



# Position Specification

**Open Society Foundations**  
Chief Operating Officer

# Position Specification

Ref: Chief Operating Officer  
Open Society Foundations

A Chief Operating Officer (COO) is sought to lead and implement an unprecedented remodelling of the organisation. A profound transformation is under way at the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and this newly created position will integrate and align OSF's corporate functions, its programs, and its operations functions to align with the new vision. In order to augment external impact and ensure that its resources are used to maximum effect, OSF will pursue greater operational decentralization, guided by aligned strategy and operational support at the global level. The COO will build and implement the new operating systems that both drive and underpin the transformation of OSF. This will include greater delegation of operational leadership, whilst maintaining strategic coherence and effective management across the Foundations. Working across the world, the COO will be called upon to support work in challenging political contexts in support of OSF's risk-taking approach. The COO must have international experience, a creative, solution-oriented approach, and an understanding of diverse working practices across the globe. A demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in the recruitment of staff and delivery of operations functions is also a critical part of the role. The COO will be a member of the Executive Leadership Team, and report to the President.

## Our Client

This specification should be read in conjunction with information on the Open Society Foundations website at: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>

## Background

The Open Society Foundations are a truly global champion of human rights, freedom of expression, and opposition to autocracy. A leading global grant maker, OSF work to build inclusive societies grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law, whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people, particularly those who face discrimination purely for who they are. The Foundations achieve this by grant making to groups and individuals that work on the issues of promoting justice, transparency, and open debate. Alongside grant making, OSF engage in strategic human rights litigation and impact investing, while incubating new ideas and engaging directly with governments and policymakers through advocacy to advance positive change.

Established by George Soros in 1984, OSF is one of the world's largest philanthropic organizations operating as a network of regional and national foundations, and of global programs in more than 120 countries. Since its inception, the organization has spent more than US\$18 billion on its work in every part of the world. The entities that comprise the Open Society Foundations employ collectively approximately 1,500 staff based in over 40 offices across 43 countries. On average, the consolidated budget for worldwide programs is approximately US\$ 1.3 bn.

The Open Society Foundations have operated successfully over the last three and half decades, celebrating global growth and success in its efforts to build inclusive societies. The world, however, is changing. Inequality is growing and marginalization of different groups has fueled an embrace of authoritarian politics in many countries. Currently, more people in the world live under authoritarian governments than not. To meet the changed context for our work, OSF has enacted a new transformation vision prioritizing an integrated global approach whilst giving more power our regional programs to support change at the national and regional levels.

Moving forward, the Foundations will implement one global strategy and six regional sub-strategies supported by cross-cutting strategic tools, including advocacy, communication, strategic litigation and impact investment. This new consolidated approach envisions decentralized operations to ensure greater proximity to local challenges, and more coordinated and collaborative actions, including major changes to streamline the grant-making process. In order to

better respond to unanticipated crises and opportunity, a larger reserve budget will be set aside to allow for rapid responses.

In this context, a Chief Operating Officer is sought to implement the transformation goals and effective operations of the Foundations. They will develop the organizational model to ensure that the combined assets of OSF's corporate functions, programs and regions are leveraged to maximum effect for the causes and communities they serve. To achieve this, they will help to build the new operating systems that both drive and underpin the transformation of OSF. This will allow the effective delegation of operational leadership, without loss of coherence across the Foundations. OSF's operations must be true to the change they seek to create in society, and the COO should be committed to developing equitable distribution of power and resources across the Foundations.

## The Role

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) will be responsible for the Foundations' critical corporate functions at the global level, at a time of profound transformation. The COO will work to enhance the working relationship between OSF's corporate functions, programs, and regions, including ensuring that operational decision-making and information flows are optimized. The delegated operational authority intended in this transformation requires robust management practice, virtual team management, and excellent corporate support functions to maintain coherence across the Foundations. Specifically, the COO will be responsible for the Finance, Grant Management, IT, Real Estate & Facilities, and Security functions. A radical enhancement of the data analysis capabilities in the finance function is anticipated, to support the new grant making model. The COO will be critical to ensuring effective working relationships between operations and programme colleagues. The COO will ensure the optimal performance of the Foundations' operations, while supporting the President and Global Board in driving the strategic agenda. The COO will be a member of the Executive Leadership Team, and report to the President.

