

Does Violence Policy Center Represent the People?

Violence Policy Center (VPC) considers itself to be an influential player in promoting gun control policies which will ostensibly make the public safer:

Each year, the VPC releases hard-hitting, fact-based studies on a full range of gun violence issues. Recognizing the VPC's groundbreaking research and unique expertise, VPC staff are frequently quoted by the national news media and relied upon by policymakers. The VPC also works with national, state, and local advocacy organizations representing affected constituencies—such as women, children, minorities, consumers, and public health practitioners—to keep our neighborhoods, homes, schools, and workplaces safe from gun violence.¹

The question is: Does Violence Policy Center actually represent the public's views?

One way to determine if an organization has true public support is to see if they garner a certain amount of membership dues. For example, if an organization's total annual revenues is \$1 million and \$750,000 of that came from membership dues, then one can reasonably conclude that since dues represent 75% of revenue, the organization represents part of the public. Further, if annual dues are \$25, then the organization has about 30,000 members. Such organizations exist to enable groups of like-minded individuals of average wealth to pool their resources, in order to create greater influence with policy makers; a democratic aspect of our First Amendment rights, which states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Philanthropic Research has a web site named GuideStar, which contains tax returns for many non-profit organizations.² A basic (free) member of GuideStar can access the 2003-2005 tax returns of Violence Policy Center.³ Examining these tax forms highlights some interesting trends.

In 2003, VPC reported \$1,671,595 in total revenues. The seven top employees, including Executive Director Josh Sugarman and Legislative Director Kristen Rand, earned \$654,514, or 39.2% of total revenue.

In 2004, VPC replaced two of its highest-paid employees with one lower-paid employee. In 2003, Mathew Nosanchuk earned \$129,218 in salary in benefits, and Joseph Sudbay earned \$94,102. In 2004, replacement Fiona Harris earned \$53,290 in total compensation. Nevertheless, the top *five* employees received 45.8% of total revenue, because total revenue dropped 41.4% from the 2003 amount.

In 2005, revenue dropped again for a total decrease of 53.7% from 2003, so the same top five employees received 59.6% of total revenues in salary and benefits. This

means that between 2003 and 2005 a handful of people saw their piece of the pie grow 52.1%.

In the beginning of this section, the concept of public support was in part defined by evidence of membership dues being paid to an organization that claims to promote beneficial public policies. Violence Policy Center's tax returns included a section entitled "Schedule A, Part IV-A: Support Schedule." It includes a line item for membership fees. For the years 2000 through 2004, the total membership fees received was \$0.

Propaganda Arm for Elitist, Anti-Rights Money?

As revenues decreased, both Sugarman's and Rand's salaries increased 5.9% to reflect the inflation index. But because revenues decreased, these two top earners—each of whom earned \$132,894 in salary and \$3,987 in benefits—went from 15.5% of total revenue in 2003 to 35.4% in 2005, more than doubling their slice of the pie. Having just two employees taking home over one-third of total revenue may not be a long-term success strategy for a normal business, but it works when normal profitability concerns don't exist. To understand the financial circumstances of VPC, one must understand their definition of "public support," which accounted for 85-90% of VPC's total revenue. And to understand VPC's "public support," one must understand the Joyce Foundation, because VPC's main "public donor" is the Joyce Foundation.

At the Joyce Foundation site, selecting "Gun Violence" on their "Grant List" page displays a roster of Who's Who in gun control: e.g. Violence Policy Center, Mayors Fund to Advance New York City, Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence. Joyce Foundation spent \$6,650,865 on gun control research in 2005 and 2006.⁴ By comparison, the entire gun rights industry contributed a total of \$1,291,050 for the two-year 2006 election cycle.⁵

An examination of the Joyce Foundation's 2005 financial statement shows no line item for membership dues or individual contributions. Their income is derived from investments: e.g. stocks, bonds, and real estate.⁶ The seed money for their grants came from Beatrice Joyce Kean in the 1970s, when she left the Foundation over \$100 million.⁷

In 2003, of the \$1,507,016 in "public support" received by VPC, \$500,000, or 33.2%, came from the Joyce Foundation. In 2004, VPC received another \$500,000 from the Joyce Foundation, but due to decreases from other sources of "public support," the Foundation's share rose to 60.1%. In 2005, as revenues decreased again, the Joyce Foundation chipped in another \$450,000, increasing their share of VPC's "public support" to 68.1%. In just three years, the Joyce Foundation more than doubled its share of VPC's "public support" and nearly doubled its share of VPC's total revenues from 29.9% in 2003 to 58.2% in 2005.

Conclusion

With an increasing share of financial support despite overall decreasing revenue, it stands to reason that the Violence Policy Center is the public mouthpiece of the Joyce Foundation's agenda regarding your gun rights. It is also clear that their agenda

represents the wishes of a few well-paid VPC employees and the Joyce Foundation's board of directors. This is undemocratic.

About the Author

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Endnotes

¹ About the Violence Policy Center, copyright © 2006. <http://www.vpc.org/aboutvpc.htm>

² GuideStar, Philanthropic Research, Inc. <http://www.guidestar.org/>

³ Internal Revenue Service Form 990: Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax.

2003: <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2003/521/571/2003-521571442-1-9.pdf>

2004: <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/521/571/2004-521571442-01b82729-9.pdf>

2005: <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/521/571/2004-521571442-01b82729-9.pdf>

⁴ Joyce Foundation, Grant List. <http://www.joycefdn.org/GrantList/Default.aspx>

⁵ Open Secrets, *Gun Rights: Long-Term Contributions*, The Center for Responsive Politics. <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.asp?Ind=Q13>

⁶ Joyce Foundation, *Financial Statements 2005*. http://www.joycefdn.org/pdf/JF_05AR_Financials.pdf

⁷ The Joyce Foundation, *About Us*. <http://www.joycefdn.org/AboutUs/History.aspx>