

**July 11, 2005**

## **SSSP - Social Action Award 2005 – Final Report**

**Chair, Talmadge Wright (Loyola University Chicago)**

**Committee Members: Tammy Anderson (University of Delaware), Joel Best (University of Delaware), Stephen Couch (Penn State University, Schuylkill Campus), Kamini Grahame (Penn State University, Harrisburg), Arthur B. Shostak (Drexel University), Susan Will (CUNY, John Jay College), Tukufu Zuberi (University of Pennsylvania).** On our committee there were 4 voting members with two on leave and one unavailable (Tukufu Zuberi and Kamini Grahame) and one I could not reach (Tammy Anderson).

After careful consideration the Social Action Award committee decided to extend the 2005 Social Action Award to the organization: The *Alliance for a Clean Environment* (ACE). While the headquarters of ACE is in Stowe, PN, 43 miles away from downtown Philadelphia, the work they do encompasses both the city and the surrounding region. In the best tradition of SSSP, ACE has employed social science research methods combined with legal activism and popular education to raise issues of toxic wastes and environmental concerns which are central to the lives of people in this region.

Two comments made by committee members are worth reporting about this group. One mentioned that ACE stands out above the other organizations under consideration, “as a fighter, a creative and bold innovator.” Another committee member stated: “The nominator’s words convey what one would expect of an organization that is worthy of the Social Action Award. It is an organization that “has shown persistence and innovation over several years in its fight against three major environmental hazards - a major chemical plant, a large landfill, and a nuclear power plant. ... They have made major strides against intense corporate and political power to protect a working class and diverse population from the continuation of documented environmental harms. They have been very adept at collaborating with scientists, including this sociologist, in their efforts.” It appears that ACE educates the public, reminds citizens that they have power, and it encourages actions to bring about social change. We need organizations such as ACE to remind us that government and big corporations will listen to us if we organize.”

The other contenders for the award were: The Village of Arts and Humanities (VAH), The Institute for the Development of African American Youth (IDAAY), and Inside-Out (IO). Copies of the nominations for these groups and the ACE are included in the appendix of the final report. The committee also discussed including the group *Manna* as suggested by the Executive Committee, but it was felt that this group was already receiving recognition from SSSP and therefore the recognition should be “spread around.” Below are one of the comments from a committee member which summarized our position: “While SSSP has asked us to consider Manna for the award and I believe we should honor that request, I would not rate them higher than the two that I already rated at the top. (They are benefiting from the fundraiser, so it would be nice to spread

the "wealth.") Besides, they have received considerable funding from other organizations.” Other groups we looked at included: The Philadelphia Unemployment Project (<http://www.philaup.org>), PHILAPOSH (<http://www.philaposh.org>), and Project SHARE. Of these my personal favorite was the PUP. However, we only received formal nominations for the four organizations mentioned earlier.

Philadelphia has many good, socially active organizations doing excellent work. A major part of the difficulty in doing this selection was, as several committee members said, choosing apples from oranges. Here are some of the problems with the committee thinks SSSP needs to address in giving out this award:

1) Defining the criteria more specifically for the award so that committee members are not forced into having to make decisions between groups which are radically different and serve different populations. Informally we have done much of this work ourselves, but, would like further guidance from the executive committee.

2) The nomination process needs to be reworked. As committee chair I did not receive ANY nominations for this award as I had expected and had to eventually beat the bushes with committee members to secure these four nominations. Just placing an ad for the award in the SSSP newsletter does not seem to be enough.

One suggestion would be to have the executive committee send out a specific call, either via letter or email, to all of those members who live in the city or region where the upcoming conference will be held with suggestions for nominees. The depth of interest could be judged by the effort put into placing these nominees in the appropriate nomination form. While the Social Action Committee has in fact submitted the nomination forms for the current awards – this should come from the general membership of SSSP and not from the committee. (It is for this reason that I refrained, as chair, from nominating any group – it should not be a result of simply having the power as a committee member). This award needs to reflect the membership of SSSP not the committee. The committee would welcome advice and consideration on this matter.

3) Award recognition. While granting the award to one organization is important, especially for the \$1,000, I believe that recognition should be granted for those top competing organizations which made it through the selection process – if anything, by granting a certificate or something. For example, while ACE has received this year’s award, why do we not recognize the runner-ups, 2<sup>nd</sup> (IDAAAY) and third place (IO), and invite them to the ceremonies? IF we wish to better integrate sociology with social action, then we could start by recognizing as many groups as possible within a given region that satisfy our criteria – if anything, for the SSSP members.

4) The voting process. Rather than wait until May for receiving the nominations I would suggest that SSSP initiate this process at the end of the current 2005 conference for the following year. An early appeal could be sent out for nominations for those groups in San Francisco deemed eligible for the award in September, with a deadline of November or December. When nominations have arrived, the committee, working with SSSP could

send out those selected as nominees to the entire SSSP via its WEB site, and have SSSP members vote on the WEB for the organization of their choice. This would both encourage SSSP members to visit the SSSP Web site, plus allow us to display the actual rankings that members give to the various groups. Perhaps SSSP could even set up a blog or Web site for members comments about the groups.

Thank you again, for letting me serve as chair of this committee. I would trust that the committee's concerns will be dealt with in a serious and timely manner so that next year's award could be granted with less conflict.

Best Wishes,

Talmadge Wright, Chair  
2005 Social Action Award  
Society for the Study of Social Problems.