

# SELECTING LEADING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



ASHOKA

# Selecting Leading Social Entrepreneurs

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This introduction to how best to select the world's leading social entrepreneurs should prove useful for Nominators, others involved in Ashoka's selection process, candidates, and other partners. Thank you for helping.

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## Ashoka's Purpose

Recognizing the *fact* that the rate of change is escalating exponentially, Ashoka set out in 1980 to create the field of social entrepreneurship. It is now recognized as a key field that is essential to the world's well-being -- and a realistic, attractive life choice -- almost everywhere.

Entrepreneurship *is* as essential for education and the environment as it is for steel or electronics. Ashoka's selection process, applied regionally and uniformly across the globe, has, year after year, reliably found the best next generation of leading ideas and entrepreneurs for the good of all. Three quarters have changed their field at at least the continental level within five years of their launch and Ashoka election.

Since 1980 the rate of change has escalated and spread its reach dramatically. A world that for millenia has been organized for efficiency in repetition (think assembly line or law firm) now must organize very, very differently for an environment where everything is changing. The new world of fluid, open teams of teams will increasingly require *everyone* to be a changemaker.

This is a profound and hugely beneficial transformation. When everyone is a changemaker, the problems outpace the solutions. And the world will be a far more equal place.

The Ashoka community is uniquely well-positioned to help the world see this new framework and identify how we all can and must seize this historical moment.

This guide, *Selecting Leading Social Entrepreneurs*, is intended to provide Ashoka staff and colleagues with an overview of how skillfully to spot and elect Ashoka Fellows. It explains what Ashoka means by a leading social entrepreneur and provides the key criteria and tools used during the selection process.

***If you would like to nominate someone for the Ashoka Fellowship, please visit [www.ashoka.org/nominate](http://www.ashoka.org/nominate).***

## Selecting Leading Social Entrepreneurs

Ashoka is the world's field-defining association of leading social entrepreneurs—of men and women who possess the vision, creativity, and extraordinary determination of the business entrepreneur, but who devote these qualities to introducing new solutions to societal problems. These rare individuals, found in all cultures, foresee the next step forward for their field (be it in environmental issues, health care, economic development or another area of human need). They then relentlessly pursue this vision until it has become the established new reality, not just locally, but across society.

The Ashoka community's ability to help its members succeed and also to entrepreneur together major pattern changes en route to an "Everyone a Changemaker™" future depends on its continuing to select only the new ideas and entrepreneurs that together will change the world. Ashoka's rigorous selection process honed over decades allows it to do so reliably and uniformly across the globe. Over half the Ashoka Fellows have changed national policy within five years of their launch. Three-quarters have changed the patterns in their fields.



Ashoka Fellow Albina Ruiz (Peru) created a system of micro businesses that are dedicated to collecting and processing urban waste and thus promoting cleaner and healthier cities in Peru. Her work has improved living conditions for more than 6 million people and is being replicated across Latin America. Perhaps her most important success has been dignifying the job of garbage collectors, who are now included in a formal employment system complete with social and pension payments.



# Selecting Leading Social Entrepreneurs

Selecting *only* such leading social entrepreneurs is critical for many reasons, in addition to the long-term impact that the Ashoka entrepreneurs' own work will have:

- Their life stories and impacts make them powerful, highly contagious role models.
- Because getting local people in thousands of communities to love and champion their new ideas is central to their success, social entrepreneurs are mass recruiters and facilitators of thousands and thousands of new local changemakers—who in turn are role models and recruiters of yet more changemakers. This is a key force helping the world make the jump to its “Everyone a Changemaker™” future.
- Ashoka's community of mutual help is as powerful as it is because its members are peers who know they can trust one another.
- The Ashoka community's most advanced work, *collaborative entrepreneurship*, would not be possible without the Ashoka Fellows' strong building blocks of innovations and leadership.



Ashoka Fellow Kiran Bir Sethi (India) empowers children to be "change agents" in shaping their lives and communities. She has reached over 250,000 children in 22 countries within the two years of the "Design for Change" contest, which challenges youth to design the social infrastructure and architect solutions for the world's most pressing problems. Kiran Bir Sethi is now working to spread collaboration and empathy in children in 40 countries.

