

# on the table®



## What is On the Table?

In 2017, **Silicon Valley Community Foundation** was one of 10 foundations across the country to increase **civic participation** through **On the Table**, a three-year national initiative funded by **The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**. **On the Table** replicates an annual civic engagement initiative of the same name developed by The Chicago Community Trust to bring together residents to share a meal and engage in dialogue about community issues. Support for **On the Table** advances **Knight Foundation's** work to help cities attract and keep talented people, expand economic opportunity and create a culture of **civic engagement**.

## San Francisco Bay Area Approach

The original **On the Table** model described above was adapted by SVCF to elevate our community's priorities and deepen relationships with nonprofits in our region. Work took place in three phases.

### Year 1: Elevating community stories

SVCF intentionally designed OTT to: 1) involve the entire region by inviting community leaders and residents across the Bay Area and Silicon Valley to host and participate in OTT conversations and 2) focus conversations around one critical issue: housing. In 2017, about 7,000 participants shared stories of the impact of the Bay Area's housing crisis on their lives and families.

### Year 2: Working toward solutions

After sharing personal housing stories in 2017, participants wanted to know *what they can do about it*. Because of this feedback, 2018 conversations were crafted to be solutions-oriented and focused on identifying **pathways to action**.

### Year 3: Reimagining relationships beyond the table

After two years of implementing OTT in the San Francisco Bay Area, we have demonstrated SVCF's commitment to deepening relationships with the communities we serve. As part of that commitment, SVCF will support the continued implementation of OTT conversations to generate community-driven solutions.

*Many thanks to all who made OTT a reality—The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, all our hosts and participants, and our community advisory group: People Acting in Community Together, Faith In Action, Youth Leadership Institute, Silicon Valley @ Home, Destination: Home, Housing Trust Silicon Valley, Urban Habitat, Unity Care and Housing Leadership Council, San Mateo.*

See the full report that encompasses the collective voices and learnings of our region at [siliconvalleycf.org/onthetable](https://siliconvalleycf.org/onthetable)

## PATHWAYS TO ACTION: Three ways Bay Area residents can build healthy, equitable, sustainable communities for all



### INDIVIDUAL ACTION:

Relationships matter. Building relationships, especially with people different from yourself, leads to greater empathy and shared understanding.



### GROUP ACTION:

Organizing is powerful. Formal and informal community gatherings (like OTT conversations!) concentrate power to fight for our future.



### CIVIC ACTION:

Institutions matter. Voting, understanding planning and permitting, and interacting with your local government gives residents access to decision-making power.

# SVCF's learnings: Reimagining relationships



Since 2017, **The Knight Foundation** has supported 13 community foundations across the country in replicating the **On the Table** civic engagement model. The following are SVCF's key learnings from implementing **On the Table** in the region we serve.

- Our future is directly connected to the **future of our community**. By creating new relationships and strengthening existing partnerships, SVCF has opened itself up to a community-driven agenda and is working to be flexible and responsive in its work.
- **Flexibility** is key. We had initially imagined OTT 2018 as one week of conversations in mid-November. However, our advisory group suggested that a longer time window would be beneficial for partner organizations, allowing them to integrate conversations into existing work and utilize OTT activities to support voter mobilization efforts before the 2018 election.
- **Collaboration makes the work relevant.** Throughout the process we worked hand in hand with an advisory group and conducted numerous site visits and design sessions with hosts and partners. We found conversations to be most successful when integrated into an organization's existing calendar and work.
- **Additional resources are needed to maximize opportunities for organizing.** Community members have a deep desire to continue organizing, but many Bay Area nonprofits lack the experience and funding necessary to effectively bring together diverse groups of people. Investment in organizing efforts works in tandem with investment in policy and advocacy solutions.
- OTT provided a valuable opportunity for organizations to reach out to **new sectors of the community** and to rekindle lapsed partnerships.

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