulnerable groups, Armenia necessitates adoption of number of legal regulations. To expedite the process and develop measures in mobilizing public support for advocacy towards legislative changes, the applicants are encouraged to develop research on discriminatory practices in the areas of education, health care, labour, army, penitentiaries and other closed and semi-closed institutions, etc.; state policies targeted at ensuring equal access and non-discriminatory treatment for minorities and vulnerable groups; effective and independent mechanisms for enforcement and oversight of state policies to protect women against violence, as well

as to promote and protect the right to non-discrimination, including freedom of religion and belief. Applicants are also encouraged to develop measures to assess the implementation of the newly adopted Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence in Armenia; develop advocacy measures for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention signed in January 2018, as well as identify activities to be carried out as a result of ratification. Additional suggested research areas include practices of investigation and adjudication of discrimination and domestic violence cases; the need of special measures for targeted populations (affirmative actions) in Armenia, and impact of such measures on accelerating equality in enjoyment of human rights. Applicants are also encouraged to research stereotypical narratives and attitudes towards minorities and marginalized groups, their root causes and influence on equal enjoyment of human rights.

General and Higher Education

Education is the foundation of self-empowerment and continuous human development. There are certain problems in the Armenian system of education today. Despite numerous interventions, defined as reforms and significant donor support targeted towards improvement of the field, the problems of integrity, social justice, and quality remain challenges to the sector. Hence, a number of current education policies and programs necessitate analysis and research, to develop insight into these problems and suggest effective policy solutions. Applicants are encouraged to submit policy research proposals related but not limited to the following sub-themes in the field of education: social justice (e.g. inclusion and non-discrimination issues, access to quality education in urban vs. rural communities, effectiveness of high schools in terms of accessibility and quality of education for all, problems as a result of transition from secondary to higher education); academic integrity and academic freedom (e.g. problems of higher educational institutions' autonomy and academic independence in the context of ongoing reforms in higher education, issues of plagiarism); general education text books (e.g. study of Armenian history textbooks' content); role of parents' council and other councils in ensuring accountability and quality of education; scientific qualification process; state policy approach towards elitization of education; benchmarking methods and indicators to measure the quality of education; assessment of practice vs. policies of the free of charge system of general education; public perceptions towards the quality and value of education; optimisation of general education in the context of community consolidation, as well as the national security strategy and its reflection in the system of education.

Disinformation and Propaganda

The development of communication and information technologies has not only fostered the capacity of civil society groups to mobilize and advocate for policy reforms, but also is increasingly used by authoritarian governments around the world to impose restrictive ideologies upon their societies. In Armenia, notwithstanding the handful independent media outlets, the expansion of nationalistic, militaristic and discriminatory narratives tends to curb public spaces and civic discussions. Such tendencies necessitate increased focus on policy community prioritizing research-based evidence as opposed to propagandistic discourse. To counter manipulation of information concealed in local and foreign propaganda, the applicants are encouraged to develop policy research looking into channels, messaging and the political logic behind tendencies which aim to absorb public sphere using disinformation and propaganda mechanisms. The applicants are also encouraged to conduct retrospective fact-finding to research historical revisionist practices aiming to promote critical thinking and alternatives to repeating narratives.

Migration and Integration

Armenia's migration dynamics have historically been and are currently complex, most recently characterized by steady emigration, seasonal and low-wage labour migration to Russia in the context of the Eurasian Economic Union, and an inflow of Syrian-Armenians seeking refuge from conflict. Public discourse on migration is dominated by concerns over depopulation and emigration. Policymaking on migration seems driven by EU funding and the promise of visa liberalization rather than by the needs of migrants and their families. If we consider migration and integration policies as a lens through which to assess government accountability and implementation of rights guarantees with respect to citizens and non-citizens, then the lack of accountability of this sphere means migrants abroad are left at risk of exploitation and violence, their families at home left with scant access to social guarantees. Applicants are encouraged to consider (but be not limited to) the following issues in developing their research proposals: identifying a balanced migration policy that responds to the needs of migrants and their families; identifying ways and mechanisms for the state: to balance concerns about migration and depopulation with the need to facilitate better protection for citizens seeking work abroad and to facilitate integration of newcomers and returned migrants. Additionally, researchers can consider whether public narrative around migration issues is reflective of the reality of dynamics flows and the needs of migrants, and how it affects the space for policy-making.

EU - Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement Monitoring Mechanisms, Procedures, Standards and Indicators

In November 2017, Armenia and the EU signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). This is a binding Agreement, which sets a comprehensive reform agenda and provides a wide range of cooperation sectors. The implementation of reforms has to be meticulously monitored by civil society. To mitigate manipulations of reforms, the Armenian civil society necessitates clear mechanisms, procedures, standards and indicators for a rigorous monitoring of the reforms. The applicants are encouraged to develop research addressing effective implementation and impact of the new Agreement. The activities may include but be not limited to developing a methodological framework, an assessment model to address the impact of CEPA implementation in the variety of spheres; assessing civil society engagement in monitoring of Agreement's implementation; assessing the performance of Armenia's obligations under human rights and other instruments (as referenced in CEPA); assessing the performance and impact of Civil Society Platform and other institutional bodies established under the Agreement; developing and implementing local and international advocacy strategies; developing research to compare government's popular narratives vs. behaviour in the fields covered by CEPA; exploring new tools or engagement mechanisms for civil society in the framework of CEPA (or other instruments Armenia has signed up for). The research areas may include political dialogue, justice, human rights and freedoms, fight against corruption, trade, security, and sectoral cooperation in the areas covered by CEPA. Applicants can also propose a research to comparatively assess certain sectors as provided by the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Treaty and CEPA.