# Quick Guide to Ashoka's Selection Criteria

## A NEW IDEA (THE "KNOCK-OUT" TEST)

Is the person possessed by a truly new idea—a new, big solution or approach to a social problem? Is it a transformational innovation or just a tweaking of how things are currently done? How is it different from what others in the field (e.g. environment or poverty) are doing?

## CREATIVITY

Is the candidate highly creative in both goal setting and problem solving? Both are key. Are these qualities clearly present throughout the candidate's life as well as in the current work and its history? Was this idea (and earlier evidence of creativity) clearly created by this person?

## ENTREPRENEURIAL QUALITY

Is the person so committed to his or her vision that it is impossible for him or her to rest until the vision becomes the new pattern across society? Does the person relentlessly grapple with the many practical "how-to" challenges?

## SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE NEW IDEA

Is the idea likely to solve an important social problem at the continental level? Is the idea itself sufficiently new, practical, and useful so that people working in the field will adopt and replicate it? If it is, how many people will be affected? How much will they benefit? Ashoka is only interested in ideas that will change the field significantly and that will in the end have continental impact.

## ETHICAL FIBER

Would you instinctively trust him or her? Social entrepreneurs introducing major structural changes to society must be deeply trusted to succeed. Evaluating candidates' trustworthiness and ethical fiber requires significant use of instinctive as well as analytical intelligence.



# Ashoka's Selection Criteria

Ashoka's value, especially as a fellowship, depends absolutely on its electing only the world's leading social entrepreneurs with the most powerful new ideas.

In reviewing candidates, Ashoka applies one initial knock-out test, a 'new idea', and then four criteria: creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact, and ethical fiber.



Ashoka Fellow Bart Weetjens (Tanzania) trains African giant pouched rats to detect landmines left over from decades of conflict and war in Mozambique, Angola, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. The native rats are both less expensive than sophisticated electronic equipment and more resistant to endemic diseases than dogs. Bart's HERORats have cleared over 66,000 mines and other unexploded devices and arms across over 28 million square meters, restoring this land to local populations.

The rats are also trained as tuberculosis screeners that can screen thousands of sputum samples monthly. They detect 40% more cases than lab technicians.

# A New Idea (The "Knock-Out" Test)

Ashoka cannot elect someone as a Fellow unless he or she is possessed by a new idea, solution, or approach to a social problem that will change the pattern across a field—be it in housing, rural development, health, or any other area of need—at a continental scale.

Ashoka does not invest in "retail" projects or programs, such as a new school or clinic. Instead, Ashoka invests in systemic, structural change that, for example, will transform all of a society's schools or clinics. Leading social entrepreneurs do far more than teach a person how to fish: they change the entire fishing industry.

Ashoka elects candidates at all stages of development. The new idea should be the central vision of the candidate's life work --be it at the critical early launch stage or later when he/she has built an organization and spread movement.

If there is no clear, new, pattern-changing idea, then Ashoka cannot proceed with the candidacy. This is a tough but fair and clear first hurdle.

To assess whether a candidate has a pattern-changing new idea, Ashoka probes the following questions:

- *How precisely is this idea different from what others are doing in the field?*
- *Is this idea a truly transformational innovation, or is it a tweak on the current way of doing things?*
- *Does this idea have the potential to change a field (e.g. public education, child welfare) systemically? Does it address one or more of the root causes of a widespread failure?*
- *Will the idea, given time, lead to continental-scale change?*
- *Does the idea serve the good of all?*





## A New Idea: Empathy Through Experience

Long sensitive to issues of otherness because of how members of his family suffered at the hands of the Nazis, German Ashoka Fellow **Andreas Heinecke** came face-to-face with how people avoid those with disabilities when a fellow journalist was blinded in an accident and returned to work. Andreas then took up his life's work of finding ways to help others overcome such reactions to people who are different.

Dialogue in the Dark is one of his highly successful means of doing so. People pay for the experience of being plunged into a totally dark space and having to eat, interact, and navigate obstacles—all the while guided by a blind person. Suddenly the blind person is the abled person and those with sight are those who are disabled.

People who have gone through the Dialogue in the Dark experience remember the details years later and have a very different view of blindness and blind people. His Dialogues have now become a financially viable franchise arrangement operating in some 30 countries. Andreas has also developed another similar platform called "Scenes of Silence," where deaf and mute people teach nonverbal communication.



