



# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE & ECOSYSTEM

History, Strategies, Typology

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasingly, funders working to promote social and policy change realize that to reach their objectives, they must support a diverse set of groups whose differing yet synergistic roles and expertise interlock in service of shared strategies and outcomes. This collection of strategies constitutes the field of civic engagement, and the ecosystem of groups constitutes the civic engagement infrastructure.

For example, a funder interested in increasing economic equality will need to fund a number of areas, such as policy development and analysis, grassroots field activities that educate and mobilize the public, public opinion and communications work that builds political will and resists opponents, possibly voter engagement activities, and issue advocacy specialists who have relationships with decision-makers (as well as, perhaps, with public-interest litigation groups to ensure that new policy is implemented adequately).

This supply chain of coordinated resources, roles, tools, and relationships — across issues, constituencies, and places — has become a fundamental civil society assumption and theory of change for funders and field leaders.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the landscape, typology, and analysis of civic engagement infrastructure. It will begin with a short history and timeline of funders' and groups' evolving sense of civic engagement as a field, especially the ways that civic engagement programs and infrastructure have become an anchor for avenues of social change and impact.

In providing a typology of civic engagement groups and roles, the sum of which comprise the infrastructure, we will divide the field into eight broad strategic focuses:

- People-centered
- Policy and issue advocacy, including structural democracy reform
- Communications
- Narrative and culture change
- Civic technology and digital organizing
- Capacity building and technical assistance
- Research, experimentation, and assessment
- Funders

Space considerations permit only the most top-level description of the richness and diversity embedded in the arenas contained in each section. Nonetheless, we hope to have captured the leading ideas, activities, and communities gathered in this growing, independent sector domain. ♦



## SECTION ONE

# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The definition of “nonpartisan civic engagement” has been expanding steadily over the past 15 years, as has the range of roles and activities the term aims to describe. This report will provide a brief history of this evolution and a current snapshot of civic engagement as a field of funder investment and practitioner strategies.

Put simply, we can say that:



Civic engagement is an umbrella term for the collection of nonpartisan ideas, activities, and field building interventions that serve to promote reform in the areas of social attitudes and behaviors, public policy, and politics.

Civic engagement work occurs at the local, state, and national levels — often in coordinated ways.

When integrated, this ensemble of strategies, groups, and programming becomes a coherent civic engagement infrastructure. The purpose of this document is to describe the infrastructure’s elements and functions.

At its most basic, *infrastructure* refers to an underlying framework or architecture necessary for the optimal functioning of a system. For our purposes, civic engagement infrastructure describes the ways collaborating organizations join forces to promote community power, resources, policy shifts, and other desirable social and political outcomes.

## TWO GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

The notion of civic engagement infrastructure being described here starts from the assumption that social and policy change movements are best built from, and accountable to, an inclusive grassroots base that is diverse in terms of race, class, gender, religion, abledness, and geography.

In other words, the ever-evolving and creative conditions of community life form the concrete reality that long-term changemakers must begin with for their organizing, advocacy, and policy designs. This community-level civil society energy and intelligence drives and sustains most reform.

The second guiding assumption underlying this infrastructure typology is that the work of civic engagement is an effort to balance the ratios of **power** on behalf of people and communities who are often marginalized from decisions and resources that affect them.

Because democracy is always a roiling negotiation of ideas, values, priorities, privileges, and available resources, the work of nonprofit civic engagement seeks to help society consider and adopt ideas and policies that, ultimately, best serve a sense of the common good— itself a continuously contested social construct. While political and corporate actors can leverage vast sums of money to further their interests and achieve governing majorities, nonprofit civil society groups and their constituents — especially those representing communities excluded from power — rely for the most part on the assets of their ideas, moral imperatives, and chorus of voices.

1

Social and policy change movements are best built from, and accountable to, an inclusive grassroots base that is diverse in terms of race, class, gender, religion, abledness, and geography.

2

The work of civic engagement is an effort to balance the ratios of power on behalf of people and communities who are often marginalized from decisions and resources that affect them.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT'S MISSION

### *From Representation to Power and Governance*

In many ways, and in the eyes of both funders and field leaders, the developing story of nonpartisan civic engagement funding and work can be seen to have moved through four general and sector-wide moments, each building on its predecessors:

- Creating campaigns for structural democracy reform.
- Building a national and collaborative infrastructure for more equal electoral representation.
- Aggregating electoral, cultural, and advocacy power.
- Seeking to establish a diverse and aligned governing majority able to wield that power in the civic and cultural sphere.

