request for proposals

San José Voter Engagement 2020 Initiative
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 is delighted to be partnering with the City of San José on a special grantmaking opportunity to increase voter engagement in the 2020 election. Through this special grantmaking opportunity, grants of up to $50,000 will be provided to organizations for projects that engage voters innovatively and effectively. By issuing this request for proposals (RFP), we hope to solicit the best ideas from nonprofits, public agencies, research institutions and community organizations serving the City of San José.

We invite you to apply.

Grant Application Deadline

The application process will open on October 17, 2019.

Grant applications must be submitted through our online application system. Apply SVCF, by 11:59 p.m. (PST) on Friday, November 8, 2019.

The Problem

Voting is the most fundamental element of participatory democracy, yet historically, turnout figures have been very uneven across communities. For example, in 2018, while turnout in Santa Clara County overall was over 70 percent, many parts of San Jose reported turnout near or below 50 percent, while other San Jose precincts were over 80 percent.¹ These polling results mirror statewide ones which show that voters tend to be whiter, wealthier and older than California’s general population. Barriers that keep low-income people and people of color from voting, such as longer lines at the polls,² higher vote-by-mail ballot rejection rates,³ and limited attention from political campaigns⁴ are well

¹https://results.enr.clarityelections.com/CA/Santa_Clara/92418/Web02.222611/#/turnout
This is problematic, as major offices will be elected at all levels of government in 2020, and if these patterns hold true in San Jose, then the city’s policies will not reflect the community’s diversity of perspectives.

The Opportunity

There are many opportunities for voter engagement in San Jose, including the 2020 election, recent state and local government reforms as well as community-based organizing strategies to increase voter turnout, particularly among underrepresented groups. Santa Clara County is leading the way in implementation of the Voter’s Choice Act (VCA), which aims to engage residents in the design of election plans and allow voters to cast their ballots on different days and in different ways. Successful implementation of the VCA is especially critical now as the 2020 election approaches and residents will vote on many critical issues related to education, housing, transportation and others. Additionally, recent philanthropic investments in nonpartisan voter engagement in underrepresented communities across the United States have led to new successful strategies for reaching infrequent voters through online and in-person outreach led by trusted messengers.5

Program Goal

SVCF and the City of San José believe that all residents should have the power to engage in elections and have a voice in their government. Our goal is to inspire greater civic participation and ensure our democracy represents all voices and perspectives. SVCF has chosen to focus this grant opportunity on the following:

1. **Supporting community education** programs for underrepresented voters in San Jose to learn more about the voting process, issues on the ballot and their rights at the polls.

2. **Organizing nonpartisan outreach** programs to remind voters to cast a ballot and of the importance of weighing in on local issues.

The objective of this RFP is to support voter engagement primarily targeted in City precincts with low voter turnout. In doing so, it is critical that any grants offered through this RFP strictly avoid any partisan activity or advocacy on behalf of any candidate or issue on the ballot. Project descriptions will be reviewed to ensure that actual or perceived conflicts of interest are actively avoided. Grantees shall not expend any portion of the grant award for political advocacy efforts, whether for or against a political candidate, ballot measure or bill. Furthermore, grantees shall not expend any portion of the grant award to inhibit or promote religion or convey a religious message. By using an RFP approach, SVCF aims to solicit the best thinking of nonprofit service providers, research institutions and other entities serving San Jose.

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

2) Participate in the information session. This is highly encouraged for those 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. Register for an information session:

- **Thursday, October 17 at 1 p.m.** – online only – Register here.
- **Wednesday, October 23 at 10 a.m.** – Sobrato Center for Nonprofits, Campbell Room, 1400 Parkmoor Ave., San Jose – Register here.
- **Monday, October 28 at 11:30 a.m.** – Mexican Heritage Plaza, Classroom 1, 1700 Alum Rock Ave., San Jose – Register here.

3) Submit grant application, including required attachments, through our online application system, apply SVCF, beginning **October 17, 2019.** Applications must be submitted by **11:59 p.m. (PST) Friday, November 8, 2019.** A guide to the online application system can be found [here](#).

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 Jose. Organizations headquartered outside the City of San José may apply but should demonstrate significant service to the City 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 the field. Proposals should clearly identify where activities will take place within San Jose. 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 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.
- Experience in providing services and/or conducting outreach in targeted precincts.

Awards

Up to $50,000 will be awarded to nonprofit organizations in San Jose for outreach grants for the 2020 election cycle, with some exceptions for larger grants or collaborations of groups. Applicants should indicate if they are applying for funding for the March election, November election or both. Applicants should also 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

SVCF staff review all proposals; those recommended for funding must be approved by 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.

Grantees may be invited to participate in convenings and/or technical assistance opportunities to enhance voter engagement efforts. Grantees may be also invited to collaborate in research projects that add to the body of knowledge about voter engagement, particularly in low turnout communities.

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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