## Creativity

Successful social entrepreneurs must be creative. They must be able to lead society to a better future, which requires highly creative goal setting. To reach that goal then requires many years of iterative problem solving as both the world and their programs evolve. They must seek out problems and new openings and apply their creativity day after day, year after year, to succeed.

Creativity is also a wellspring of entrepreneurs' motivation. Because they own their vision, they are far more dedicated to making their idea become society's new reality than an employee in someone else's organization would.

Creativity is not a quality that suddenly appears in mature mid-life; it is almost always apparent from youth onward. It is important to look for a trail of innovation over a candidate's life.

To assess how creative a candidate is, we probe into his or her life with the following questions:

- *Does this individual have a vision of how he or she can meet some human need better than it has been previously met? Is it his or her own idea?*
- *Does he or she have a history of creating other new visions? Is this creativity evident in his or her earlier years?*
- *Does the individual have a track record of developing creative solutions to problems? Is this problem solving clearly his or hers?*
- *Is he or she likely to continue making creative contributions beyond this one idea throughout his or her lifetime?*



# Creativity: Healthcare Through Mobile

**Sam Agutu** (Kenya) uses mobile technology to make quality health care accessible and affordable for the 95% of Kenyans not covered by conventional, employer-based health insurance. By simplifying account management, Sam's innovation enables health providers to offer preventive and check-up services at a fraction of their usual costs in exchange for access to a previously untapped market.

In a country lacking an established consumer banking system, Kenyans have widely adopted mobile banking, using the popular M-Pesa system to deposit, withdraw and transfer funds through their phones. Sam saw an opportunity to leverage this trend to achieve economies of scale in health care provision through micro-insurance. He convinced a critical mass of health providers to provide basic preventive and check-up services at a significantly lower price-point—the equivalent of US\$5. Key to the cost savings is the higher patient volume made possible by a unified mobile system for managing accounts. Consumers pay for services at participating medical facilities using the Changamka smart card, sold at supermarkets and linked to users' M-Pesa accounts. The Changamka card encourages individuals to save for their health care costs, allowing users to easily transfer funds from their mobile bank accounts into a health savings plan.

Sam has gone on to diversify coverage products through Changamka, including micro-insurance and maternal health. Most notably, Sam is expanding beyond preventive care into more expensive inpatient coverage, bringing health insurance to 39 million previously uncovered Kenyans, and revolutionizing the reach of the health system.



# Entrepreneurial Quality

Ashoka is looking for those rare individuals who are, by temperament, first class entrepreneurs. They *will* change the world. Of Ashoka's five criteria, this has the most narrowly filtering mesh.

There are a number of tests that flow from the way in which Ashoka understands this entrepreneurial temperament and which are key to applying this criterion rigorously:

*1. Does the individual truly have a concrete idea for a different future for this field? This idea must not be a vague description of a goal; it must be a precise engineering plan—both of how this new idea will work and of how to get there.*

Many loosely use the word "entrepreneur" to describe everything from the corner retailer to the business bureaucrat. The same is true in the social sector. Someone who starts a school is a local changemaker but not a "social entrepreneur."

"Entrepreneurs" bring **society-wide, systemic, structural changes**. "Social entrepreneurs" do so, from deep within and therefore throughout their work, **for the good of all**.

The entrepreneurial personality that Ashoka is looking for is rare—and extremely distinct. There are thousands of creative people who lead, administer, and who "get things done." Very few of these people will succeed in changing the basic pattern in their field at the continental level. Ashoka seeks to elect only those with this unique entrepreneurial personality type.



# Entrepreneurial Quality

*2. Is he or she possessed by this idea? Is it obvious that this person is not going to be able to rest until his or her idea has become the new pattern across society? Is he or she unquestionably willing and eager to jump into this endeavor full-time? Is he or she facing up stoutly to the skepticism of the conventional minded? Has he or she shown such a committed pattern before?*

Ashoka is looking for individuals who are truly possessed by an idea and who will persevere in refining, testing, and then spreading and marketing the idea until it has become the new pattern for society as a whole. These individuals are the Steve Jobses and Sergey Brins of the citizen sector.