### CAMPAIGNS FOR DEMOCRACY REFORM

FROM 1990

The work in this initial phase characterized most of the pre-2007 era, and is often referred to as supporting “good government efforts.” Funders and grantees in this strategy began working largely at the national level to compel government to be more transparent and modern, make elections fairer, and encourage universal participation by all eligible voters. The main democracy

reform campaigns included voter registration changes, media transparency and fairness, voting rights advocacy and litigation, and campaign finance efforts. This work continues, often at the state level, for example in promoting

Work in the pre-2007 era is often referred to as supporting “good government efforts.”

same-day voter registration and redressing voter suppression and gerrymandering laws and policies in states.

### BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

FROM 2007

Briefly described earlier, this is the main subject of this paper as a whole. Suffice it to say here that connecting and resourcing the totality of essential groups, roles, places, and strategies has been essential to civic engagement as currently understood, and will accommodate innovations that continue to build out the ecosystem.

### BUILDING ELECTORAL AND ADVOCACY POWER

FROM 2011

In addition to supporting enfranchisement of underrepresented voters, the civic engagement infrastructure has increasingly pursued specific social, policy, and political outcomes and a paradigm for building power.

The Grassroots Policy Project defines power as “a set of relationships between and among people, taking place within a historical context and social structures.” The three faces of power are:

- Organizing people and resources for direct political involvement in visible decision-making arenas.
- Building durable, long-term political infrastructure: networks of organizations, aligned around shared goals, that can shape political agendas.
- Making meaning on the terrain of ideology and worldview.<sup>1</sup>

1 Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson, “The Three Faces of Power,” Grassroots Policy Project, 2018, [https://grassrootspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GPP\\_34FacesOfPower.pdf](https://grassrootspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GPP_34FacesOfPower.pdf).

This multi-issue agenda within civic engagement came about with the growing participation of community organizing groups, and with the cultural and equity movements beginning with initiatives like the Immigration Reform campaigns, same-sex marriage and LGBTQIA rights work, Occupy Wallstreet, Fight for Fifteen, and Black Lives Matter.

The key shift to emphasize here from previous understandings of civic engagement is the move beyond representation in a status quo democratic process toward a grassroots, multicultural movement to change its terms, assumptions, and fundamental operations.

### ESTABLISHING A DIVERSE AND ALIGNED GOVERNING MAJORITY ABLE TO WIELD POLITICAL AND CULTURAL POWER

FROM 2014

This is the leading edge of current civic engagement thinking and programming. Seizing on the implications of dramatic demographic shifts; the escalation of cultural, economic, and climate crises; and political and ideological volatility among many Americans, civic engagement leaders are working to create permanent coalitions that influence both civil society and public sector spheres — such as legislatures — to articulate and push for public interest reforms.

This is largely beginning at the state level in places like Minnesota, Washington, and New Mexico, where grassroots multi-issue and multiconstituency organizations and their allies have been working in alignment for more than a decade to accrue a tipping point and sustained influence on a shared policy and political

agenda. Criminal justice reforms, tax and budgeting policies, education reform, minimum wage increases — these are recent examples of policies advanced by civic engagement coalitions, and they demonstrate the promise of a reform-minded governing majority fueled by an infrastructure.

In addition, and intertwined with these infrastructural reforms, both long-planned and spontaneous social-movement spaces have arisen out of growing discontent with institutions and public awareness on key social, political, and policy issues. These disruptive efforts combine shared community visions and collective action to influence political and civic discourse on issues ranging from wealth equity, police violence, reproductive rights, and the climate crisis. ♦

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## SECTION TWO

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TYPOLOGY

The following sections will outline components and examples of the civic engagement infrastructure through these strategic focuses. Some organizations are largely defined by one category, but many cross over, employing multiple strategies in their work.





#### CAPACITY BUILDING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Leadership and organizational development



#### CIVIC TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL ORGANIZING



#### COMMUNICATIONS



#### FUNDERS



#### NARRATIVE & CULTURE CHANGE

- Narrative
- Culture change



#### PEOPLE-CENTERED

- Grassroots organizing
- Identity-based
- Movements
- Faith-based
- Service sector

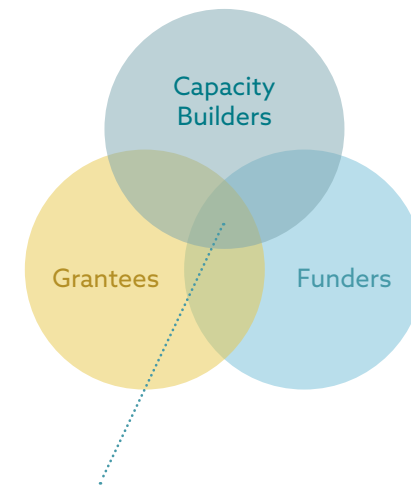


#### POLICY & ISSUE ADVOCACY

- Research and analysis
- Issue advocacy
- Structural democracy reform
  - Voting rights and access to the ballot example
  - Campaign finance reform example



#### RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTATION, & ASSESSMENT



#### SUPPORTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Funders, grantees, and capacity builders work together to share the creation, maintenance, and evolution of the civic engagement sector.



