request for proposals

Promoting Greater Civic Participation through Open Government
Promoting Greater Civic Participation through Open Government

Introduction

A healthy democracy is dependent upon all community members’ ability to participate in the public policy process and having influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Yet studies have shown that those with more time, money and political know-how are better able to engage and express their needs and wishes in the halls of political power.\(^1\) A statewide analysis of voter and civic engagement data showed significant disparities in participation between whites and people of color, between those with higher and lower income and education, and between older and younger generations.\(^2\) The consequences of these disparities are serious and far-reaching, resulting in a democracy that does not represent all of California’s diverse voices and perspectives.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation advances innovative philanthropic solutions to the most challenging problems in Silicon Valley. One of these challenges is promoting greater civic participation through open government, which is critical to improving public policy and advancing the common good. This challenge is addressed through SVCF’s Promoting Greater Civic Participation through Open Government grantmaking strategy. To better understand our goals and objectives for this strategy, we encourage you to read SVCF’s research brief on the topic at siliconvalleycf.org/civicparticipation.

The civic participation strategy will make strategic investments in:

1) Promoting greater civic participation through open government efforts. A cornerstone of these efforts will be to support models of participation that engage diverse groups — in particular, those with lower incomes, people of color, immigrants and youth. In addition, we look forward to supporting innovative models of participation that use technology-based tools to challenge conventional standards of practice, and that allow for meaningful, two-way communication between residents and public officials.

2) Making government data open so that it can be freely used, reused and dedicated to the public domain or made available through an open license.

3) Civic education programs that are readily accessible to the community, including youth.

By using an RFP approach, SVCF aims to solicit the best thinking of nonprofit service providers, public sector agencies, research institutions and other entities serving San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

\(^1\) University of California, Riverside, School of Public Policy. Advancement Project. (2016). Unequal Voices, California’s Racial Disparities in Political Participation.

\(^2\) Ibid.
Grant Application Deadline

The application process will open beginning November 13, 2017.

Grant applications must be submitted through our online application system, apply.siliconvalleycf.org, by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, December 15, 2017.

Problem Statement

Because governments do not have the resources or capacity to address all of the economic, political and social challenges that exist, it is crucial that residents engage in the betterment of our communities.

A healthy democracy is dependent upon all community members being able to participate in the public policy process and having influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Yet studies have shown that those with more time, money and political know-how are better able to engage and express their needs and wishes in the halls of political power. A statewide analysis of voter and civic engagement data showed significant disparities in participation between whites and people of color, between those with higher and lower income and education, and between older and younger generations. The consequences of these disparities are serious and far-reaching, resulting in a democracy that does not represent all of California’s diverse voices and perspectives.

The open government movement has the potential to change these patterns by transforming the ways in which residents engage with government. Since former President Barack Obama’s December 2009 directive to put government data online, open government has attracted an enormous amount of public attention. The open government movement is based upon the idea that governments function better when residents play an active role in creating policy. In general terms, an open government is one with high levels of transparency, as well as public access to government-held information and proceedings. More recently, the definition has been broadened to include resident participation and collaboration in proceedings through the use of modern, open technologies.

Cities across the country are implementing open data initiatives to equip residents with previously unavailable data and activate them to use that information to address a range of community issues. This enables everyone in the community to have fair and equal access to the same baseline information, making it more difficult for “alternative facts” to take hold.

---

3 University of California, Riverside, School of Public Policy. Advancement Project. (2016). Unequal Voices, California’s Racial Disparities in Political Participation.

4 Ibid.

Program Goal

With this grantmaking strategy, SVCF intends to have an impact both on institutions and individuals. There are 125 county, city, school and special district offices in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. At the institutional level, we anticipate that this grantmaking strategy will result in at least 20 percent of these offices committing to open government practices and engaging more residents in local planning and problem-solving. We are particularly interested in assessing which engagement tools and strategies are most effective in reaching diverse segments of the community (including low-income residents, people of color, immigrants and youth).

At the individual level, the anticipated result of this grantmaking strategy is to increase the civic knowledge and skills of residents that participate in SVCF-funded civic education programs. We hope to find ways to capture whether some of these residents are then motivated to participate in civic or political activities, such as volunteering, public meetings or voting.

Promoting civic participation through open government is a new area of investment for SVCF. Therefore, we are open to seeing what works and what does not. Our goal is to determine how the civic participation efforts that we fund can be extended, strengthened and sustained over time. We are optimistic that successes in this area will lead to a larger and more diverse range of residents who are civically engaged — giving them the power to help make our economy grow and our local communities thrive. SVCF will be intentional in its efforts to support projects that ensure fair and equal access to this information by marginalized groups.