The true entrepreneur is easily distinguished and profoundly distinct from other personality types. Some people are satisfied when they see a vision and can express it. They do not have the compulsion to make it a reality. Others are satisfied when they have solved the needs of their particular clients or organization. In contrast, *a leading social entrepreneur cannot rest until his or her vision has become the new norm in society.* Everything else follows from this central truth. That is what sets this profession so clearly apart. That is what gives Ashoka its strength and its ultimate promise. That is why Ashoka must be so strict in applying this criterion.

This total absorption is critical to transforming the new idea into a reality, and it is for this reason that Ashoka absolutely insists that candidates commit themselves full-time to their ideas during the launch phase. Ashoka understands that, although many social entrepreneurs have an idea that they are willing to commit to full-time, they may have financial constraints that prohibit them from doing so. For this reason, Ashoka provides stipends to cover the living expenses of those Fellows who need support in order to work full-time on their ideas.

*3. Does he or she have the realism of the entrepreneur? Does he or she listen well? Is he or she free of ideological fetters? Is the idea realistic—on all dimensions, ranging from the technical to the political?*

True entrepreneurs are both visionary and practical. They do not want to be activists or martyrs. They simply want their ideas to succeed. When it comes to working on their ideas, they absorb the realities around them with great sensitivity and fidelity. From early morning to late at night, year in and year out, they constantly listen to their environments, seek out threats or opportunities that might affect their ideas, and refine their ideas until they are so well thought out that they will succeed at the continental level and beyond. Other personality types not driven by this compulsion will commonly not design their ideas so that they are capable of spreading broadly.

If there is a flaw in the design of their ideas, social entrepreneurs change the design. They listen to everyone, and they ask about every dimension of their work—from its economics to the anthropology of its field. They don't let an ideology or pride of authorship get in the way of their constantly hearing, experimenting, inventing, and listening again. This is what allows great entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into their society's new reality.

*4. Is this person as concerned with the practical engineering questions as with the vision? Does he or she have a good "how-to" map? When pressing this person on 'how-to' questions down to the second, third, and fourth level, does he or she light up with enthusiasm and become more engaged?*

True entrepreneurs must both have clear, big goals and be extraordinarily detailed engineers committed to the persistent pursuit of all the practical "how-to" issues that must be resolved for a new idea to fly.

The idealist will not have thought things through in this way. The true entrepreneur, by contrast, is almost always starved for the opportunity to discuss these sorts of issues with others and will truly enjoy an opportunity to do so in any depth.



## Entrepreneurial Quality

5. Did this person in the earlier stages of his or her life show the determination, ingenuity, realism, and thoughtful attention to detail, that characterize an entrepreneur? Has he or she previously taken surprising, perhaps even apparently risky, initiative to do things differently or to cause others to do things differently? Has this person been oriented towards delivering results, not just doing a job and not just desiring to get ahead? Most successful entrepreneurs have demonstrated such patterns of behavior since childhood. (80 percent of the Ashoka Fellows started something in their teens.)

People with an entrepreneurial personality type, knowing instinctively that they cannot come to rest in life without entrepreneuring a major change across society, seek out their field of action and then their new idea early and persistently. Once they find it, they are committed deeply and for however long it takes.

Almost always, this idea has grown out of experience rooted in their life's history. The interest began germinating when they were young. They then, more or less intuitively, put themselves through a long "apprenticeship" during which they master their field in great depth. They must know its history, people, institutions, anthropology, politics, and technology so well that they can see what the next historic step for the field is and how to bring it about. Their personality dictates that they pursue this path.

People often describe entrepreneurs as "risk takers." From the outsider's perspective, the leaps the entrepreneur takes do seem risky. However, the undertaking looks like a reasonable investment to the entrepreneur because he or she has thought through the idea with great attention to how it will work once it is set in motion. He or she has carefully considered every aspect of how the idea will move through a series of steps from the point of conception to its establishment as the new pattern. In fact, the entrepreneur is only willing to take steps that he or she believes will lead to success.

## Entrepreneurial Quality: A Contagious Passion

"Here I can say with absolute assurance that the main element for the association's success was Vera. She is so persistent; she insists and insists until she wins."