### SECTION THREE

## PEOPLE- CENTERED

Wide public participation in civil society associations as a means to form community bonds and influence civic reforms has been the taproot of American democracy from the country's founding, down to the present day — as has been well documented by observers ranging from Alexis de Tocqueville to Robert Putnam, Theda Skocpol, Michael Dawson, and Manuel Pastor.

Much of this desire to come together stems from the country's extraordinary racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. These proliferating formal and informal affiliations and organizations become social and political homes through which individuals and communities define themselves, address social challenges and economic opportunities, and advocate together for beneficial public-sector policy and other outcomes.

Current civic engagement strategy also relies on such social and political home organizations as the overall infrastructure's foundation. These are most often local and grassroots organizations, with long-standing and year-round connections to their communities and constituencies. These groups might be issue-focused (e.g., housing, education, environmental justice, immigrant rights); identity-focused (e.g., racial, ethnic, or religious communities); or geographic (e.g., the neighborhood, city, or state). In each case, groups bring people together in service of shared concerns, and provide levels of organization, political education, mobilization, and electoral activity. Their ultimate mission is to increase the social, political, and governing power of their constituencies and communities.

The ultimate mission of organizing groups is to increase the social, political, and governing power of their constituencies.

## GRASSROOTS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

This echelon of the civic engagement infrastructure is simultaneously the most important and always somewhat expansive and amorphous. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) defines community organizing this way:

One grantmaker ... described it succinctly:



**"Community organizing is a form of leadership that enables a constituency to form an organization that gathers resources necessary to create the power to create change."**

Community organizing comprises building relationships, leadership and power, usually among underrepresented communities, for the purpose of bringing that power and collective voice into discussions about the issues that affect those communities by engaging with relevant decision-makers. The issues raised, solutions identified and strategies developed to achieve those solutions all are defined and acted on by the leaders themselves, usually with the help of professional organizers. 'Community organizing' is distinguished by the fact that affected constituencies are the agents of change rather than paid advocates or lobbyists who represent the interests of such constituencies.<sup>2</sup>

This definition illuminates why community organizing is the moral and strategic foundation of civic engagement thinking and activity. It is through such intimate and vibrant social experiences

that people come to learn about and practice democracy: by surveying their communities, negotiating interests, making decisions together, and taking collective action.

As an infrastructure unto itself, community organizing ranges from the hyperlocal and neighborhood-level group all the way to national networks of coordinated local and state groups. Examples of the latter include Community Change, Center for Popular Democracy, People's Action, and Faith in Action. Similar community organizing alignment and power organizations and networks exist within states, such as Virginia New Majority, Ohio Organizing Project, and California Calls. These networks educate, train, provide resources to, and help organize and mobilize community residents on behalf of relevant issues and civic trends. In many cases, they serve as the 501(c)(3) political strategists for the multi-issue and multiconstituency groups and infrastructures in their city or state, and provide alignment on canvassing, communications and messaging, and other roles and activities best undertaken by grassroots groups.

For example, after the 2016 election, when the Affordable Care Act and other federal safety net programs were in jeopardy, it was often organizing groups and their vast networks of members and constituencies who appeared at town hall meetings and led direct actions aimed at stopping these cuts. Or when minimum wage or other ballot measures are considered, organizing groups are on the front lines to educate and energize their base to participate meaningfully.

In addition, community organizing groups participate in the permissible electoral activities just elaborated on, including voter education, voter registration, voter protection, access-to-the-ballot efforts, and get out the vote.<sup>3</sup>

**Organizing groups are on the front lines to educate and energize their base to participate meaningfully.**

<sup>2</sup> "Smashing Silos in Philanthropy: Multi-Issue Advocacy and Organizing for Real Results". p. 3

<sup>3</sup> A description and glossary of nonpartisan electoral engagement work can be found in appendix I.

In short, there is virtually no aspect of civic engagement that doesn't crucially depend on community-based groups and their year-round organizing and outreach. Despite being dramatically overmatched by adversaries in terms of funding and direct access to decision-making authorities, these groups and their constituencies form the foundation of our vibrant, pluralist, democratic ethos.

