



When new Fellows gather for the first time, the Fellowship focuses on meaningful introductions. Here new Fellows share an item that is meaningful to their identity as an immigrant, refugee, or the child of New Americans.



FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF NEW AMERICANS TO SHAPE A NATION

The impetus for an individual's philanthropy is often a desire to "give back," and express gratitude to an institution, community, or cause. The late Paul Soros is an example of an immigrant who expressed his gratitude through philanthropy. Born in Hungary to a wealthy family, Soros was an accomplished scholar-athlete who survived the Nazi occupation of his homeland and Russian captivity before arriving in New York in 1948 on a one-year student visa. With limited financial means, he eventually enrolled at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, an engineering college. Upon earning his master's degree, he began a successful career in civil engineering, and married Daisy Schlenger, who would also become his partner in philanthropy.

Known as 'the invisible Soros' in contrast to his more famous brother, financier George Soros, Paul had his own improbable journey. According to his obituary in *The New York Times*, he made his way "from riches to rags to riches again. I was lucky to survive. The rest was relatively easy." His path to renewed riches began when he created Soros Associates, a leading international provider of port planning, engineering, and installations. Soros is credited with several shipping innovations that transformed the industry. Yet, according to a *The Wall Street Journal* profile, "Paul Soros never forgot arriving in the U.S. with boundless educational ambitions but limited options."

Inspiring Immigrants

In 1997, a charitable trust was created to support the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans, a merit-based fellowship program to assist young New Americans at critical points in their education. Paul and his wife Daisy Soros created the charitable trust to give back to the country that had afforded them opportunities as immigrants, and to call attention to the diverse contributions New Americans bring to the United States. An initial commitment of \$50 million was made to the trust for this purpose, and in 2010 the Soros family added another \$25 million.

According to Craig Harwood, the current Fellowships director, the program's Theory of Change is to "help New Americans succeed at the

“

They hoped to build a unique community of New Americans who were high achievers within their respective fields and committed to giving back to the United States.”

– CRAIG HARWOOD

Paul & Daisy Soros alumni returned to the Fellowship’s Fall Conference for a story slam style event that focused on the New American identity.



highest levels and underscore their contributions to society.” He said that Paul and Daisy Soros saw the start of graduate studies as an “inflection point” in the lives of these New Americans, a time when high-achievers become fully committed to a professional field of interest, and recognized that significant support could help promising individuals focus on their studies and be encouraged about their future prospects. “They hoped to build a unique community of New Americans who were high achievers within their respective fields and committed to giving back to the United States,” said Harwood.

As true partners in life and philanthropy, Paul and Daisy Soros were also addressing an unmet need: far fewer resources are available to pursue graduate studies as compared with a much larger, although still insufficient, set of scholarship and financial aid programs to support undergraduate studies. Guided by academic advisors, including Warren Ilchman and Stanley J. Heginbotham, they came to understand that the potential threat of staggering debt often inhibits and can halt even the most able and talented candidates from pursuing graduate degrees.

While many promising students take on the debt of graduate school knowing that they will be able to pay off the debt with lucrative jobs, those jobs don’t always align with their interests. The Fellowships would allow recipients to take on prestigious internships and jobs in their field that would help accelerate their careers and their ability to make an impact. Additionally, the Fellowships would give Fellows and their families reassurance that their chosen field, regardless of its prestige or stability, is one of worth.

The Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans program is highly-selective: Only 30 Fellowships are awarded each year out of an applicant pool of nearly 1,800. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Soros stated that he “was hoping that this fellowship would make a real contribution to American culture, the economy and the citizens of this country,” and recognize the immense contributions of immigrants. Over the past 20 years, the Fellowships have supported 625 immigrants and children of immigrants. These New Americans possess heritage from over 80 countries; the most-represented homelands are India, China, and Mexico.

Each Fellowship award provides up to \$90,000 (limit of \$25,000/year stipend and limit of \$20,000/year tuition support) for up to two years of full-time graduate study in any field at any graduate degree-granting institution in the United States. Online graduate programs are excluded.

FELLOWS THRIVE

As envisioned, the Fellows have gained from their graduate studies the ability to contribute as leaders through the arts, business, education, government, law, nonprofits, science, technology and other areas—often through boundary-breaking careers that move across sectors. Noteworthy examples of Fellows from the early classes are:

Vivek Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., class of 1998, who served as the U.S. Surgeon General during the Obama administration. He was born in England; his Indian parents settled in Miami, Florida when he was three years old. A graduate of Harvard University who holds both M.D. and M.B.A. degrees from Yale University, Murthy is a serial entrepreneur who cofounded Trial Networks, a software technology company dedicated to improving the quality and efficiency of clinical trials, and is the co-founder and president of Doctors for America, a national organization of medical professionals committed to creating an affordable, high-quality health care system.

A current Fellow, Wendy De La Rosa, is pursuing her Ph.D. in consumer behavior at Stanford University. Born in the Dominican Republic, she immigrated with her family to the Bronx, where she experienced and examined the struggles of the working-class poor. After earning a B.S. from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, she worked for investment firms Goldman Sachs and Centerbridge Partners. Shifting her attention to research, she helped create Google's behavioral economic research unit, and cofounded Common Cents Lab, a research-based effort to improve financial well-being for low-to moderate-income Americans. For these accomplishments, De La Rosa was included in the 2018 Forbes 30 Under 30 list.