The successful candidate will play a part in the development and optimization of organisational design, structure, culture, business processes, and operational effectiveness, and as a member of the Foundations' Executive Leadership Team, will help to ensure the transformation program achieves maximum impact for the communities they serve. They will bring a profound understanding of the leadership and management skills required to strengthen OSF's financial management, use of technology, culture, governance, risk management, and operational effectiveness. They will bring significant leadership experience gained in the context of challenging operational environments and complex organisational change, and the ability to lead across a broad span of corporate functions, through a global and matrixed structure. They will demonstrate sophisticated stakeholder management skills, and the ability to build effective operations and partnerships across very complex organizational structures.

### **The Chief Operating Officer will be responsible for:**

- Overseeing the Finance, Grant Management, IT, Real Estate & Facilities, and Security functions globally;
- Leading the development of an optimal organizational structure to deliver on the strategic goals of OSF; set and achieve ambitious standards for performance, improvement, and efficiency, in service of the needs of global colleagues and the fulfilment of the Foundations' missions, at a time of significant change;
- Developing the relationship between OSF's corporate functions, programs and regions, building trust and common purpose, and demonstrating the value of the functions' service to the wider organization;
- Facilitating the equitable distribution of power and resources across the Foundations;
- Ensuring that OSF is a leader in innovative policies, practices and processes relating to core support functions , and operational excellence;

- Contributing to an organizational culture based upon the principle of mutual respect and understanding, which embraces change, innovation, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging; cultivating a caring, learning environment, an empowered workforce, and positions OSF as an employer of choice;
- Advising the President on OSF's direction and operational effectiveness globally;
- Overseeing the development of operational policies and procedures, facilitating global operational decentralization, within a coherent strategic framework, and supported by robust management practices;
- Ensuring that change initiatives clearly serve OSF's mission, deliver maximum value for the right cost, with the minimum operational risk;
- Establishing clear, consistent organizational policies and procedures that improve service delivery, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability, and drive value;
- Establishing systems, policies and processes that enable risk-aware and effective local operational leadership.

## Candidate Profile

The Chief Operating Officer will be someone of unimpeachable personal integrity, and will demonstrate the key qualifications, experience, competencies and behaviours identified below:

### Qualifications

- An MBA or advanced degree in finance, operations, law, technology, strategy, or HR.

### Key Experience, Knowledge, and Technical Skills

- Previous experience designing organisations, leading business operations and transforming business processes in a large, complex organisation, with an international footprint and decentralized model;
- A profound understanding of impact-led organisations, and operational context in the countries OSF serves, especially LMICs;
- Proven experience of fostering a respectful, nimble, empowered, results-oriented and collaborative working environment;
- Experience of creating, nurturing and leading multi-disciplinary teams and managing operating budgets;
- Practice-based understanding of enterprise transformation and leadership of effective operational functions;
- Aptitude in designing organizational policies and operational frameworks, re-engineering business processes, driving implementation, and decision-making in lean, but complex, organizations;
- Excellent change leadership credentials, including appreciation of people, technology, risk, processes and systems, and a track record for successfully implementing transformation programmes that deliver maximum value to the organisation, on time, with minimal business risk;
- Excellent team leadership credentials, developing high performing teams, and creating a compelling vision and culture across the organization;
- Experience of working as part of an executive top team, and of interaction at Board-level;
- Experience of thought-partnering, managing and developing a team of diverse professionals of wide-ranging experience levels;
- Sophisticated understanding of operating within a complex governance environment.

## Competencies

### Setting Strategy

- The ability to set operational strategy to ensure alignment of structure, people, processes, systems, technology and resources;
- The inclination to seek and analyse data from a variety of sources to support decisions, monitor corporate performance, and to align others with the organisation's overall strategy;
- The capacity to use data and information to diagnose and resolve multiple, concurrent problems; a conceptual and strategic analytical capacity to understand the, sometimes competing, requirements of the different areas of responsibility;
- The ability to formulate appropriate, evidence driven, ambitious strategies for change, in service of the organisation's purpose;
- The ability to effectively balance the desire/need for broad change with an understanding of how much change the organisation is capable of handling, to create realistic goals and implementation plans that are achievable and successful.