## IDENTITY-BASED

As noted above, socially marginalized and politically disenfranchised communities often create civil society groups to pursue rights and benefits conferred on so-called "in-group" populations. Beginning with pillar organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC),

the National Organization for Women (NOW), and more recently groups like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Alliance for Youth Action, identity-based groups act as information, education, organizing, legal defense, and advocacy groups

serving a specific population and its concerns. This work happens through the courts, legislatures, and ballot boxes, but is almost always anchored by grassroots communities and through organized movements that aim to change broad public understandings and policies.

Because so many of our current political and social contests are waged through identity-based — especially racial — rhetoric and policy agendas, identity-based groups have a growing influence in setting the strategic course for the civic engagement infrastructure as a whole. The Movement for Black Lives, Color

Of Change, Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA), Asian Pacific Environmental Network in California, Ohio Student Association, and Native Voices in the Inner Mountain West are all examples of identity-based groups that play a leadership role in the broader civic engagement infrastructure.

In the near term, it seems, any renewed vision of a fair and inclusive common good will come through these identity-based understandings and narratives. The civic engagement infrastructure generally, and identity-based groups specifically, will be instrumental in setting a course by which a politically salient cohort of Americans see themselves in a pluralist vision of who we are as a nation, and can thus form new cultural and political coalitions.

## MOVEMENTS

Social movements are defined as individuals engaged in some form of collective action to create social and/or political change. Movements are necessarily disruptive — a push against the status quo and traditional institutions. They often arise when groups of people do not see a path forward through established and formal political channels and other institutions. Therefore, movements often appeal to individuals who are skeptical of or disillusioned by traditional civic avenues for change. Historically and in our contemporary context, social movements are often led by young people. Recent examples of major U.S. movements include Dreamers, Movement for Black Lives, Never Again MSD (in response to Parkland gun violence), #MeToo, and climate justice movements.

Movements often emerge from major events, such as the killing of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown for the Movement for Black Lives, or SB 1070 and other anti-immigrant policies for the Dreamers. These movements also exist in permanent

In the near term, it seems, any renewed vision of a fair and inclusive common good will come through these identity-based understandings and narratives.





organizations like Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Mijente, and Sunrise Movement. These organizations offer a social and political analysis and home for individuals who might not find adequate traction in traditional civic engagement structures.

Movement organizations are able to influence public narrative and discourse through mass actions, protests, and mobilizations. Increasingly, movement organizations are also leveraging their collective structures to engage in elections and politics. Consider, for example, the rise of organizations and projects like Movement for Black Lives' Electoral Justice Project and Black Voters Matter. Many movement organizations are engaged in voter registration and mobilization programs and legislative advocacy. What typically sets movement organizations apart from other groups is their ability to balance their conviction that existing institutions and systems need to be transformed while simultaneously using those very systems to build power. Many movement organizers describe it as building power to set the field for long-term and systemic social and political fights.

## FAITH-BASED

Most Americans are devout.<sup>4</sup> Often their politics are informed by their religious affiliations and belief structures. Religious institutions and teachings remain a significant civil society force in the U.S. Viewed as social and political homes, faith institutions not only provide gathering places for like-minded people to form community, but also profoundly influence the ways adherents make meaning of their lives and the world.

Influential faith-based advocacy and civic engagement groups and networks exist across the ideological spectrum. While the

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<sup>4</sup> Though rates of religious intensity in the U.S. are shifting, religious adherence still approaches 90%. See Pew Research Center, "Belief in God," <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-god>.



Right has long invested in a dense network of conservative clergy and religious advocacy and communications groups, the Center/Left is only now returning to the faith-based organizing and civic advocacy that proved decisive in the Civil Rights and antiwar advances of the 1960s.

Faith-based groups draw on texts, doctrines, traditions, and values systems that lie outside the Right/Left ideological continuum, and appeal to nonpolitical ideas and resources to

gain ethical force. Recent examples of this influence can be seen in positive policy developments in areas including criminal justice reform, parental leave, economic justice, climate change efforts, and immigration work.

Faith-based work has become especially important given the degree to which rural voters exercise disproportionate social and political influence

Faith-based groups also produce materials and provide coaching and other technical assistance to clergy and congregational leadership across the country to promote civic engagement and issue education among their congregants. Because there is a mosque, church, temple, or synagogue in almost every community, faith-based organizing and advocacy is a rapidly growing piece of the civic engagement infrastructure. Funders and field leaders alike see faith-based work as a way to extend their reach beyond metro areas and into small cities and towns. This has become especially important given the degree to which rural voters exercise disproportionate social and political influence over state and federal elections and policy.

