

The Open Lithuania Foundation (OLF) is an independent non-profit organization founded in Vilnius in 1990 with the support of George Soros, the globally prominent American financier and philanthropist. Soros has initiated and supported similar foundations overseas since 1984. He started in Hungary and expanded to Poland, Russia, Central and Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia.

The OLF is based on the idea of the importance of an open society and is a part of the network of Open Society Foundations, but is autonomous in its activities. People who are actively engaged in Lithuania serve as the driving force for the OLF's ideas and projects.

What did the OLF achieve from 1990 until 2008 when it suspended its operations? What were the new, impact making and meaningful ideas and activities that it introduced to Lithuania? How many ideas and initiatives were implemented? What were its most successful projects?

The review below of 18 years of work is based on OLF's [yearly reports](#).

The OLF initiated or carried out more than 50 programs during those 18 years. By implementing programs in the areas of education and science, law, civil initiatives and public administration, public health, culture, information, publications, library support, youth projects etc., the foundation contributed towards modernizing the public institutions of Lithuania, empowered its society to influence decision-making and presented the experience of other countries. The OLF was active in promoting changes in civic awareness and self-government, human rights, multiethnic culture, education, public health, law, economy, social reform, information dissemination, and many other areas critically important for raising and nurturing free, creative and responsible citizens of Lithuania.

The most common phrases used to describe activities and achievements of the OLF include, "That was innovative for Lithuania" and "It was the first time in Lithuania." The OLF's total subsidy to the progress of creating an open society in Lithuania during 1990-2008 exceeded 70 million USD, i.e. almost 4 million USD annually.

The OLF's *Publication Program* is its most well-known. It helped to introduce to the public, in Lithuanian translation, works of the world's most outstanding historians, philosophers, sociologists, and economists. *Education for Lithuania's Future* initiated, supported and published more than 350 new textbooks, educational literature and toolboxes for schools. Other programs, such as the *Law Program*, the *Higher Education Program* and the *Program for Science and Studies*, also included publications. In total, the OLF initiated or funded the publication of at least 784 books. (Please visit the virtual exhibition here: <http://parodos.lnb.lt/exhibits/show/atviros-lietuvos-fondas>).

In 1995, the OLF opened the first library in Lithuania that specialized in law, attracting over 7,000 visitors per year. Along with books, magazines and a database that included thousands of titles, the OLF library was transferred to the National Martynas Mažvydas Library in 2000, where the OLF Law Reading Room was founded. In 1996, the OLF library offered the first web-based reading space for visitors. Later on, the OLF contributed towards opening similar spaces at universities and public libraries.

After its closing in 2000, the OLF library was partially donated to the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University. The audio and video collections were gifted to the Adam Mickiewicz (Adomas Mickevičius) public library.

The OLF's first public phone-based internet centers opened their doors in Vilnius in 1995 followed by Kaunas and Klaipėda in 1996. They provided free internet and email services to institutions of education and science, NGOs as well as individuals until 1999. The total number of users reached 20,000.

The OLF *Conference and Foreign Internship Program* was particularly popular, since it was almost the only one in the country providing partial funding for the professional development of Lithuania's scholars, artists, and educational and cultural workers abroad. More than 4,200 people made use of this opportunity during 1992-1998. Combined with other OLF programs, such as *Public Health, Education, Library Support, and East-East*, OLF provided support to 6,000 Lithuanian professionals in a wide range of areas.

In cooperation with its partners, the OLF established the first law clinics and public law firms, providing free public legal aid in criminal cases. With assistance from the Canadian government, the first credit union in Lithuania was founded.

Provoking heated discussions and broad public interest, the OLF initiated research into public policy to check the government's decisions using the criteria of justification, transparency, publicity, and financial sources, and promoted citizens' participation in reforming the existing systems of culture, education and law.

For the first time in Lithuania, the OLF's *Junior Achievement Program* brought basic courses in market economy to schools in 1993, with 2,000 to 3,000 students reached annually. Along with others, the OLF initiated programs for studies abroad, foreign languages, school student exchanges, United World colleges, debates, children's support through Big Brothers/Big Sisters, contemporary art, Transparency International, and many others.

The majority of OLF's implemented programs are still serving the people of Lithuania, with 19 NGOs that grew out of them and are still operating successfully today.

For more information on the OLF's activities, please check our reports: [www.olf.lt/ataskaitos](http://www.olf.lt/ataskaitos).

The OLF's key programs:

## **EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND STUDIES**

### **Programs**

1. Education for Lithuania's Future
2. School Computerization and New Technologies
3. Pre-School Education
4. Debates
5. School Student Exchange
6. United World Colleges
7. Foreign Languages
8. Good Start
9. Center for Education Studies
10. Professional Career

11. School Libraries
12. Communication and Conflict Management
13. Higher Education (*HESP*)
14. Science and Studies
15. Open Society College
16. Foreign Study programs
17. International Science Foundation
18. Junior Achievement

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

### **Programs**

1. Civil society
2. Media
3. Law
4. Youth
5. Social Welfare and Support
6. Journalism Center
7. Children's Support
8. Business and Economy
9. East East
10. Public Administration and Civil Initiatives
11. Women
12. Baltic – American Partnership Program
13. Public Policy
14. Human Rights Monitoring Institute
15. Transparency International
16. Civil Society Institute

## **CULTURE**

### **Programs**

1. Culture Infrastructure

2. Performers' Art
3. Soros Contemporary Art Center
4. Regional Cultural Program East East
5. Open Lithuania Foundation House

## **INFORMATION**

### **Programs**

1. Publication
2. Training for Publishers and Distributors
3. Internet
4. Medical Internet
5. Libraries
6. E-publishing

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **Programs**

1. Public Health Initiatives
2. Geriatrics and Gerontology
3. Palliative Therapy
4. Born Healthy
5. Head Injuries
6. Harm Reduction
7. Mental Disability
8. Albert Schweitzer Medical Workshops
9. Salzburg – Cornell Seminars for Doctors