



Request for Proposals

Promoting Greater Civic Participation through Open Government Voter Education and Outreach Small Grants Program

Introduction

For representative democracy to be successful, the electorate must be broadly representative of the population at large. Unfortunately, election turnout has been falling in recent years and this decline has exposed wide gaps in voter turnout between different communities. Older, whiter and wealthier Californians have been significantly more likely than others to vote in recent elections, and this is particularly true in non-Presidential elections. However, a series of recent legislative changes in California were passed with the specific intention to raise participation rates, and in light of these changes there now is the potential to change the makeup of the electorate and raise the voices of historically underrepresented communities.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation advances innovative philanthropic solutions to the most challenging problems in our region. One of these challenges is declining rates of civic participation, and our *Promoting Civic Participation Through Open Government* grantmaking strategy represents SVCF's commitment to improving democratic processes in Silicon Valley by reforming how residents engage with and shape government. To this end, we are announcing **a small grants program of \$150,000 to support voter education and outreach efforts. SVCF will award grants of up to \$12,000 to nonprofit organizations working to engage underrepresented communities in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties in the November 2018 election.**

Grant Application Deadline

The application process will open on **August 14, 2018.**

Grant applications must be submitted through our online application system, Apply SVCF, by **11:59 p.m. PST on Friday, August 24, 2018.**

Problem Statement

Turnout for elections in California has been dropping consistently in the last several decades, and the decline has been especially notable in midterm elections such as the 2018 election. Turnout reached a historic low in 2014, and a Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)¹ analysis noted that turnout had fallen despite registration remaining high, and that California's turnout rate had declined relative to other states. In that year, which was also the most recent midterm election, turnout among underrepresented communities reached historic lows; only 8.2% of 18 to 24 year old voters turned out to vote in the 2014

¹ http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_216EMR.pdf

general election, while well over 50% of seniors voted²; 28% of Latinos and 36% of Asian-Americans turned out in the election, compared with nearly 50% of whites.

As the PPIC analysis noted, the gaps are even more substantial in years when there is no presidential election, as will be the case this November. A recent survey showed that for the 2018 election over 60% of likely voters in California were white while less than 40% of Californians are³, in contrast less than 20% of likely voters are Latino while Latinos are now the largest demographic group in California at over 40%. If the electorate falls along those lines, the results of the election are significantly less likely to fully and accurately reflect the views of Californians.

While there are challenging historical trends, there are also several opportunities recently created by legislative changes which should make voting easier for underrepresented communities. In the past two years, California has introduced several new reforms to the voting system including:

- SB 450 or the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) which will shift California to an election administration model with vote-by-mail and vote center options. The VCA is currently in a pilot phase in five California counties, including San Mateo County.
- AB 918 or the California Voting for All Act which raises the language access requirements for counties, ensuring that voters will have more chances to request election materials in languages other than English.
- Same-day registration which will allow voters to register and vote on the same day.

These changes, together with new technology-based tools to help reach voters, should raise turnout rates. However, the reforms have all come quickly together, raising the need for voters to learn about the changes to the voting process. While election administrators are working to educate the electorate on these changes, nonprofits can play a significant role in supporting those changes and easing the transition for their communities.

Grant Opportunity

SVCF will award a total of \$150,000 to organizations conducting voter education and outreach in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties for the November 2018 election. Grant awards under this program will be for a maximum of \$12,000. Grant applications should include specific target populations and also include plans to help voters learn about recent reforms. Examples of possible activities could include:

- Voter education events for underrepresented demographics to learn more about the voting process such as who is eligible to vote, how to vote by mail and how to request election materials in specific languages.
- Nonpartisan opportunities for communities to come together and learn about what offices and issues are on the November ballot.

²<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b8c7ce15d5dbf599fb46ab/t/57fffc482e69cfe207ed89e4/1476394059592/UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf>

³ <http://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-likely-voters/>

- Technology-based outreach to remind voters when to vote or learn more about issues on the ballot.

Civic participation, which includes voter engagement, is a new area of investment for SVCF. Therefore, we are open to seeing what works and what does not work, with the ultimate goal of determining how the efforts that we fund can be extended, strengthened and sustained in subsequent election cycles.

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, 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 voter education and outreach 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 in advance of the November 2018 election. SVCF is interested in supporting organizations that are open to learning and sharing successful voter education and outreach strategies. 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.
- Demonstrate clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges created by recent voting reforms in California.
- Benefit from collaborative work.
- 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.

- Research brief on [Promoting Civic Participation through Open Government](#).

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, this session provides an overview of SVCF's online application system, [Apply SVCF](#).

Additionally, the information session will provide an opportunity for applicants to review in the RFP's content in detail and ask questions. The information session will be held on **August 14, 2018 at 11 a.m.** To register for the session please visit [our website](#).

3) Submit grant application, including required attachments, through our online application system, Apply SVCF, beginning **August 14, 2018**. Applications must be submitted by **11:59 p.m. PST Friday, August 24, 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 to scale beyond this election.
- Clarity of project description and project activities regarding steps to be taken to achieve desired outcomes.
- Direct link to recent legislative changes where applicable.
- Achievable timeline (two months) that corresponds to the key activities.
- 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

Grant awards will be up to \$12,000. 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

Staff will 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 early September 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 invited to participate in a post-election meeting 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. **Proposals accepted August 14, 2018 through August 24, 2018.**