### Executing for Results

- The ability to set clear operational goals, priorities and their measurement while committing teams to improved performance; creative, tenacious and accountable in driving results;
- Entrepreneurial and comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty; the ability to adapt nimbly and lead others through complex situations;
- A smart risk-taker, who regularly seeks data and input from others to foresee possible threats or unintended circumstances from decisions;
- Integrity and forethought in their approach to making decisions;
- The ability to act in a transparent and consistent manner, while serving the best interests of the organisation;
- The ability to persevere in the face of challenges, and exhibit a steadfast resolve and relentless commitment to higher standards, which commands respect from colleagues;
- The ability to work well across time zones, self-motivated, and well-organised. Strong sense of ownership, obligation, and personal accountability; will assist OSF in its movement towards a blended office/virtual environment;
- The ability to manage multiple stakeholder relationships at various stages of development, manage multiple projects, handle competing demands, ensure effective management of all requests and queries. Able to lead through influence, and to be decisive.

### Leading Teams

- Collaborative leadership style and virtual team management ability to effectively supervise and direct teams of professionals and support globally dispersed teams;
- Outstanding organisational and leadership abilities; strategic, results-oriented, with a strong commitment to OSF's mission;
- The ability to identify, attract, manage, motivate and inspire the best talent, continuously upgrade the team by bringing new talent, keep the best, and manage non-performance;
- Creator of a high-performance culture that respects and celebrates diversity and inclusion;
- The capacity and ability to shape a fast-paced and service-oriented organisation;

- Leads others to formulate solutions to complex problems, empowering teams to respond nimbly in a fast-changing world.
- A commitment to implementing OSF's core principles as articulated in OSF's framework documents and/or agreements;
- A leader who is self-reflective and aware of his/her own limitations; leads by example and drives the organisation's performance with an attitude of continuous improvement by being open to feedback and self-improvement.

## **Relationships and Influence**

- Demonstrated ability to work in a multi-cultural environment and establish harmonious and effective working relationships, both within and outside OSF;
- Political sensitivity, strong oral, written and interpersonal skills, with the ability to relate and work effectively and strategically with colleagues and partners at all levels;
- An ability to inspire trust and lead through influence;
- Encourages others to share the spotlight, and celebrates and supports the success of the team;
- Highly proficient manager of stakeholders of wide-ranging seniorities; adept builder of enduring relationships, able to work through difficulties to establish and achieve shared goals within complex environments and at pace;
- Creates valuable networks within relevant sectors and leverages these to capitalise on the latest insights and practices;
- Creates a sense of purpose/meaning across operational departments and engages others to the greater purpose for the organisation as a whole.

## **Personal Competencies**

- Operates with a values-based approach where integrity and mutual respect are paramount;
- Builds trust and common understanding across complex stakeholder communities;
- Demonstrates a commitment to global equity, aligned with the change OSF seeks to create in society;
- Displays the cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and the unpretentious style that set the tone for a collaborative, mutually supportive, team-oriented culture;
- Shows the ability to listen, learn, and assimilate and not rush to judgment based solely upon their own personal experience. Able to partner with and influence/inform others;
- Possess a creative, solution-oriented approach in challenging political contexts;
- Conducts themselves as a responsive, informed, accessible, and down-to-earth member of a high performing executive team;
- Flexible and open to new ideas;
- Displays a strong degree of self-awareness and the patience to operate within a complex decision-making culture;
- Demonstrates commitment to the Foundations' core values, mission, and programs.

## **Location**

- The Chief Operating Officer will be based in London, New York, or Berlin.

## **Compensation & Benefits**

- Competitive compensation and benefits will be offered.

## Language Requirements

- OSF operates in an English language environment, consequently fluency in spoken and written English is essential. The command of another language (or languages) will be an advantage.

## How to Apply

To apply, please send your CV, and supporting statement to [responses@russellreynolds.com](mailto:responses@russellreynolds.com) by **Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March**. Your supporting statement should succinctly highlight your motivation, experience, and skills against the requirements of the role. Please include the role title in the subject of your email.

If you have a question about the position, or your application, please contact the Russell Reynolds Team (Simon Kingston, Nick Ricketts and Sarah Wright) at either [responses@russellreynolds.com](mailto:responses@russellreynolds.com) or on PH: +44 20 7830 8089 or +44 207 343 3673.

Open Society Foundations is committed to fostering a just, equitable and diverse culture free from racism and discrimination in which all staff, partners and stakeholders feel empowered, safe, and heard.

[Open Society Foundations](#)