



## Why The James Irvine Foundation Supports Civic Engagement

*An excerpt from the Irvine Foundation's website about how civic participation fits into its evolving focus to expand economic and political opportunity for California young adults and families that are working but struggling with poverty.*

### Political Opportunity

Millions of Californians, especially those who are low-income, are not engaging in the political system, and their voices are not being heard. They don't feel their vote counts, they are cynical about the effectiveness of government, and they don't see how the political system matters in their daily lives. Many experience practical barriers that prevent them from participating.

The statistics are stark: Higher-income Californians are much more likely to vote and otherwise be politically active than lower-income Californians. [For example](#), 71 percent of Californians who make less than \$40,000 per year are not registered to vote, compared to 13 percent of Californians who make \$80,000 or more.

### Evolving Focus

In 2016, Irvine will develop [new grantmaking initiatives](#) to expand political opportunity for families and young adults who are working but struggling with poverty. This includes exploring ways to remove the systemic barriers that prevent too many Californians from achieving political influence.

Building on its existing work, the Irvine Foundation will deepen its commitment to expanding political opportunity because it's vital that all voices are heard in California. People who are left out, or opt out, of the system lose faith in it. Recently, [only one in three Californians reported trusting the state government to do what is right](#).

Government plays a critical role in establishing the context for economic opportunity — investing in education, setting the rules of our economy, and leveling the playing field for those who are systematically left behind. California will be stronger when everyone has the chance to be heard. Government will be more accountable and more effective, and more Californians will have the opportunity to succeed economically.



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This is why economic and political opportunity are so closely linked and mutually reinforcing. When all Californians have real opportunities to shape our state's future, we will all have a better shot at achieving economic stability.

### **Expanding Political Opportunity**

We are hopeful that the time is right to expand political opportunity. We see a growing recognition across our state's communities that disparities in opportunity are not in anyone's best interest — nor do they represent what's best for California. And we know from our experience funding organizations working to advance voting and civic engagement that our state has the leadership and the know-how to bring all Californians' voices to the table.

### **Looking Forward**

We deeply believe that expanding political opportunity for communities that have largely been left out of the political system can have a transformative effect on the lives of millions of Californians. In the coming years, we will experiment with initiatives that give voice and influence to all Californians, encourage leadership that is representative and responsive to communities, and strengthen the opportunity for all Californians to achieve their goals.

To read the latest updates on the grantmaking initiatives we are exploring as part of this new direction, visit [www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org) and/or follow us on Twitter: @IrvineFdn.