request for proposals

Promoting Civic Participation Through Open Government
Introduction

Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) addresses our community’s most challenging problems. Despite the area’s great wealth, residents are challenged by so much – lack of affordable housing, financial instability, the precarious safety and insecurity of immigrants and persistent gaps in student achievement. Through its discretionary grantmaking, the community foundation addresses these and other issues, including support for people to engage in civic affairs and the public decisions that directly affect their lives.

SVCF recognizes that to achieve meaningful progress on these issues, collaboration is critical. By issuing requests for proposals (RFP), we hope to solicit the best ideas from nonprofits, public agencies, research institutions and community organizations serving San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and to partner together on solutions. The focus of this RFP is on promoting civic participation through open government. We invite you to apply.

Grant Application Deadline

The application process will open on September 9, 2019.

Grant applications must be submitted through our online application system. Apply SVCF, by 11:59 p.m. (PST) on Friday, October 4, 2019.

The Problem

A healthy democracy is dependent upon all community members' being able to participate in the public policy process and exercise influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Yet studies have shown that those with more time, money and connections 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 incomes, and between older and younger generations.1 These underrepresented groups are more likely to experience barriers that prevent them from building and exercising their political power, such as having fewer places to vote and elected officials who are more responsive to donors who tend to be wealthy and white.2 The consequences of these issues are serious and far-reaching, resulting in a democracy that does not represent all of California’s diverse voices and perspectives.

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

Recent state and local government reforms as well as community-based strategies have the potential to increase civic participation in the region, particularly among underrepresented groups. San Mateo and Santa Clara counties are both leading the way in the implementation of the Voter’s Choice Act (VCA), which aims to engage residents in the design of election plans and provide voters more opportunities to cast their ballots. Successful implementation of the VCA is especially critical now as the 2020 election approaches and residents are expected to vote on many critical issues related to education, housing, transportation and others. At the same time, community-based organizations have been successful at engaging their residents through consistent, issue-centered voter education and outreach that is led by community members.3

Local reforms have also included efforts to create more open government, prioritizing transparency and accountability for officials and supporting new models of public participation that engage diverse groups. Several cities are diversifying the membership of appointed boards and commissions by providing leadership training for immigrants, youth and people of color. Other cities have also partnered with local organizations to pilot new online and offline models of engagement that go beyond traditional public meetings and allow for greater and more diverse input in local decision-making.

Program Goal

SVCF believes that all residents of Silicon Valley should have the power to engage in civic affairs and the public decisions that directly affect their lives. Our goal is to inspire greater civic participation throughout the region and to ensure our democracy represents the voices and perspectives of all people. SVCF has chosen to focus this grant opportunity on the following:

1. **Supporting voter engagement projects** that reach underrepresented communities in advance of elections and educate infrequent or first-time voters about issues on the ballot as well as their own voting rights.

2. **Increasing civic education opportunities** for youth and recent immigrants so that they understand how government works and can become effective advocates around issues that impact their communities.

3. **Creating new models of engagement** which make it easier for underrepresented communities to engage in civic life and influence policy.

Projects that support recent voter and redistricting reforms to ensure fair representation at the local level will also be considered for funding. 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.

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Application Process

1) **Review reference materials**, including SVCF’s research brief on Promoting Civic Participation Through Open Government. These may be found at [siliconvalleycf.org/grants](siliconvalleycf.org/grants)

2) **Participate in the information session.** This is highly encouraged for those interested in responding to this RFP. Because all grant applications are submitted online, these sessions provide an overview of SVCF’s online application system, **Apply SVCF**.

Additionally, the information sessions will provide an opportunity for applicants to review the RFP in more depth and ask questions. Sessions will be held at the following places and times:

- **Monday, September 16 at 11 a.m.** Online only. Register for the session.
- **Friday, September 20 at 11 a.m.** Sobrato Center for Nonprofits, Cupertino B Conference Room, 1400 Parkmoor Dr, San Jose, CA. Register for the session.
- **Thursday, September 26 at 2 p.m.** Sobrato Center for Nonprofits, Pacific Conference Room, 330 Twin Dolphin Drive, Redwood City, CA. Register for the session.

3) **Submit grant application**, including required attachments, through our online application system, **Apply SVCF**, beginning September 9, 2019. **Applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. (PST) Friday, October 4, 2019.** A guide to the online application system can be found [here](siliconvalleycf.org/grants).

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

Proposal Eligibility Criteria

- Organizations serving 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 can.
- 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.

- 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.

**Proposal Evaluation Criteria**

SVCF awards grants on a competitive basis. Successful proposals will need to meet the minimum eligibility criteria and provide a clear and compelling narrative about how the proposed project will advance SVCF’s program goals. Proposals will also be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Clarity of project description and strategies/activities to be implemented to reach desired outcomes.
- Relevant and measurable outcomes and indicators of success.
- Strategies that are based on well-tested models and can be scaled or expanded regionally, while maintaining local relevance.
- Achievable timeline (12 months) that corresponds to the key activities.
- Organizational capacity to implement project including: staffing, leadership, operational and fiscal management.
- Established track record of work related to proposed project or likelihood of success with a new project.
- Ability to leverage financial, human and technical resources from other partners leading to greater impact.
- Ability to contribute successes and lessons learned with the field.

**Awards**

Up to $100,000 will be awarded to nonprofit organizations, research institutions and local governments. 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 review process.

**Applicants will be informed of grant decisions in December 2019.**

**Evaluation, Monitoring and Grantee Learning Activities**

Grantees will be expected to meet SVCF’s reporting and evaluation requirements as well as be willing and available to talk with SVCF staff and donor advisors if requested. Grantees will also be asked to participate in periodic meetings to share information on project successes, challenges and lessons learned to further the overall program goals of this RFP.

Thank you very much for your interest in responding to this RFP and in joining us in promoting civic participation through open government. 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 siliconvalleycf.org.

More Information

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

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