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TEACHFORAMERICA

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**PETER JENNINGS AWARD HONORS RHONDA KALIFEY-ALUISE, KIRA ORANGE JONES,
AND SARAH USDIN FOR EDUCATION EFFORTS IN NEW ORLEANS**

*Three New Orleans Education Leaders to Receive Teach For America's Prestigious Alumni Award,
Recognizing Significant Impact in Expanding Educational Opportunity*

NEW YORK, May 8, 2012— Teach For America announced today that Rhonda Kalifey-Aluise, Kira Orange Jones, and Sarah Usdin will receive this year's Peter Jennings Award for Civic Leadership for their combined contributions to expand educational opportunity in New Orleans. Named in tribute to the late journalist and longtime Teach For America supporter, the award is presented annually to Teach For America alumni who have significantly impacted an issue of critical importance to ending educational inequity.

"I am honored to present this award to these extraordinary educators, who are helping to transform education in New Orleans," said Kayce Freed Jennings, who will present the award to the recipients. "Rhonda, Sarah and Kira are proving that all children can achieve at the highest levels, despite their circumstances, when given the opportunity to do so."

Kalifey-Aluise joined Teach For America's Houston corps in 1992 and in 2004 joined the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) to launch the charter network's first school in New Orleans. Forced to relocate to Houston as a result of Hurricane Katrina, Kalifey-Aluise spearheaded KIPP's return to the Recovery District in the fall of 2006. Today, the KIPP New Orleans network, led by Kalifey-Aluise, is the fastest growing in the country and consists of nine schools serving 2,450 mostly low-income students. At the same time, she has created an incredibly strong program for special needs children and has gone to great lengths to develop the school-based supports necessary to retain some of the hardest-to-reach children in the city. Their academic results have been impressive: KIPP New Orleans's students have shown an average two years of academic improvement for every one year of instruction they receive. Rhonda has helped to set the bar high for school performance in the city. She is a compelling and persistent voice for not claiming victory until we are truly providing all the children in New Orleans with an excellent education.

A 2000 South Louisiana corps member, Kira Orange Jones returned to Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to serve as Teach For America's executive director of Greater New Orleans. Under Kira's leadership, the region has grown its corps from 60 to 400 teachers working in more than 100 area schools. In November 2011, through a community outreach campaign, Kira was elected to represent parts of New Orleans and surrounding parishes on Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Sarah Usdin, who joined Teach For America's South Louisiana corps in 1992 and served as executive director of Teach For America – South Louisiana, is the founder and CEO of New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), a nonprofit that works to open high-quality educational institutions in the city. In the six years since its inception, NSNO has launched 10 charter schools serving 5,500 area students. It has also supported the founding of three charter management organizations and provided start-up grants and other supports to more than 90 percent of the city's open-enrollment charter schools. The organization has also recruited 420 teachers and 23 principals to staff these schools. Sarah's passion and determination in the wake of the hurricane and the years since have helped inspire a veritable movement of people and resources to be part of the change in New Orleans.

"While there is much more to be done to ensure an excellent education for all in New Orleans, it has been deeply inspirational to see the community's tremendous progress in providing parents and students with access to good schools," said Wendy Kopp, founder and CEO of Teach For America. "We are excited to put a spotlight on Sarah, Rhonda, and Kira, who have provided extraordinary leadership as part of this effort. They truly embody Teach For America's core values of transformational change, leadership, team, diversity, and respect and humility."

Although these leaders are at the helm of three different organizations, their work is mutually reinforcing. "Sarah, Rhonda and I are deeply humbled by this recognition of our efforts to change the educational outcomes for our students of New Orleans," Orange Jones said. "We know that in partnership with our community we're transforming our city's and the nation's public perception of what is possible for New Orleans' children."

Established in 2007, the Peter Jennings Award has quickly developed a reputation for recognizing breakthrough talent in the education community. Past alumni recipients include Newark superintendent Cami Anderson; IDEA Public Schools cofounders Tom Torkelson, JoAnn Gama, and Jeremy Beard; The New Teacher Project (TNTF) President Tim Daly and former TNTF President Michelle Rhee; and Colorado State Senator Michael Johnston.

About the Peter Jennings Award

The Peter Jennings Award for Civic Leadership celebrates Teach For America alumni who in the past year has exerted great leadership to expand educational opportunity. The award is named after journalist and ABC News anchor Peter Jennings, a longtime supporter of Teach For America who spoke powerfully about the organization's work on the front lines of this challenge to make America better. He understood deeply the long-term impact of Teach For America's work and embodied the values and commitment that the organization seeks to foster among its corps members and alumni. Award nominations are submitted by Teach For America alumni, staff, and others in the arena of education and social reform.

About Teach For America

Teach For America works in partnership with communities to expand educational opportunity for children facing the challenges of poverty. Founded in 1990, Teach For America recruits and develops a diverse corps of outstanding individuals of all academic disciplines to commit two years to teach in high-need schools and become lifelong leaders in the movement to end educational inequity. Today more than 9,000 corps members are teaching in 43 urban and rural regions across the country, while nearly 24,000 alumni are working across sectors to ensure that all children have access to an excellent education. For more information, visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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