- Odilon Arantes, former Chief of Pediatrics, Lagoa Hospital Rio de Janeiro

**Vera Cordeiro** (Brazil) is founder of the Child Health Association, the creator and heart of a network of Brazilian organizations that extend care to poor children after they are discharged from public hospitals. As a doctor at a large public hospital, Vera noticed that children would be treated and return to the same environment that caused them to be ill in the first place, only to return sicker. Vera therefore organized follow-on care that engaged the whole family and addressed the underlying conditions— including poor education, inadequate housing and social exclusion—that contributed to disease. Doing so required fundamental reforms both within and beyond the health system that only a true entrepreneur could champion.

At every stage of the way, Vera met resistance—from an inflexible government, an underfunded health system, even from social workers who looked down on "untrained" volunteers. But she discovered she had a gift for recruiting helpers—journalists, doctors, hospital directors—with her seemingly endless energy. As her idea gained traction, she helped others launch similar efforts, and today, her methodology is used in 23 public hospitals in 7 cities in Brazil. Her achievements include a 60% reduction in hospitalization days and a 35% increase in family incomes.







# Social Impact of the New Idea

Ashoka is only interested in ideas that, in addition to being new, will likely change the field significantly and have importantly beneficial continental scale impact. Successful social entrepreneurship needs not only an extraordinary champion to develop an idea but also a powerful, practical new idea that will spread on its own merits. Such a “contagious” idea will be picked up and adopted by others in the field once its impact and feasibility have been demonstrated.

This is the only criterion that is about the idea, not the entrepreneur.

Once a new idea has been demonstrated, Ashoka assesses how many people will be affected by the implementation of the idea, and how beneficially. To do so, Ashoka asks:

- *Will the idea solve an important social problem, ultimately on a continental scale?*
- *Will the idea spread? Will it be picked up by others? What will motivate people and/or institutions to adopt the new idea?*
- *How many people will benefit? How much?*

Over the years, Ashoka has identified five key ways an idea can change systems to reach this level of social impact. The following questions help Ashoka understand the kinds of systemic change a candidate is pursuing:

- *Is the idea redefining value chains?*
- *Will it change public policy or a sectoral norm?*
- *Does it transform society's dynamics by bringing cross-sector change (e.g. by increasing business-social congruence)?*
- *Does it fully integrate marginalized populations and/or strengthen the ethical fabric of society?*
- *Will it increase the number of social problem solvers and help create a culture of changemaking?*

# Social Impact: Working Globally for Children

On a crowded street in Mumbai, a uniformed police officer approaches a group of street children. He accuses them of breaking the law and threatens to arrest them if they do not pay him a bribe. The officer routinely harasses them and other street kids, but they have no one to turn to. One of the children uses a nearby payphone to place a toll-free call to ChildLine, a 24-hour emergency telephone service for Mumbai street kids started by

**Jeroo Billimoria** (India). The call is answered by a trained volunteer, herself a former street kid—and trouble for the officer is immediately on the way. This simple step has changed police behavior and much more. The child, who had only known exploitation, begins to feel power.

Jeroo has since spread what she started in Mumbai into Child Helpline International (CHI), a global network of outreach services for children, spanning 143 countries. Previously victimized street children are now active citizens responding to the needs of their peers and respond to over 14 million contacts a year.

Through her work, Jeroo realized that the power she sought to bring to children was often undermined by their exclusion from financial services and lack of financial know-how. She therefore founded Aflatoun, a program to empower children through developing financial skills. Aflatoun reaches over 2.3 million children across 103 countries, and has launched over 5,000 social enterprises around the world, creating an environment in which everybody can be a changemaker.





# Ethical Fiber

Ashoka will only elect to its global Fellowship those individuals with unquestionable ethical fiber. This criterion is fundamental for three reasons:

1. Social entrepreneurs introducing major structural changes to society must ask many people to change how they do things, often in uncomfortably major ways. When people do not trust the entrepreneur, this significantly reduces the likelihood of his or her new idea being successful.
2. The world has enough untrustworthy public leaders. Ashoka does not want to add to the supply.
3. The quality of Ashoka's collaborative Fellowship depends on its members intuitively knowing that they can trust one another. Otherwise there will be little sharing and even less working together.

This criterion is therefore absolutely critical. Ashoka staff must make every effort to evaluate a candidate's ethical fiber through numerous interviews and reference checks, including with the candidate's work colleagues and clients during site visits. Everyone involved in the selection process must weigh this equally seriously. To do so requires one to resort to instinct and gut feelings, not just rational analysis.

