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 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.¹ A statewide analysis of voter and civic engagement data showed significant disparities in participation between white people and people of color, between those with high and lower levels of income and education, and between older and younger generations.² These disparities are exacerbated by systematic barriers to civic participation which prevent some communities from building and exercising political power. 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.

SVCF advances innovative philanthropic solutions to the most challenging problems in Silicon Valley. One of these challenges is ensuring that our local democracy is truly representative of all Silicon Valley residents and not just those with the time, resources and experience to influence local government. Promoting greater civic participation through open government 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 strategy. To better understand our goals and objectives for this strategy, we encourage you to read SVCF’s research brief on the topic.

The Promoting Civic Participation Through Open Government strategy will make strategic investments to support:

1) New models of engagement which give underrepresented communities a greater voice in influencing local government policy. This will include both tech-enabled models and those that improve in-person consultations. SVCF will also continue to support efforts to improve government transparency in Silicon Valley through programs which connect residents with newly available open data and government information.

2) Reforms with the potential to significantly improve the voting experience in California. These reforms are to both the voting process and ensuring fair representation at the local level. As these reforms are introduced at the local level, SVCF will support projects to ease these transitions in advance of the next election cycle.

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

² Ibid.
3) Projects featuring integrated voter engagement (IVE) strategies for underrepresented groups. IVE strategies enable community members to participate in a continuous series of civic engagement experiences, led by their peers, to achieve consistent participation and raise voter turnout. SVCF is specifically interested in supporting collaborative projects among organizations which have the potential to have a greater impact.

4) Civic education programs which are readily accessible to the community. Such programs could include project-based learning experiences for students to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to lead campaigns and become active voices in their own community. SVCF is also supportive of efforts in individual local districts or county offices to review existing civic education practices and incorporate models with an established record of success.

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.

**Grant Application Deadline**

The application process will open beginning October 22, 2018.

Grant applications must be submitted through our online application system, Apply SVCF, by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, November 30, 2018.

**Problem Statement**

Since governments do not have the resources or capacity to address all the economic, political and social challenges that exist, it is crucial that residents engage in the betterment of our communities. As governments make decisions, it is critical that they have the support of the community in executing them. However, too many decisions are made with little or ineffective input from the public. As a result, trust in the public sector has been falling consistently in recent years as residents increasingly feel their voices are not being heard.\(^3\) This leads to residents tuning out the political process both in elections, as demonstrated by falling voter turnout, and also in between elections as fewer and fewer people are contacting their public officials. This cycle is troubling by itself, but especially so as the decline in civic participation has disproportionally been among communities of color, those with lower incomes and young people.\(^4\) As a result, a whiter, richer and wealthier set of Californians are steering public policy through higher participation rates.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) University of California, Riverside, School of Public Policy. Advancement Project. (2016). Unequal Voices, California’s Racial Disparities in Political Participation, Part II.

\(^5\) Ibid.
There is positive movement to change this\(^6\) and SVCF will support reforms by making strategic investments in projects that promote greater civic participation through open government. 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 are excited to support innovative models of participation that use technology-based tools to challenge conventional standards of practice and allow for meaningful, two-way communication between residents and public officials. Similarly, we will support the implementation of election reforms in California designed to raise voter turnout among underrepresented communities. Reforms like the Voter’s Choice Act (SB 450) have shown promising early results, but continued dialogue between elections officials and community groups is critical for their long term success.\(^7\) Both new models of engagement and election reform have tremendous potential to ensure that government is more representative of Silicon Valley’s diversity and reflects the will of residents.

SVCF is also committed to ensuring that the most underrepresented communities can benefit from new systems for civic participation. We have learned that informed and empowered voters do not simply turn up when it is time to vote but rather are continuously engaged in local issues. For this reason, we will invest in community-led organizations to raise levels of engagement among their constituents throughout the election cycle and not simply in the weeks before the election. In particular, SVCF is interested in programs that incorporate integrated voter engagement (IVE) strategies with a proven history of success. Such strategies have successfully shown that community-led engagement, emphasizing continuous peer-to-peer contact and educational opportunities, can help raise voter engagement and build leadership in historically underrepresented communities.\(^8\) SVCF is also committed to ensuring that new voters, both youth and recent immigrants, can benefit from civic education programs which feature real opportunities to learn about how government works, and how they may be able to use their power to shape it. SVCF wants to ensure that well tested models are employed in local districts and through after school opportunities. As such, this RFP will support districts and offices to trial new programs and design curriculum incorporating project-based learning for students to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to play active roles in the civic life of their communities.


Program Goal

There are 125 county, city, school and special district offices in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. At the institutional level, the anticipated impact of this grantmaking strategy is for at least 20 percent of these offices to commit to open government practices and engage 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 impact 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.

This is the second year of the **Promoting Civic Participation Through Open Government strategy** for SVCF. Therefore, we are open to seeing what works and what does not, with the ultimate goal of determining 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—with the power to make our economy grow and local communities thrive.

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 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 that do 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 both well-tested models that can be scaled up or expanded regionally while maintaining local relevance, and new pilots 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/grants.
   - Research brief on Promoting Civic Participation through Open Government.
   - This RFP – Promoting Civic Participation through Open Government.

2) Participate in the information session on October 29 at 11 a.m. PST. This is highly encouraged for those interested in responding to this RFP. Because all grant applications are submitted online, this session provides an overview of SVCF’s online application system, Apply SVCF. Any additional questions can be directed to SVCF’s Civic Participation Program Officer Jack Mahoney at jmahoney@siliconvalleycf.org.

   Additionally, the information session will provide an opportunity for applicants to review in more depth the RFP’s content and ask questions. Register for the session.

3) Submit grant application, including required attachments, through our online application system, Apply SVCF, beginning October 22, 2018. Applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. PST November 30, 2018. A guide to the online application system can be found here.

   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.
Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals for grants should include a narrative that responds to the questions found on Apply SVCF. 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 regarding 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, 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 leading to greater impact.
- Ability to contribute content-area knowledge to the field.

Awards

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 for this strategy will help staff to 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 2019.

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 research-based 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