request for proposals

Advancing Financial Stability by Improving Access to Public Benefits
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Introduction

Silicon Valley is a region of stark economic contrasts. While great wealth is created here, many residents struggle to make ends meet. Although the Silicon Valley economy has recovered overall, many residents still feel the effects of jobs or assets lost in the Great Recession a decade ago, and many are left out of the current technology boom. Skyrocketing housing costs are putting even more strain on individuals and families living on the margin.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation advances innovative philanthropic solutions to the most challenging problems in Silicon Valley. One of these challenges is improving how low-income individuals and families obtain and access public benefits and supports. This challenge is addressed through SVCF’s Advancing Financial Stability by Improving Access to Public Benefits 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/financialstability.

The advancing financial stability grantmaking program will make strategic investments in two sub-strategies that focus on:

1) Improving access for low-income individuals and families to public benefits programs for which they are eligible, including CalFresh, CalWORKs, Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants and Medi-Cal (see appendix for descriptions of these programs).

2) Connecting individuals and families to free tax preparation services to help them save on tax preparation costs and ensure they claim all tax credits and deductions for which they are eligible. Examples include the Federal and State Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child and Child Care Tax Credit.

This request for proposals, or RFP, focuses specifically on improving access to public benefits programs. 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 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

The poverty rates in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties in 2015 were 8.5 percent and 8.2 percent, respectively. This is more than a 2.5 percentage point increase in San Mateo County from 2007.¹ If the high costs of housing were factored into the poverty calculation, the numbers of households in poverty in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties would actually be 17 percent and 18 percent, respectively.² In other words, once housing costs are taken into account, nearly one in five residents in Silicon Valley is coping with significant economic hardship. Meanwhile, low-income households have seen the slowest recovery to their incomes from the Great Recession. In 2014, residents with incomes at the 20th percentile saw virtually no increase in their income from the 2009 level after adjusting for inflation.³

Given this economic reality, it is more important than ever that efforts are made to boost income conditions for low-income households. SVCF believes we can make a significant, positive difference for families and local economies by improving how low-income individuals and families access and obtain public benefits and support. Public benefits are provided through an array of funding structures and agencies. Ultimately, policy changes may be required to improve and better integrate public benefit programs through streamlining, aligned eligibility, application, verification and renewal procedures.

Program Goal

This sub-strategy seeks to increase the number of low-income individuals and families participating in public benefit programs. The benefits provided by these programs can substantially improve the stability of families who are living on the margin. Unfortunately, many of these useful programs are severely underutilized for a variety of reasons, including a lack of information about the programs themselves and how to enroll, lengthy enrollment forms and processes, and mandatory in-person interviews during work hours. Therefore, in evaluating proposals, SVCF will give special consideration to efforts to streamline and increase enrollment in a particular benefit program or across multiple benefit programs through innovative and creative uses of technology.

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³ Ibid.
Improving outreach to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations is another important part of this sub-strategy. The goal is to make it easier for people to apply for and stay enrolled in benefits they are entitled to receive. As such, we will consider culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach efforts, which might involve nontraditional venues such as community-based organizations, community colleges, elementary schools, child care centers and retail stores.

We strongly encourage applicant organizations to consider partnering on proposals, given the limited amount of funding available. If a collaborative activity or project is proposed, applicants should indicate the purpose of the collaborative, how it is expected to enhance services for clients and how the collaborative would operate, be governed and share resources. One lead agency should be identified in the proposal, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be signed by each of the collaborating agencies.

Lastly, to ensure that available resources are being maximized, SVCF may also consider investments in research to determine unidentified needs and best practices to meet those needs. In addition, SVCF will consider investing in information campaigns with the goal of increasing participation in public benefit programs.

**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.

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**Key Dates**

- **November 13, 2017:** Application process opens
- **November 16, 2017:** RFP informational webinar (register at siliconvalleycf.org/calendar)
- **December 15, 2017, 11:59 p.m.:** Proposal submission deadline
- **February 2018:** Announcement of grant awards
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/financialstability

- Research brief on Advancing Financial Stability by Improving Access to Public Benefits
- This RFP – Advancing Financial Stability by Improving Access to Public Benefits

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.
Appendix

**CalFresh** - This is a food program for low-income individuals and families. Participants receive a debit card, which is accepted in most grocery stores for the purchase of food.

**CalWORKs** - This is a combined federal and state program that pays cash to low-income households with the goal of moving individuals from welfare to work.

**Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants** – This is a California program that gives money to certain legal immigrants who are aged, blind or disabled and have been denied Supplemental Security Income benefits because of their immigration status.

**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program** – This is a program to aid low-income households that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy.

**Medi-Cal** – This is a program that offers free or low-cost health coverage for children and adults with limited income and resources. It covers low-income adults, families with children, seniors, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, children in foster care and former foster youth up to age 26.

**National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs** - These programs are federally assisted meal programs that operate in public and nonprofit private schools and child care institutions. They provide nutritionally balanced meals to children as part of their regular school day.

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children** – This is a program that safeguards the health of low-income women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care.

**Supplemental Security Income** – This is a program to pay cash to low-income individuals over 65 years of age or under 65 if the individual is blind or disabled.
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](http://www.siliconvalleycf.org).

More Information

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

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