A Fortunate Few

The program seeks applicants under the age of 30 “who have demonstrated and sustained accomplishments that show creativity, originality and initiative.” A wide range of New Americans are eligible to apply: children of immigrants, Green Card holders, naturalized citizens, individuals who have refugee or asylum status, and immigrants who have graduated from both high school and college in the United States, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. What is essential: identifying as an American who has the desire and potential to change the world.

In assessing applicants, the program looks for evidence that graduate studies will enhance a Fellow's future creativity and accomplishment, and that his or her accomplishments are “likely to persist and grow.” In addition, the Fellow must show “a commitment to responsible citizenship in this country.” In summary, the five selection criteria require the candidate to demonstrate:

- Creativity, originality, and initiative in one or more aspects of their life
- Commitment to and capacity for accomplishment that has required drive and sustained effort
- Commitment to the values expressed in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, including “support of human rights and the rule of law, opposition to unwarranted encroachment on personal liberty, and advancing the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society.”
- Promise of continued significant contributions
- Graduate training is relevant to career goals and of potential value in enhancing creativity and accomplishment

Fellows are selected through a rigorous review process that is led by an expert team with extensive professional experience in higher education admissions and talent identification. Financial need is not a selection factor. Each application is looked at from a holistic perspective. Recognizing the vast differences in privileges afforded to applicants, the Fellowships considers “the distance traveled” by each applicant. For example, while one applicant may have had a prestigious summer internship, another might have stayed home and taken care of a family member—each is considered a major accomplishment. Key questions in the application process include: What does being a New American mean to you? How does being a New American shape your worldview?

The program identifies 77 finalists each year. The finalists have two in-person interviews, all expenses paid, with a team of panelists comprised of highly accomplished New Americans working in a range of fields.

FELLOWS THRIVE, CONTINUED

Fei-Fei Li, Ph.D., class of 1999, who serves as the director of the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab and the Stanford Vision Lab, and previously was the chief scientist of artificial intelligence and machine learning at Google Cloud. Born in China, Li immigrated with her family to the United States when she was 15. She earned her undergraduate degree in physics from Princeton and her doctorate in electrical engineering from the California Institute of Technology. An author of more than 100 scientific articles in top-tier journals, Li conducts research in machine learning, computer vision, and cognitive and computational neuroscience with an emphasis on Big Data analysis.

Fei-Fei Li pictured with Daisy and Jeffrey Soros after sharing her story with new Fellows.

The selected Fellows immediately become part of an undeniably “unique community” of doers and dreamers. Personal connections are established for each Fellow within his or her cohort, and with surrounding cohorts. Each Fellow is expected to attend two of the program’s annual Fall Conferences, which take place over a weekend in late October in New York City. Most Fellows stay involved with the program through regional dinners, volunteer service with the selection process, and through an alumni program, the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellows Association. Since the passing of Paul Soros in 2013, Daisy and other members of the Soros family remain actively engaged and are a familiar and personal presence to the Fellows.

Each Fellow is visited at their graduate institution by the program’s leadership. According to Harwood, these visits include the director or deputy director spending time on campus with the Fellows, their mentors, department faculty, and other institutional figures—even including the university president or chancellor. The program also organizes alumni dinners as part of the campus visit so that new Fellows can meet alumni in their region.

Lasting Legacy

Harwood emphasized that the design of the program reflected the early life experience of Paul Soros. He and Daisy conceived of a way to fulfill a young adult need that Paul had known himself. Harwood urged others to focus on identifying an unmet need, and ask “where are we going to be of value?”

In its two-decade history, the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans has become a visible vehicle for recognizing the “extensive and diverse contributions of New Americans to the quality of life in the United States.” The initial goal of creating a unique community of New Americans has also been achieved, and perhaps even exceeded—the Fellows, past and present, now constitute an active learning community. To foster greater interaction among the Fellows, Harwood noted that a focus on digital communications “has been a game changer.” For example, a weekly newsletter brings news stories of the Fellows to the entire community.

Appreciation for the life-changing impact of the program was evident when about half of the Fellows—300+ leaders from diverse fields—attended the 20th year celebration. Along with other praise, the Fellows credit the program with “doors that were opened” and “connections that were made.” As a result of their Fellowships program, Paul & Daisy Soros have indeed brought honor to New Americans, and who in turn, continue to contribute in extraordinary ways to the entire nation.

To
achieve
the
New
American
dream

PAUL & DAISY
SOROS



Written by [Jane L. Polin](#),
Philanthropic Advisor

Photos: Christopher Smith

For more on the Paul & Daisy
Soros Fellowships for New
Americans visit pdsoros.org.

This case study is one of 12 in a suite of case studies focused on how donors are supporting scholarships to create change. These case studies showcase the rich and varied narratives of giving in the scholarships space, giving insight to the philanthropy landscape and approach for foundations, academics, and practitioners.

The case studies have been developed in companionship with Candid's project [Scholarships for Change](#), a dynamic hub that pulls together data and knowledge to tell the story of how philanthropic dollars are supporting transformative scholarships. It includes a mapping tool and a repository of reports and case studies to learn from peers. The site was made possible through the generous support of The Ford Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Please visit scholarshipsforchange.org to explore further.

GrantCraft harnesses the practical wisdom of funders worldwide to improve the practice of philanthropy. Visit grantcraft.org to access our free resource library.

©2019 Candid. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, creativecommons.org/licenses/by0nc/4.0.