Finally, we recognize that civic knowledge and skills are necessary for people to understand how to participate effectively and to feel a sense of political efficacy. Therefore, we will invest in civic education programs that are readily accessible to the community, including youth.

A healthy democracy is dependent upon all community members being able to participate in the public policy process and having influence over the decisions that affect their lives.
Proposal Eligibility Criteria

• Only organizations serving San Mateo and/or Santa Clara counties will be considered. Organizations headquartered outside the two-county region must demonstrate significant service to these areas, or must be partnered with another organization based within the core counties.

• Organizations must fall into one of the following categories: those with a 501(c)(3) designation; those that have a fiscal sponsor with a 501(c)(3) designation; public agencies; collaborations of nonprofit and public agencies; or other entities that have a designated charitable purpose.

• 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 under applicable law.

• 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.

Project Proposal Characteristics

Priority will be given to organizations that demonstrate a clear understanding of how the proposed activities advance SVCF’s programmatic goals, those that show a cohesive overall community strategy and those that best describe how their efforts will be coordinated and implemented, including key anticipated milestones and the timeframe for completion. SVCF is interested in partnering with organizations that are open to learning, sharing and developing new solutions to challenging problems. We are receptive to concrete, practical and impactful project proposals that:

• Include either a well-tested model that can be scaled up or expanded regionally while maintaining local relevance, or a new pilot that, if successful, can be grown and replicated.

• Benefit from collaborative work and bring public and private partners together with nonprofit organizations.

• Demonstrate knowledge of the sector and its trends.

• Identify the target population and provide justification for that focus.

• Provide clear benchmarks for measuring progress.
Application Process

1) Review reference materials. These may be found at siliconvalleycf.org/civicparticipation.

   • Research brief on Promoting Civic Participation through Open Government.
   • This RFP – Promoting Civic Participation through Open Government.

2) Participate in the information session. Because all grant applications are submitted online, this session provides an overview of SVCF’s online application system, apply.siliconvalleycf.org.

   Additionally, the information session will provide an opportunity for applicants to review in more depth the RFP’s content and ask questions. To register for the session please visit the calendar on our home page.

   More specific questions about program concepts, content, eligibility and evaluation can be addressed through phone calls and in-person meetings with the program officer, as time permits.

3) Submit grant application, including required attachments, through our online application system, apply.siliconvalleycf.org, beginning November 13, 2017. Applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. (PST) Friday, December 15, 2017. A guide to the online application system can be found here.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals for grants should include a narrative that responds to the questions found at apply.siliconvalleycf.org. Grant proposals will be evaluated, on a competitive basis, using the following criteria:

• Innovative and effective strategy with potential for systems change.
• Clarity of project description and project activities, including steps to be taken to achieve desired outcomes.
• Achievable timeline (12 months) that corresponds to the key activities.
• Meaningful benchmarks and indicators of success.
• Organizational capacity to implement project – including staffing, leadership and operational and fiscal management.
• Established track record in specific program content area or likelihood to achieve needed content expertise.
• Ability to leverage financial, human and technical resources from other partners to achieve greater impact.
• Ability to contribute content-area knowledge to the field.
Awards
Successful applicants will receive grants for a maximum one-year period. Applicants should include a budget narrative that makes clear the necessity of the project’s specific line-items.

Please note that project proposal narratives may be posted publicly on our website to reflect our value of transparency and encourage learning among grantees, future applicants and the community at large.

Review and Selection Process
An advisory committee with issue expertise will help staff review all proposals recommended for funding to SVCF’s board of directors. Applicants may receive a site visit, telephone call and/or other type of communication from SVCF staff as part of the proposal review process.

Applicants will be informed of grant decisions in February 2018.

Evaluation, Monitoring and Grantee Learning Activities
Grantees will be expected to meet SVCF’s requirements for a final financial and narrative report and evaluation data, as well as be willing and available to talk with SVCF staff and donor advisors if requested.

In an effort to further the overall program goals of this RFP, inform future RFPs related to this topic and contribute to larger field-building objectives, grantees will be requested to participate in periodic meetings to share information on project activities and best practices, as well as respond to evaluations annually.

Thank you very much for your interest in responding to this RFP and in making our region a better place. We look forward to reviewing your proposal.
About Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Silicon Valley Community Foundation advances innovative philanthropic solutions to challenging problems. We engage donors and corporations from Silicon Valley, across the country and around the globe to make our region and world better for all. Our passion for helping people and organizations achieve their philanthropic dreams has created a global philanthropic enterprise committed to the belief that possibilities start here. Learn more at www.siliconvalleycf.org.

More Information

If you have questions, please contact us at grants@siliconvalleycf.org or call 650.930.9885

RFP published November 2017
Proposals accepted November 13, 2017 through December 15, 2017
© 2017 SILICON VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION