

INNOVATIONS IN VOTER EDUCATION

Companion Brief for Election Administrators

Written by Catherine Hazelton
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	<u>Executive Summary</u>
4	<u>Summary of Voter Education Funds</u>
6	<u>Why Election Officials Should Consider Sponsoring a Community Grants Program</u>
9	<u>How to Establish and Participate in a Community Grants Program</u>
13	<u>Providing an App or Data Tracking</u>
16	<u>How to Secure Funding and Political Support</u>
18	<u>Final Note</u>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, San Mateo and Yolo County election offices implemented innovative grantmaking programs to educate voters about new voting practices under the California Voter's Choice Act. Harnessing county and private philanthropic funding, the counties partnered with community foundations to make short-term grants to community-based organizations.



Image credit: Youth Community Service

In short, the community grants programs worked. **With minimal investment, counties educated more voters and saw increased civic participation, particularly among under-represented communities.** Grantees' culturally competent approaches clearly connected with voters, demonstrating that community-based outreach is an efficient and effective model that deserves replication. This ready-to-use model is outlined here with recommendations for elections officials interested in sponsoring similar programs. A second companion guide with recommendations for philanthropic funders can be accessed [here](#).

For a **full analysis** of the grantmaking programs—including details about their structure and implementation, the role of county election offices, grantee activities, key impacts, and challenges—please see *INNOVATIONS IN VOTER EDUCATION: How Philanthropy Joined with San Mateo and Yolo Counties to Support Local Nonprofits and Ramp Up Election Outreach*.

SUMMARY OF VOTER EDUCATION FUNDS

The grant programs supported voter education and engagement in advance of both the primary and general elections in 2024. In both San Mateo and Yolo Counties, election officials designated funding to be redistributed to nonprofit organizations serving their communities. The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund (Haas Jr.) provided additional funding in both counties, and Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) contributed funds to support the San Mateo County effort. While election officials provided funding, critical information, and assistance as needed, the respective grants programs were fully administered by Silicon Valley Community Foundation and Yolo Community Foundation (YCF). Grantees—including direct service providers, media producers, and civic engagement organizations—used grants ranging from \$3,500-\$22,362 apiece to produce and distribute voter education materials, engage voters at community events, and conduct direct voter contact. The Yolo County program, first piloted in 2024, built upon the San Mateo County effort, which first launched in 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over \$529,000 in grants** were awarded across both counties.
- **28 community organizations participated:** 19 in San Mateo County and 9 in Yolo County.
- **Voter outreach prioritized equity and inclusion**, primarily reaching youth, non-English speakers, under-represented communities of color, and people facing food insecurity.
- Grantees **contacted more than 135,000 individuals** through canvassing, phone banking, outreach activities, and written communications.
- Grantees created unique content and generated at least **200,000 targeted media impressions**.

KEY OUTCOMES

- **Grantees reached large volumes of voters**, primarily from communities with low voter turnout rates.
- The grants program contributed to **higher-than-expected voter participation in targeted communities**.
- Through positive personal interactions, event attendance, and social media engagement, **voters demonstrated interest** in grantees' efforts.
- Grantee strategies and materials **added value to the counties' outreach efforts**, demonstrating the grantee organizations' cultural competence, relationships, and creativity.
- Election officials and nonprofits **established lasting collaborations** and increased their respective outreach capacities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS

- **Consider replicating this efficient, effective approach** in other California counties.
- **Explore opportunities for sustained funding**, ideally from the state government, to scale the model statewide.
- **Partner with a community foundation** or other organization that can administer the grants and coordinate with grantees. Focus your own role on providing resources, accurate information, and guidance.
- Ensure funding is allocated and grants are approved **at least three to four months before an election** to allow for adequate planning and collaboration.
- **Provide clear guidance to grantees** and streamlined approval of materials in order to reduce confusion and delays.

CONCLUSION

By leveraging trusted messengers, culturally relevant outreach, and existing community networks, the novel funding programs in Yolo and San Mateo counties **amplified the reach and impact of county election efforts while remaining cost-effective and legally compliant**.