Social Justice

Equality is a significant indicator of success in the performance of societies. The unequal distribution of resources and unfair treatment of different social groups are subjects of continuous enquiry, and represent the causing variables for the underdevelopment of countries throughout the world. The research activities proposed in the sphere of social justice shall be carried out considering that according to its Constitution Armenia is a social state. The country has also taken responsibilities to deliver social guarantees as a member of the Council of Europe. Drawing a commitment to equality and justice in policies and practice, applicants are encouraged to develop research addressing the extent to which the reforms implemented in various spheres reflect the principles of social justice, to understand whether the ongoing reforms fulfil the standards uphold by the foundations of the constitutional order, namely that of a social state governed by the rule of law. The research activities can include but be not limited to assessing the allocation and implementation of public funds in the sectors of health, education, labour and social affairs and other spheres; studying cases of corruption and their relation to unemployment, poverty and migration, issues of access to justice of poor and the marginalised and children social protection issues; investigating policies and practice of social justice issues on local and national levels; social justice issues related to different groups (e.g. assessing health insurance for state workers and special groups, mortgage loans and programs of affordable housing for young families). Applicants can research policies and administrative procedures designed on the basis of rights-based approach; develop a methodology for the assessment of social justice policies and propose a research addressing the linkage of social justice issues with development indicators. The applicants are also encouraged to look into the ideologies based on which the reforms are implemented in various sectors, their penetration into existing narratives and actions from the perspective of social justice.

Financial and Economic Policies

Armenian economy is facing number of challenges. Applicants are encouraged to develop research aimed at improving the understanding of crucial financial and economic policies promoted by the Government of Armenia and addressing the different measures to improve the economic situation in the country. Research activities can include but be not limited to assessing the impact of Armenia's integration to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU); assessing Armenia's new tax code, customs policy and import monopolies; inflation, fiscal and monetary policies, public finance and debt management, high unemployment and poverty, market access and conflict of interest issues; assessing policies addressing the contraction of shadow economy, regulating the work of small and medium enterprises, and policies protecting economic competition. The applicants are also encouraged to comparatively assess the joint customs regulations of the EAEU and the newly signed Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU.

Appendix 2 Application Form

Policy Fellowship Initiative Call for Proposals Spring 2018

This application form is designed to offer specific framework for proposal submission and evaluation. The form highlights selected key sections that a robust policy research proposal shall contain. Each section needs to be carefully addressed. Word limits are expected to be taken into consideration. Precise, concise and clear writing are seen as an advantage of a potentially successful proposal.

Project title and abstract

Provide a brief overview of your policy research: what do you intend to examine? What is the motivation and reason behind your study? What is the current reform relevance? Describe the questions you seek to answer. (250-300 words)

Problem description and research justification

Define the policy problem and specify what do you aim to achieve with your policy research. What are the novelty and urgency of addressing the problem? How the problem affects the Armenian society today? Who are the stakeholders directly and indirectly involved, as well as targets influenced by the problem? Present the context and nature of the specific concern and anticipated contribution to the field as a result of your research. (1000-1200 words)

Research questions

Present your main and sub- (if any) research questions. (80-100 words)

Policy options and argumentation

In response to your research question/s, what is/are your suggested alternative policy option/s? Elaborate on the reasons why the suggested alternative policy option/s is/are more effective? (350-400 words)

Methodology

Describe research methodology selected to answer your research question/s. Indicate potential obstacles in applying research methods, and elaborate on how you will overcome those. (300-350 words)

Outputs and deliverables

Describe your research outputs and deliverables: policy papers, policy briefs, posters, conference papers, databases, guidelines, information leaflets, infographics, presentations, audio visual materials etc. (80-100 words)

Advocacy strategy

How you see the impact of your policy research? What tools and resources you will use to reach out to target audiences in properly communicating the findings of your research? Elaborate on the advocacy strategy you will apply to maximize the impact of your research. What are the risks associated with the implementation of your advocacy strategy? (500-700 words)

Project timetable

Provide the timeframe for the project and its key activities. Please note that the maximum project duration is five months. Estimated start of the project is: April 01, 2017

Budget

Please list all costs associated with your research in an itemized budget table below. Expenses such as honorarium, fieldwork, advocacy costs (presentation, publication of policy paper), and other necessary expenses can be included in the budget. Please note that the budget shall not exceed \$3,000 (USD).

| | <i>budget category</i> | <i>unit</i> | <i>number of units</i> | <i>cost per unit (\$)</i> | <i>total (\$)</i> |
|----|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | |
| | Total: | | | | |