To help evaluate a candidate's ethical fiber one must ask the following:

- *If you were in a dangerous situation, would you feel more relaxed if this person were with you, or would you feel a slight twinge? Imagine whatever situation is most likely to make you instantly fearful—for example the edge of a cliff if you are afraid of heights, or holding a snake if you are terrified of snakes. Then imagine the candidate with you. If you feel anything other than comfort, your instinct has spoken.*
- *Do you trust this person absolutely? (Would you ask him/her to take care of your young child? Would you trust the country to him/her?)*

# Ashoka's Search & Selection Process

Ashoka has honed its process for identifying leading social entrepreneurs and electing them to its powerful Fellowship for well over three decades. It is a five-step process which values the local context in which the candidate is working while ensuring that Ashoka's criteria and standards are applied reliably everywhere.

## I. Nomination

Ashoka's local Representatives lead a thorough process of research and analysis about each idea and candidate. Applications are welcome from anyone, but Ashoka's Nominators play a critical role, both in identifying and screening candidates. The Representatives invest considerable time and energy engaging a robust network of Nominators across all fields of work. Nominators come to deeply understand Ashoka's criteria and the power of and need for social entrepreneurship. Many become active members in the broader Ashoka community.

## 2. First Opinion Review

Ashoka's Representative reviews each candidate's application, and then conducts independent reference and background checks, site visits, and interviews. This stage of the selection process ensures that each candidate's work is truly relevant, impactful, and innovative in his/her region's context. The Representative both makes a key judgment and drafts the successful candidate's profiles.

## 3. Second Opinion Review

Once Ashoka's Representative has made his or her recommendation to support a candidate, that candidate goes through an intensive second opinion review by a senior Ashoka professional. The second opinion reviewer must come from outside of the country and have a keen understanding of Ashoka's criteria from a global perspective. This review includes an in-depth (typically half-day) interview that takes a fresh look at the candidate's life history and his or her new idea. The second opinion review provides a fresh outside perspective on the work of the candidate and helps the international staff calibrate and train local Ashoka teams.



# Ashoka's Search & Selection Process

## 4. Selection Panel

Once the second opinion reviewer has completed his or her work, the candidates that have passed are then sent on to a Selection Panel. The Selection Panel is made up of (1) diverse local/regional social entrepreneurs and sometimes a close partner and (2) a global board member or someone appointed by the board to represent it. The Selection Panel is responsible for ensuring that those elected are likely to become first rate social entrepreneurs with continental scale impact. In making these decisions, the panel is defining the field of social entrepreneurship.

The panel members are guided in their deliberations by three cardinal principles:

- **Confidentiality:** All of the Selection Panel's deliberations must be kept confidential.
- **Avoiding Conflicts of Interest:** When a panel member knows a candidate personally or has a working relationship deeper than casual professional contact, the member will notify his or her fellow panelists and not participate in the decision-making regarding that case. However, if the panelist is comfortable, he or she may contribute as a knowledgeable resource.
- **Consensus:** The Selection Panel decides by consensus; there is no voting. Most importantly, panelists must not put pressure, even subtly, on any member who has doubts. If one member does not believe a candidate meets the criteria, the candidate must not be elected. In choosing levels of election, the same conservative principle applies. Ashoka asks each participant in the selection process to take affirmative responsibility for each election, a responsibility all other participants must respect.

The Selection Panel also discusses and comes to a consensus on the stage at which it perceives the candidate's work to be in order to determine the candidate's level of election, i.e. as an Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow, Member, or Global Academy Member.

## 5. Board Approval

Ashoka Representatives, second opinion reviewers, and Venture program staff collaborate to write a candidate "profile" that presents the main elements of the candidacy and demonstrates how each of the criteria has been satisfied. Ashoka's Board of Directors, after ensuring that Ashoka's selection process was respected, reviews these profiles and the panel's discussions and recommendations carefully. The Board then approves, approves with modification (but never to a level higher than that recommended by the panel), or asks for more information from Ashoka staff. It also identifies patterns and policy issues as a result of these reviews.