WHY ELECTION OFFICIALS SHOULD CONSIDER SPONSORING A COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

Grants programs can achieve the goals and mandates of elections offices

- Elections officials are the liaisons to democracy, responsible for providing all citizens access to the ballot. Programs that help potential voters engage in their democracy **align with the core mission and values of election offices.**
- **Counties participating in the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) are required to inform voters about the new voting practices.** While the law mandates county-sponsored community meetings to inform the electorate, these have largely proven to be sparsely attended and ineffective. Participants in the community grants programs have found far greater success reaching voters through existing events sponsored by their organizations and conducting direct outreach.
- Counties participating in the VCA must contact all of their voters at least twice before each election. **Under Senate Bill 1450, passed in 2024, counties have more flexibility to conduct this voter outreach, including via a community grants program.** After a county conducts six statewide elections under the VCA model, election officials may reduce the number of direct voter contacts to once before each election if they use at least half of their remaining outreach funds on additional, targeted outreach to historically underrepresented voters.¹ Redirecting county outreach dollars to community-based organizations through a grants program like those piloted in San Mateo and Yolo counties could be an **efficient and effective way to meet the legal requirements of the VCA to educate underrepresented voters.**
- **Participants recommend the approach.** Jack Mahoney of Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) says, "This partnership between SVCF and the San Mateo County Department of Elections helped both of our institutions more effectively serve San Mateo County residents. We strongly recommend others adopt this model to deepen trust across sectors and improve voter education and participation in local elections."

"When you don't go where the voters are, you overlook one of the most important avenues of engagement. We want to use trusted messengers to go where the people are. You don't have to come to us, we go to you."

Mark Church
Chief Elections Officer
San Mateo County

¹ SB-1450 Elections. (2023-2024). California Legislative Information. Retrieved July 1, 2025, from https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB1450.

- Providing community-based organizations with grants **establishes new partnerships, builds trust, and deepens opportunities for long-standing collaboration.** One grantee said, “We are very keen on ... working with the county. Our mission is well aligned. They also work with vulnerable populations.” Another grantee was pleased to learn while working with election officials, “We really do want the same thing.”
- Elections offices must employ a variety of strategies to prepare their electorates, and sponsoring a grants program can be a key tool in any election outreach plan. Yolo County Chief Elections Officer Jesse Salinas says, “**This is not the only solution but an important first step** in an ongoing community outreach journey that can enable us to better connect with historically low-propensity voters.”

Both election administrators and voters benefit

- **The grants programs were efficient, with grantees able to reach many more voters than county staff could, and at a lower cost to the county.** One election official said that grantees were able to reach a larger population than the county could have, providing additional staffing the county didn't have. He further said the amount of work grantees conducted exceeded the cost of the program and the minimal time staff spent supporting it. The program “was mostly an asset to us and we didn't have to do too much monitoring.” San Mateo County Assistant Chief Elections Officer Jim Irizarry said, “It's a net positive because you have more organizations and people doing the work. It's an indisputable fact that when people are working together toward similar goals, it makes your effort that much more effective. There's synergy, and a multiplier effect.”
- **The grants programs were also effective.** “It's the actual personal contact that gets results,” Jim Irizarry said, a fact supported by myriad academic studies of what works to mobilize and engage voters. Indeed, several data points from San Mateo and Yolo counties suggest that as a result of the grants programs, voter turnout was up and voters were engaged in grantees' outreach efforts. See our [full report](#) to review impact data and findings.
- One county official said the grants program “**helped us reach groups of people who wouldn't have been registered** or didn't know about the election.” The official added, “We can't do that, but these organizations can and are willing to go out there and do the work.”
- Person-to-person outreach can better **help voters understand the nuance of elections policies and practices.** For example, one grantee noted, “The most significant thing we observed was the need to increase awareness of conditional [voter registration].”²
- In addition to increasing turnout, the programs educated voters about the process and the decisions they would face when completing their ballots. Irizarry said, “This is not just about increasing the number of votes; **it's about creating informed voters.**”

“Voters need to see why it's important to vote, and they connect the dots differently when it comes from a trusted messenger.”

