

Community Catalyst Fund – Promoting Civic Participation

Background

In July 2020, SVCF announced its [new strategic plan](#) with the objective of building a Silicon Valley where all can live financially secure, safe and fulfilling lives. This followed a year-long strategic planning process supported by The Bridgespan Group, which included extensive conversations with nonprofit and community organizations. SVCF also conducted interviews with issue-area experts and analyzed trends related to our strategic areas of focus. We connected with many of our community partners throughout the process and beyond, carefully considering all insights and feedback provided.

The four key pillars of the strategic plan are:

1. Reducing systemic disparities
2. Supporting strong and engaged communities
3. Growing the culture and practice of effective philanthropy, and
4. Being a trusted and enduring institution for the community

To reduce systemic disparities, we put populations facing the greatest challenges— low-income households, immigrants and communities of color — at the center of our work. We support efforts that build strong and engaged communities, and work with our donors to promote effective philanthropy with a focus on local giving.

We have begun [adapting our grantmaking programs](#) to meet these goals. Through grantmaking programs guided by our board and staff, our foundation has shifted to provide more general operating support and capacity-building grants to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations that amplify the voices of and build power among historically underrepresented communities.

One of SVCF's priorities is considering the racial diversity of leadership in local nonprofit organizations our foundation supports. This summer, SVCF conducted a comprehensive survey of the nonprofit programs funded through the [SVCF's COVID-19 Nonprofit Emergency Response Fund](#). Over 200 organizations replied to the survey, enabling a deep dive into the racial diversity of our local nonprofit leadership. [The survey findings](#) illuminated the barriers to resources BIPOC leaders have encountered and the challenges they face moving forward in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. With an initial round of community action grants, we will continue addressing this disparity in our region.

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SVCF believes that a healthy democracy is dependent upon all community members' ability to participate in the public policy process and exercise influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Yet here in Silicon Valley, there is a significant power imbalance. Communities of color do not have an equal role deciding our region's future. Studies have identified that BIPOC communities face significant hurdles to building power. These hurdles are clear when analyzing representation among elected offices, voter turnout and influence with elected officials.



Under SVCF's new strategic plan, we are opening the **Civic Participation Community Action Grants** under our Community Catalyst Fund to address these disparities and build a strong and engaged community. Through this grant program, SVCF will provide funding to BIPOC-led organizations responding to the needs of BIPOC and low-income communities following the 2020 general election. As we look toward 2021, SVCF intends for these investments to build power in BIPOC and low-income communities. The work that this program funds will be part of a long-term strategy to achieve systemic change in Silicon Valley.

Organizations seeking to apply should have a clear focus on racial justice and a plan to center the community they are serving in leadership, design and implementation of programs. Priority will be given to BIPOC-led and allied organizations and those with annual budgets under one million dollars.

We are especially interested in supporting activities which continue to strengthen civic engagement in the wake of the 2020 election. Activities we plan to support include information sessions, virtual community events and the development of shared policy platforms. Grants will also support longer-term efforts such as coalition building, advocacy and relational organizing.

In issuing grants through this fund, SVCF seeks to prioritize support to organizations which commit to partnerships with others and make use of relational organizing strategies, while centering trusted community messengers in their work. Other possible strategies will likely include policy advocacy, holding elected official accountable, voter engagement and other tactics which are central to power-building.

Additional Details

Funding **will not** be provided for:

- Ongoing program support
- Capital improvements
- Budget shortfalls or fundraising events
- Previously planned or long-term campaigns
- Funding gaps due to internal organizational emergencies, such as office vandalism, resignation of an executive director or sudden loss of funding

Grants will be awarded for either general support or specific projects. The maximum grant amount will be \$30,000. The application is streamlined to reduce time spent on applying and processing. The grant review process will be expedited with the goal of awarding grants a couple of weeks after the application period closes. Only one application may be submitted per organization.

Eligibility

- Organizations must serve San Mateo and/or Santa Clara counties. Organizations headquartered outside the two-county region may apply but should demonstrate significant service to these areas or partner with a local organization that does.



- Organizations must have a 501(c)(3) designation, or have a fiscal sponsor with a 501(c)(3) designation.
- Organizations must not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, religious affiliation, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, veteran status or any other protected status.
- Organizations with religious affiliations will be considered for funding only if the project for which they seek support addresses the needs of the wider community without regard to religious beliefs.