\* \* \*

At all five stages of the selection process, the different actors involved—Nominators, local staff, second opinion reviewers, selection panelists, and board members—are asked to focus continuously on quality. Candidates should move on to the next stage of the process only if each individual reviewer is personally convinced that (1) there is a greater likelihood than not that the candidate and his or her idea together will change the field on a continental scale, and (2) that the candidate and idea meet Ashoka's standards for creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact, and ethical fiber. Although it may take ten to fifteen years to achieve that magnitude of impact, the confidence must be there.

Thinking through, reviewing, and helping the candidate perfect his or her idea is challenging and highly educative for all those in the process. Many studies show that it is also hugely beneficial for the aspiring social entrepreneurs. Candidates gain a much sharper understanding of the field and of the entrepreneur's career path, and they are also likely to engage with the Ashoka community in many ways whether or not elected.



# Categories of Election

Ashoka Fellows are elected at all stages of the social entrepreneur's career life cycle, whether they are just launching their idea, they are in the process of scaling up and spreading it, or they have already had systems-changing impact.

**Fellows**, who must be at the launch stage, are elected if (1) they meet the five criteria outlined above, and (2) Ashoka staff and reviewers are 80 percent confident that they will have continental level impact five to ten years after election.

**Associates** are elected at the same launch stage with the same criteria and receive the same benefits as Fellows, but require only a 51 percent probability of continental impact within ten years. **Global Fellows** are Ashoka Fellows with transnational or global ideas whose work defy geographic and political boundaries.

**Senior Fellows** meet all Ashoka's criteria but must at the time of election be beyond the launch stage and have already created widespread, pattern-changing impact that everyone responsible for the election believes has an 80 percent chance of being historic for the field on a continental scale. Most are recognized as leaders in their fields. With only the rarest of exceptions, Ashoka does not provide stipends to Senior Fellows, Members, or Global Academy Members (see below). They do, however, benefit from and contribute importantly to the Ashoka community.

**Members** are leading social entrepreneurs who have already made a scratch on history and are well ensconced in the mature phase of their work. They have successfully used one or more new ideas to change a pattern or system in society and the impact of their success is visible and tangible in daily life.

**Global Academy Members** have changed the history of their fields. They are operating at the global level or are well on the way to doing so. They are admired as exemplars of all the Ashoka criteria. As members of the Global Academy, they represent the field, advise major collaborative entrepreneurship, and help lead the Ashoka community.



*courtesy of Golli*

Senior Global Fellow Orri Vigfusson (Iceland) has nearly singlehandedly reversed the seemingly intractable decline of wild North Atlantic salmon from over-fishing. He founded the North Atlantic Salmon Fund to co-alesce an international citizen-led effort that makes market forces work for, rather than against, conservation.

Orri brings together stakeholders from across governments and the fishing industry to shift practices away from the over-fishing of salmon towards more lucrative alternatives, notably sports fishing. He negotiated with national governments to set up legal regimes that support marine conservation and works with commercial fishermen and women to purchase and "retire" their fishing licenses at fair prices. In addition to compensating commercial fishers for their loss of income from salmon fishing, the Fund assists fishers in finding sustainable, alternative employment.

The Fund has now brokered multi-million dollar buyouts or moratorium agreements with over 5,200 commercial salmon fishers in all North Atlantic countries, with the exception of the fjords of Norway and parts of Scotland. Orri Vigfusson's work has led to an 85 percent decline in commercial open sea Atlantic fishing over the last 25 years, with over five million North Atlantic salmon saved.





## Support to Fellows

The Ashoka Venture process opens the door for a range of catalytic investments throughout the Fellow's life cycle, from modest financial support in the form of a start-up stipend to strategic professional investments to being welcomed into a local/global community and an active network of peer entrepreneurs.

There is a magical moment in the life story of a major pattern change idea for the good, the entrepreneur behind that idea, and the organization that will support both: When, after a long apprenticeship, the entrepreneur sees the next major step for the field and knows that the time to launch the idea has come. That is the moment Ashoka seeks. Here a small investment makes a world of difference.

Once a decision is made to elect an individual to the Fellowship, Ashoka provides financial support if and to the degree that the person needs such support to be able to pursue his or her vision full-time. Ashoka weighs local (not international) comparability in setting stipend levels. Some Fellows do not need the stipend at all; others may be supporting a family member with a disability and may require a larger stipend. Therefore, the Ashoka Representative reviews each Fellow's financial situation individually and the stipend amount is tailored to each Fellow's need.