Jesse Salinas
Chief Elections Officer
Yolo County

² Conditional voter registration allows eligible Californians who have not registered to vote at least 14 days before an election to do so at the county elections office, or any polling place or voter center. <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/same-day-reg>

- **Nonprofit partners can produce highly creative content** that is different in style and tone from materials created by county offices. It is often catchy, reflects modern trends, and can be fun and engaging for voters. Because some of their content is targeted to very specific demographics, and is often in languages other than English, **grantees can reach new and different audiences.**
- **Counties can improve or diversify their own content** based on grantee-designed products. Elections offices can share grantee-created materials in the current cycle—such as by reposting it on social media—or use the materials as inspiration for their own content in future cycles.
- Counties can **learn from grantees**, including what types of questions voters have and which types of materials are resonating. Additionally, grantees could be asked to report information that helps election officials update their voter rolls, such as inaccessible buildings, wrong addresses, and language preferences.
- Investing in community-led organizing helps counties demonstrate their commitment to voters and diverse communities. Such programs can **boost public perceptions**, elevate the profile of an elections office, improve community relations, and generate recognition of staff.



Image credit: One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative

HOW TO ESTABLISH AND PARTICIPATE IN A COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

Getting Started

- **Learn more about the San Mateo and Yolo County community grants programs** by reading our [full report](#) detailing those efforts. It might also be helpful to talk with staff at the participating elections offices and foundations. For additional study, consider reviewing a similar program in [King County, Washington](#) with the Seattle Foundation.
- **Set clear goals** for what you want to achieve, including identifying targeted voter populations.
- **Secure funding for the grants program**, potentially from both public sector budgets and private funding sources such as a philanthropic foundation. This topic is discussed further on pages 16–17.
- **Partner with an organization that can administer the grants**, coordinate with grantees, and gather reports from grantees. A [local community foundation](#) may be an ideal choice. While we refer to this organization as a county’s “foundation partner,” nonprofits, and organizations that fiscally sponsor non-profits and community projects could also make good partners.
- **Plan well in advance** of the election cycle. You will need time to secure funding, engage a foundation partner, and establish goals and ground rules. We recommend completing these steps at least seven months prior to a statewide primary election. Your foundation partner will also need time to recruit community organizations, consider applications, and help grantees plan their campaigns. See the recommended timeline in our [full report](#).
- Work with your foundation partner to **establish clear lines of communication and expectations**. Identify who will make which decisions, who are the lead contacts at each institution, and how best to communicate. Ensure key collaborators have clarity on ground rules such as whether grantee materials will require county approval and how to obtain it.

Communicating with grantees

- Though your foundation partner may hold the primary responsibility for communicating with grantees, elections offices will also want to **establish mutually beneficial, collaborative relationships with grant recipients**. Ideally, many of these initial relationships will become long-term, trusted partnerships.
- It takes time to develop relationships with the nonprofit partners; start early and **expect to build on the relationships over multiple cycles**. Irizarry reflects: “We didn’t have a mechanism to work directly with CBOs. We had their input but had never worked with them. To start a process that’s even more collaborative, you have to walk before you run. It’s an evolutionary process.”
- Ensure your staff has a clear sense of the county’s role in the project. **Set expectations for staff time and responsibilities**.



Image credit: Casa Circulo Cultural & Peninsula 360 Press

- **Provide access to county staff** so grantees can get answers and approval quickly and ensure they are in compliance. Ensure they know whom to contact and that staff are prepared to **provide quick responses**, ideally within 24 hours.
- Though San Mateo and Yolo County **elections staff report the grants programs required very little of their time**, the time they spent was consistently valued by grantees. One said, “We’ve been appreciative of working with the county. Every time you ask them a question, they respond. Turnaround times were good, usually within one day.”
- Coordinate with your foundation partner on **which data they should collect from grantees and what information would be useful for your own outreach and learning**. Grantees may be able to collect data on whom they contact and how, as well as where they disseminate materials and information. They also should have basic data about the reach of any media they post. Additionally, after the election, grantees may have valuable information on the accuracy of the voter roll contact information that they can share with the elections office.
- Explore how you can **collaborate with groups to collect more sophisticated information about voters**, such as why they aren’t turning out or what motivates them. Starting a few months before canvassers will be in the field, consider working with grantees to identify one or more survey questions. Provide a mechanism for grantees to provide data and other information, such as whom they reached and feedback from voters.
- Partnerships with grantees are a great foundation for longer-term, ongoing collaboration. You may want to **invite some or all grantees to join your county LAAC, VAAC, or VEOAC**.
- Election officials from San Mateo and Yolo Counties lauded the grantees as very insightful and said their contributions were an asset to the counties. It is important to make space for grantees to share their perspectives. As election administrators know, different communities perceive voting differently because of their historic backgrounds. Grantees recommend elections staff listen to community with humility and **trust their expertise**.
- **Acknowledging and crediting community partners** can strengthen bonds with them and communicate publicly that the elections office is connected to the community. Consider discussing the grants project with local media, including grantee names and logos on county materials, and reposting grantee content on your own social channels.

