

Integrated Voter Engagement

A Proven Model to Increase Civic Engagement

Funder Recommendations

Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) is a fertile field for funders that can help strengthen grantmaking strategies, regardless of issue area, constituency, or geographic focus. Funders can improve their own success and build capacity for their grantees by following some general principles drawn from the case study research:

1

Fund IVE year round, every year. Effective IVE is a year-round effort, even in non-election years. Provide funding as early in election cycles as possible, and for more than one year whenever possible. Balance election year funding with non-election year funding. The best voter engagement capacity is built by two kinds of investments: one sustains a threshold level of staff and capacity, such as voter lists and precinct networks, so that assets don't need to be rebuilt from scratch for each election; the second allows groups to 'ramp up' and expand in order to tackle voter registration and outreach campaigns. Consider funding both kinds of capacity, both kinds of investments.

2

Provide general support. The most effective IVE organizations practice all of the elements of IVE – voter registration, education, Get-Out-The-Vote, voter protection, advocacy and policy change, and leadership development. Make sure your grant agreements and communications encourage, rather than discourage, IVE voter engagement. Recognize that nonprofits often have more difficulty raising funds for certain aspects of IVE (voter registration, for instance), than for others, and, if not making general support grants, target your funds to support those hard to fund areas if you can.

3

Encourage your grantees to do all civic engagement activities allowable under the law. 501(c) 3 nonprofits can take positions on ballot initiatives. They can lobby government bodies within certain limitations. They can educate their members on candidates' positions on the issues. Don't place more restrictions on your grantees than the law does. When appropriate, encourage your grantees to file for a 501(h) election that will permit them to do more lobbying under the law. The Funders' Committee on Civic Participation has resources for more information on activities permissible for 501(c) 3 nonprofits at www.funderscommittee.org.

4

Support the use of new technology by your grantees. Through the development of new technology, IVE groups are able to enhance the effectiveness of their voter lists, communication methods, research, training, and targeting. These new tools allow IVE groups to be more strategic and to target their outreach more efficiently. However, the technology can be expensive. Funders can provide support for technology upgrades, special training and subscriptions to large data providers, as well as cover the costs of grantees to participate in partnerships and coalitions.

5 Partner with your grantees in evaluation efforts. Support groups to assess their effectiveness, make real-time corrections when necessary, and share what worked and what didn't. Where possible, funders should support independent third-party research and evaluation, as it is often the best way to verify results, show areas for improvement, and ensure that resources are well-allocated and money is well-spent. Urge grantees to design their evaluation plans in the early phase of their activities and campaigns, rather than at the end. Accountability for results and for effective spending and stewardship of resources is best viewed as a partnership between grantees and funders. Empirical evaluation, combined with qualitative assessment, is a valuable learning tool for both grantees and their funders.

6 Support IVE efforts as they increase in scale. Reaching scale means achieving cost efficiencies and creating more opportunities to retain the expertise needed to be successful in the field. One way to scale up is for individual groups to reach more potential voters, become more effective, and acquire more sophisticated levels of skill and technology. Another way to scale up is through the coordination of individual groups at the local, statewide, and national levels. Coordinating and aggregating efforts – through tables, coalitions, or other structures – when done well – permits effective division of labor and territory among participating groups. It also allows groups to share specialized skills, technology and best practices.

LEGAL NOTES

FCCP represents a broad array of funders in the nonpartisan civic engagement funding community, including private foundations, public charities, and individual donors. These various legal entities are governed by a wide variety of legal structures and constraints, each with different capacity for supporting particular kinds of nonpartisan voter engagement work. These case studies describe a range of efforts, some of which may be inappropriate for certain funders, or may require special attention in grant agreements and work plans. We review some of these concerns in the legal notes found on the back of each case study. As always, we suggest that funders interested in supporting this work, particularly private foundations that may face greater IRS restrictions, consult your tax advisors or legal counsel and consider making general support grants as the most flexible and effective means of funding.

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FCCP is a resource for the philanthropic community on a broad range of civic participation issues. It serves as a vehicle for identifying trends, sharing best practices, engaging strategic discussions, strengthening relationships and providing and identifying resources for the field. FCCP is a special project of Public Interest Projects.

FUNDERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

80 Broad Street, Suite 1600, New York, NY 10004 | P: 646.823.2410 | www.funderscommittee.org