Ashoka expects that, over time, each Fellow and his or her project will become financially independent. Indeed, 97-98 percent of Fellows are continuing to pursue their visions full-time five years after their elections, well after the average three-year stipendiary support ends.

Because of the costs associated with electing Fellows and then of helping them in many other ways, it is necessary for Ashoka to raise funds for more than the Fellow's stipend.

## Other Considerations

There are no bars to election on the basis of national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, citizenship, disability, socioeconomic or marital status, or any other non-performance based criterion. Anyone who meets the five criteria is very much welcome as a potential Ashoka Fellow.

Ashoka does make a special effort to reach people from communities that are under-represented in public leadership and the Fellowship. With an increasingly diverse Nominator base, Ashoka elects Fellows that work across society. However, Ashoka is unalterably and without exception closed to any variant of quotas or double standards.

Candidates to become Ashoka Fellows must commit to working full-time on their vision if elected. Major structural social change requires no less. Moreover, a candidate's willingness to take this major step is a key measure of whether or not he/she truly is an entrepreneur and of whether or not he/she truly believes the idea is ripe.

Ashoka has a few negative grounds on which a candidate will be denied entry into (or continued membership in) the Fellowship. Violence, any form of discrimination, partisan political leadership, or membership in any political party and/or other type of association which advocates violence, discrimination or totalitarianism, are all incompatible with election or continued participation in the Fellowship. Essential to creating realistic, fundamentally new change, candidates must listen well, a quality that is incompatible with ideological captivity.

Ashoka is not a welfare organization seeking to help needy individuals. Ashoka's success comes with the major social changes its Fellows introduce and spread. Moreover, Ashoka's success relies critically on its ability to create a Fellowship that stimulates and helps its participants help one another and collaborate. This is Ashoka's greatest power. Only by perceiving one another as highly valued peers can the important network effect of Ashoka's Fellowship be realized.



# Ashoka's Global Fellowship

When a social entrepreneur is elected, he or she becomes an Ashoka Fellow and enters Ashoka's global Fellowship for life. Through the mutual help and collaboration of Fellows, Ashoka supports each individual to launch and spread his or her vision by sharing the most effective methodologies to bring about structural change. Ashoka's global community enables Fellows to collaborate in attacking common problems so that they are even more effective than they would be working on their own. Ashoka also provides professional support – through, for example, 43 law firms and leading management consultancy companies – for the field of social entrepreneurship and its leading practitioners.

Each year Ashoka elects a strategic number of leading social entrepreneurs to its Fellowship. Ashoka only selects those outstanding social entrepreneurs whose work Ashoka believes will be truly and broadly pattern changing. This is why Ashoka's rigorous and consistent selection process is the key to creating a powerful network effect of changemakers. Collaborative entrepreneurship among hundreds of Fellows globally pursuing the same major paradigm shift, a giant step beyond solo practitioner entrepreneurship and Ashoka's newest dimension, makes it even more important!



Ashoka Fellows Sam Goldman and David Green discuss economic inclusion at the 2014 Globalizer Summit in Chennai, India. The Fellowship's collaborative value depends on Ashoka's rigorous selection process.

## Cities where Ashoka has Staff \*

### **Bangalore**

Bandung  
Bangkok  
Colombo  
Delhi  
Dhaka  
Karachi  
Manila  
Seoul  
Singapore  
Tokyo

### **Cairo**

### **London**

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Brussels  
Budapest  
Dublin  
Frankfurt  
Geneva  
Istanbul  
Madrid  
Oslo  
Paris  
Prague  
Stockholm  
Tel Aviv  
Vienna  
Warsaw

### **Nairobi**

Bamako  
Dakar  
Johannesburg  
Kampala  
Lagos  
Ouagadougou

### **Sao Paulo**

Bogota  
Buenos Aires  
Caracas  
Mexico City  
Montevideo  
Santiago

### **Washington**

Minneapolis-St. Paul  
New York  
San Francisco  
Toronto

*\* List compiled at the time of printing. Cities commonly serve multiple countries. For a current list of Ashoka country offices and contact information, please see our website, [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org), or contact our global office at +1(703) 527-8300.*



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