Advising grantees

- A key role of election officials in community grants programs is providing **guidance to grantees about elections practices, timelines, and norms**.
- It is critical to **give clear guidance on rules** at the outset. For example, ensure grantees know that all outreach must be nonpartisan and no gifts may be given in exchange for registration or voting.
- **Make it very clear which materials need to be approved** by the county and the process for doing so. Articulate a clear written policy and include it in the grants agreements.
- **Ensure partners understand key elements of the timeline**, such as the dates when voting location addresses or county-provided materials will be available.
- **Provide insights** on which information is most important to convey. One election official recommends grantees leverage their knowledge of communities to motivate voters: “They might want to **suggest grantees focus their efforts on ‘why’ to vote**, not just how.”
- Grantees appreciated and found it insightful when counties **participated in meetings** with them such as information sessions for applicants, onboarding and training sessions, and planning meetings.

“It was very helpful to our staff to realize we can work with nonprofits in this capacity; it opened the door to collaborating on an ongoing, continuous basis.”

Jesse Salinas
Chief Elections Officer
Yolo County

Providing assistance to grantees

- The most important support election offices can provide grantees is **easy access to factual information** like the dates when vote centers will open and website URLs.
- Counties may want to provide a **toolkit with sample materials** from the county. Some San Mateo and Yolo County grantees used county materials as their own outreach assets or slightly adapted them for their own use. Consider providing grantees with **materials to which they could add their own logo and contact information**.
- Many grantees may have staff or volunteers who can translate their material into other languages, but not all do. **Consider offering the support of the county's translation and accessibility experts** to help grantees create materials that are accessible in multiple languages and to voters with disabilities.
- **Consider providing occasional training.** Some grantees would appreciate more training, especially as they enter different stages in the outreach period and as new staff and volunteers join the effort.
- Given the demands on elections staff during the voting period, counties also can **consider options other than in-person training** such as:
 - Creating a **training video and written guidelines** that can be shared with new participants as they join the effort.
 - Providing **occasional written updates** from the county or administering foundation on where we are in the voting cycle and how many voters have participated to date, countywide and in targeted precincts.
 - **Supporting a lead grantee to provide training**, updates, and other assistance to grantees throughout the grant period.
 - **Requiring each grantee to send a staff member to the initial training** and ensuring that person is responsible for training new participants.
- If you are providing grantees with an app to identify voting households and track their activities, consider providing a **more advanced level of training after grantees have had practice using the app**.
- Consider ways your office could open doors for grantees and help them get access to hard-to-reach populations. For example, one grantee suggested election officials **send a letter of introduction** to owners of high-density apartment buildings seeking permission for grantees to canvass, organize events, or distribute literature there. Grantees could be asked to provide contact information for letter recipients and to help draft such letters.
- Consider ways to **coordinate with other county agencies** like the housing authority, health department, public transit, and social services to help grantees partner with them and their clients.
- Access to jails is particularly challenging for nonprofits conducting outreach. It is very hard for external community groups to earn permission for voter outreach or placement of voting locations in jails. Grantees recommend elections offices leverage the mandate of their office and their trustworthiness to **request access from sheriff's departments**.



Image credit: Youth Community Service

Voter lists and targeting

- **Provide grantees with a list of lower-turnout precincts** to consider prioritizing. You might want to share this information with your foundation partner during the early planning stages so they can recruit grantees with networks in targeted neighborhoods, then again with grantees as soon as their grants are approved.
- If possible, **identify specific households or voters to target** within those precincts and/or help grantees access demographic data on voters in those precincts like language preferences.
- Grantees would appreciate **access to the full voter list** disaggregated by demographic data, if possible. As most counties are not equipped to provide demographic data for their voter rolls, grantees would likely need access to privately purchased data. You may want to explore whether a grantee could purchase lists and share them with the full grantee cohort.
- In addition to the names and phone numbers of voters, grantees would appreciate **mailing addresses** so they can send letters from community leaders and/or canvas.
- Consider **engaging an established committee such as a VEOAC, LAAC, or VAAC** up to six months before grants are awarded to identify targeting opportunities. Grantees would not be bound by these recommendations, but they could provide useful information, first when foundations recruit organizations to apply for grants and later when grantees design their strategies.

