**A Brief Description of Open Buffalo**

**Open Buffalo**

Open Buffalo is a civic initiative to make major, long-term improvements in justice and equity; it is an unprecedented collaboration among a diverse group of partners; and it is one of three projects in the nation chosen for the Open Places Initiative of the Open Society Foundations.

**Vision**

An equal and just region open to full democratic participation by all its residents, open to innovative ideas and policies; open to new leaders from disadvantaged communities; and open to meaningful economic opportunity and sustainable wealth creation for all.

**Building Civic Capacity**

Open Buffalo will increase Buffalo’s capacity to effect systemic change through four strategies:

* **Mobile Democracy Center** will engage at least 1,000 residents per year with voter registration, information about equity issues, and advocacy tools to increase individual engagement and action while overcoming geographic and cultural divides.
* **Emerging Leaders** will train over 100 residents per year to mobilize their communities around equity issues and to take on leadership roles in community, nonprofit, and government sectors.
* **Innovation Lab** will build Buffalo’s capacity to generate new ideas, do original research, draw more effectively on local and national best practices, share information more broadly, and draft new laws and policies.
* **Open Buffalo Arts Network** will mobilize arts groups to aid in mobile democracy and emerging leaders projects, to contribute creativity to issue-based work, and to change the stories Buffalo tells itself and the world.

**Initial Programmatic Goals**

Open Buffalo’s programmatic goals will evolve over time based on community input and changing conditions, but initially there will be three projects:

* **Restorative Justice** will work with the Buffalo Public Schools and the criminal justice system to develop practices in which all the stakeholders affected by an injustice discuss its effects and decide what should be done to repair the harm, offering more satisfying resolutions to victims and better results for offenders and communities.
* **Worker Equity** will address poverty, inequity, and training needs among workers, particularly minorities, refugees, youth, and ex-offenders, with a special focus on those working temporary and contingent jobs.
* **High Road Economic Development** will make sure that the community benefits from economic development programs and projects through quality jobs, education and training, local and minority business opportunities, and green design and operations, with an initial focus on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, the WNY Regional Economic Development Council, and the New York Power Authority.

**Open Places Initiative**

Buffalo was one of three regions chosen by Open Society Foundations for its new Open Places Initiative to increase the capacity of local communities to bring about lasting systemic change in equity, justice, and democratic practice. OSF reached out to community groups in 16 cities and asked them to apply for planning grants, of which eight were awarded. Of the eight resulting plans, OSF chose three for implementation funding, which is expected to last at least three years and up to ten. The other regions chosen were Puerto Rico and San Diego. The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

**Planning Process**

Open Society Foundations initially reached out to four community groups: Coalition for Economic Justice, Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH Buffalo, and VOICE-Buffalo. These groups crafted the Open Buffalo plan through a broad-reaching community process with door knocking, community events, focus groups, three working groups, a planning council, and an advisory committee. Local foundations, government officials, academics, labor and business leaders, activists, and residents all played key roles in shaping the plan.

**Partner Organizations**

Buffalo Peacemakers, Citizen Action/Public Policy and Education Fund, Clean Air Coalition of WNY, Coalition for Economic Justice, Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo, Cornell University ILR School, Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, Investigative Post, Partnership for the Public Good, Prisoners are People Too, Public Accountability Initiative, PUSH Buffalo, VOICE-Buffalo, and WNY Council on Occupational Health and Safety.

**Open Buffalo Advisory Board**

Aaron Bartley, Jennifer Diagostino, Duane Diggs, Franchelle Hart, Sam Magavern, Jonathan Rivera, Grace Tate, Paul Vukelic, and Dennis Walczyk