PROVIDING AN APP OR DATA TRACKING

About the Yolo County app

- Yolo County Chief Elections Officer Jesse Salinas encouraged county GIS Manager Mary Ellen Rosebrough to **build and launch two apps grantees could use to report their progress** during the general election cycle.
- Rosebrough's team employed **ArcGIS mapping software to design mobile and web-based apps**, built within the platform they had previously used to develop a suite of election management applications.
- One mobile-based app **allowed users to identify residential addresses with registered voters**. They could also **view precinct-based voter turnout** from the 2020 general election, allowing grantees to tailor their campaigns to areas where turnout had historically been low.
- Grantees who used the mobile app could **track their door-to-door canvassing**, including indicating whether they had spoken with a resident or left literature, the language with which they communicated, and the date and time of their outreach.
- The other app, which was web-based, **enabled grantees to report on their non-household specific outreach projects**, such as community events and media campaigns, including the number of people they reached, in which language, and with which messages.
- In the web-app, grantees could **provide comments and upload photos** of an event. If the activity was media based, the grantee could input information about the content, audience, and likely number of listener or viewer impressions.
- The dashboard for **the two apps overlaid information** from both sets of activities so a user could see, for example, if grantees had conducted an activity in or near a specific precinct.
- The foundation and county could **see the data collected in real time**, including the volume of grantee efforts and any outreach gaps in priority neighborhoods.

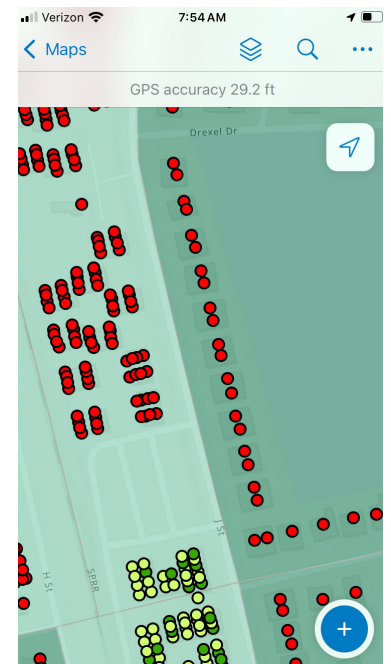


Image credit: Assessor/Clerk-Recorder/Elections Office, Yolo County

Screenshot from the field canvassing app

As depicted here, Yolo County grantees viewed areas with low turnout from November 2020 to assist in targeting their canvassing. The lighter the background color, the lower the turnout was in 2020. Canvassers used the mobile-based app to record if they left literature (light green dots) or spoke with a resident (dark green dots). The red dots indicated homes that still needed a visit.

Benefits of using an app

- Because they provide real-time data about grantees' efforts, apps can help counties and funders **identify areas where support might be needed, suggest strategic changes**, or adjust their own staff's strategies.
- Apps can **provide a county and canvassers with information about addresses** such as inaccessibility, new addresses, and language preferences.
- Apps can provide **consistency in reporting data**—allowing for better analysis—and reduce the burden on grantees to recall and tally their activities at the end of the grant period.
- App data can **allow grantees to record their own progress**, ensure they are on track to meet ambitious goals in a short time-frame, and identify potential **opportunities for greater impact**, such as a targeted neighborhood that has not been canvassed by any grantees.
- **County staff could evaluate app data to learn about voter behavior**, such as whether some types of households were more likely to engage with a canvasser during specific days or times and whether any correlations exist between canvassing and voter turnout. For example, in Yolo County it appears that canvassers were least likely to reach residents on Mondays and were most successful talking with residents in person between 7 and 8 p.m.
- Counties and foundations could use app data to **assess the effectiveness of the grant program**, including observing which communities were easier to reach and which communities could benefit from engaging other partners and strategies and in future cycles.

Feedback and recommendations from grantees who used Yolo County's app

- In Yolo County, grantees generally found **the apps worked well and were easy to use**.
- Some grantees **requested additional training**, particularly as new volunteers joined their efforts. Providing **a training video could be useful**.
- While canvassers readily used the mobile-based app, not all grantees used the web-app to track non-canvassing activities. **Clearer guidance and training might be useful, including sharing with grantees the benefits of using the apps**. For example, using the apps can help them prioritize their outreach campaigns, reduce duplication of effort, simplify their post-election reporting, and develop evidence for future investment. During the voter outreach period, foundations might want to issue a reminder about these benefits, potentially encouraging grantees to engage with the apps.
- YCF also recommends **including expectations about the use of the app into the application materials and the grant agreement**, so applicants will plan and budget appropriate staff time at the outset.
- Counties and foundations should be sure to **establish what they want to learn from the data** and who will be responsible for monitoring usage and identifying insights.

- Some grantees using the apps designed by the Yolo County elections office were **concerned they could unintentionally jeopardize the immigration status** of people they educated at public events by entering their addresses in the apps. Election administrators clarified that they only expected grantees to input addresses they visited while canvassing which included people already in the voter file, and that no individual names would be submitted. When training grantees to use the apps, expect to address this sensitive issue and provide both clarity and guidance. Given that some app users might not receive formal training, it might be useful to state your related policy within the app.
- **Future versions of the apps** might want to include the following:
 - Additional information about voters in each household such as age.
 - Filters that would allow app users to identify households with specific types of voters, such as those within a certain age range.
 - The ability for canvassers to note that multiple languages are spoken within a household.
- **To learn more about Yolo County's apps**
 - Please see these brief videos demonstrating the mobile-based field canvassing app and the web-based voter outreach app.
 - You may also contact the designer of the apps, Mary Ellen Rosebrough, at 530-406-5004.

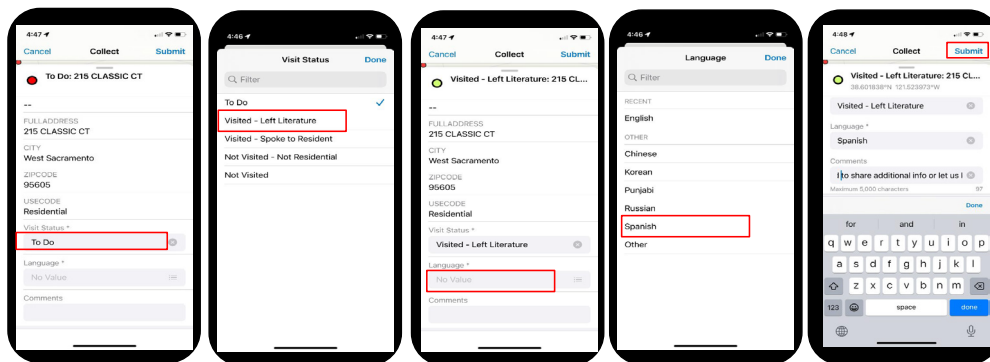


Image credit: Assessor/Clerk-Recorder/Elections Office, Yolo County

HOW TO SECURE FUNDING AND POLITICAL SUPPORT

Articulate a clear rationale for sponsoring a grants program

- Election administration budgets are tight, and funding new expenditures is always a challenge. Still, there is considerable **rationale for identifying local dollars** to support a community outreach grants program.
- First, **voter education and outreach is a key role of election officials** and consistent with their core mission. As one San Mateo County grantee said, “If you want everyone’s voice to be heard, there’s a price for that.”
- A community grants program could be a **more cost-effective way to conduct outreach**. Elections offices have limited capacity, and many are facing significant budget cuts. Making occasional, short-term grants could expand outreach efforts without the long-term obligation of other strategies.
- An election official may be able to **meet VCA requirements** by establishing a community grants program. Per California Senate Bill 1450 enacted in 2024, if a VCA county reduces the number of direct voter contacts it makes before an election, election officials are required to provide additional outreach to under-represented populations. A community grants program could provide **an appropriate, affordable vehicle for spending those mandated resources**.

Identify potential funding sources

- **County budgets may be the most streamlined, accessible source** of funding available to election officials. An analysis of the Voter’s Choice Act recommends county election officials “request additional outreach dollars from Boards of Supervisors and consider following the San Mateo County model of partnering with a regional foundation to get outreach dollars into the hands of a broad cross section of organizations that engage marginalized voters.”³
- Election officials also might be able to **allocate a portion of voter education funds in their existing budgets** for community-based grants.
- In addition to providing their own resources, local elections officials might want to **encourage state lawmakers to fund community outreach grants**. Yolo County Chief Elections Officer, Jesse Salinas, says, “Ultimately, for this program to reach the scale that’s needed to engage our diverse communities, the state will need to invest ongoing funds for outreach efforts.”
- The VCA implementation report also recommends that the Secretary of State and legislators “**advocate for more voter education and outreach funding in the Governor’s...budget** and work with the VCA Taskforce to propose the best ways to direct funds toward outreach to marginalized voters.”⁴

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

ELECTION DAY IS
NOVEMBER 5, 2024



YOLO COUNTY
ELECTIONS OFFICE



WEBSITE: ELECTIONS.YOLOCOUNTY.GOV
PHONE: (530) 666-8133
EMAIL: ELECTIONS@YOLOCOUNTY.GOV

Image credit: Assessor/Clerk-Recorder/
Elections Office, Yolo County

³ Shellenberger, L. & Romero, M. (2023). The Voter’s Choice Act: Impact Analysis and Recommendations. https://selc.senate.ca.gov/sites/selc.senate.ca.gov/files/VCA_Impact_Report_October_2023.pdf.

⁴ Ibid.

- **Philanthropic foundations or individual donors** may be able to supplement government sources, potentially as a matching grant to help election officials leverage public resources.
- Good sources might include **state or regional democracy funders**. Many of the largest California-based foundations support some form of voter education and outreach, as do several smaller or regionally-focused foundations. You might be able to identify such foundations by contacting your local community foundation or a nonprofit fiscal sponsor. Internet searches can also help identify possible partners.
- **The organization that partners with you in administering grants**—which might be a community foundation, nonprofit fiscal sponsor, or large, local nonprofit—might be able to **help you identify other potential funding partners**, including individual donors in the community or businesses. Further, if your foundation partner is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, they can accept donations directly from individuals or others.

“It requires time and money to do voter outreach. If you let the private sector know about that challenge and that we are open to partnering, then you can leverage their relationships for a noble cause.”

Jim Irizarry
Assistant Chief Elections Officer
San Mateo County

Avoid concerns and challenges to the program

- It is critical that any community outreach program be **nonpartisan and apolitical**. Irizarry advises: “Make sure the messaging is factual in nature, [like] how to register and where to register. It’s the same information we would provide, and that’s very permissible.”
- **Grantees may incorporate nonpartisan messages that inspire and motivate voters.** Some grantees created content featuring community members describing why voting was important to them. Others talked about how critical voting is in their specific community.
- **Avoid connection to candidates or parties.** For example, Salinas was careful not to invite a recent candidate for elected office to be part of the grant application review committee. He says, “Perceptions matter, so make sure to avoid getting involved in politics.” Irizarry agrees, “Make it very clear that it’s not for any particular candidate or measure. As long as you stay clear on that message, you are OK.”
- **Have a clear, nonpartisan rationale for which communities will be targeted.** In both San Mateo and Yolo Counties, grantees targeted multiple areas with low voter turnout in order to maximize potential benefit. Replicators might also consider supporting outreach across multiple supervisorial districts, both to build support among decision-makers and to ameliorate potential challenges.
- It is **important not to over-promise** or expect a community-based grants program to close all participation gaps in a few election cycles; it won’t. As Salinas points out, “To truly move the needle, we need to inspire voters on why they should vote and that their vote matters. It is possible that these programs using trusted messengers did that, but more is needed. **They need sustained contact over multiple visits.**”

FINAL NOTE



Image credit: Youth Community Service

The experiences of San Mateo and Yolo Counties prove that strategic grants to community-based organizations can expand and deepen voter participation. **Replicating this model offers a practical, proven, and inspiring way for election administrators to strengthen democracy from the ground up.** Election officials, funders, and community leaders participating in the San Mateo and Yolo County programs welcome the opportunity to connect with colleagues in other counties interested in exploring replication.