## SERVICE SECTOR

The involvement of social service groups in a broader civic engagement infrastructure is fairly recent, and comes with the realization that for many Americans, social service organizations provide a tangible connection to government and the public sphere. So while not exactly a social or political home in the way these other organizations are, social service offices nonetheless engage directly with vulnerable populations much more frequently and urgently than do other civil society groups.

The one civic engagement activity social service groups conduct routinely is voter registration. The Help America Vote Act mandated that government agencies make voter registration opportunities available to service organizations' clients. Nonprofit VOTE has been a national leader in using this universe of offices and agencies to further civic participation.

This brief overview of the types of frontline groups that serve as social, intellectual, and political homes for individuals and communities as they engage civically and make meaning of their lives relative to elections, the government, and the policy world offers just a hint of the richness, diversity, intelligence, and courage present in their leadership and work. ♦



#### SECTION FOUR

## POLICY & ISSUE ADVOCACY GROUPS

The civic engagement sector has always depended on networks of academic and think tank researchers and policy analysts to support thinking and strategy relative to policy goals.

Organizations in this sector conduct research and policy analysis, but also inform and work with decision-makers and media on issues and policies. While not social or political homes in the way people-centered organizations are, these groups nonetheless serve as trusted providers of information and relationships.

### RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Think tanks, such as the Economic Policy Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Roosevelt Institute, and New America, don't often intersect directly with the broader civic engagement infrastructure, but they're crucial sources of information and data, as well as of other forms of intellectual leadership.

There is also a growing number of "think and do" tanks that combine research and analysis with advocacy and ongoing connections to the broader civic engagement and issue advocacy infrastructure. Demos, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), and the Brennan Center for Justice are examples of this trend. For instance, CBPP has affiliates in every state that work on both federal and state tax and budget policy. These groups are increasingly looked to and enrolled by other civic engagement groups in the state to act as expert resources on policy and bills, and to use their relationships with officeholders and agency heads in an "inside/outside" advocacy campaign. The recent landmark suite of tax reform, education spending, and healthcare legislation in New Mexico, for example, was the result

of long-term coordination between the state's civic engagement infrastructure groups and national issue advocacy groups, especially the State Priorities Partnership affiliate New Mexico Voices for Children.

## ISSUE ADVOCACY

Even more than think tanks, issue-specific advocacy groups represent a growing connector helping people engage civically on policies and public attitudes that affect them and their communities. Groups such as the National Immigration Law Center, the League of Conservation Voters, the Brady Center, Planned Parenthood, and Common Cause are examples of groups with large memberships that educate and mobilize members and the broader public in support of policy reform. These groups partner with civic engagement allies at both the state and national level, not only on issue campaigns and litigation, but also on electoral programs and media and communications efforts aimed at shaping opinions.

### STRUCTURAL DEMOCRACY REFORM EXAMPLE

The ecosystem of groups that work to make the pillars and processes of our democracy more functional, transparent, and equitable is central to nonpartisan civic engagement — and is an important part of the issue advocacy sector as well. The activities in this civic engagement domain include election research and analysis, policy reform development and advocacy, technical reforms around elections and media practices, voting rights and litigation, involvement in nonpartisan civic events such as the census and redistricting; and all manner of watchdog and investigation/transparency programs.

## VOTING RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO THE BALLOT EXAMPLE

The past two decades have seen a dramatic reversal in the long march to enfranchise all eligible voters in a fair and modern voting system. Since 2010, targeted voter ID laws and policies, purging of voter rolls, voter-exclusion laws such as the disenfranchisement of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated citizens, mishandling of provisional ballots, eliminating and even criminalizing third-party voter registration, canceling early voting and moving polling places without warning, intentional misinformation concerning voting rules, and other voter-intimidation practices — all aimed at young voters and voters of color — represent a partisan campaign to diminish democratic participation among a specific class of voters.

Remedy in the courts has been mixed. Most devastating was the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, which annulled the preclearance requirements of the 1965 Voting Rights Act for voting changes in jurisdictions with a long history of racially based disenfranchisement.

Largely on the defensive for the last decade, groups like the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Advancement Project, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the Brennan Center for Justice, and the Fair Elections Center, among others, have long coordinated with one another and with local and state-level activists and plaintiffs to undertake voter protection, litigation in courts, and advocacy in legislatures.

Civic engagement infrastructure groups have helped increase same-day voter registration states to 20 and aided adoption of automatic voter registration in 15 states.

Their work, often in partnership with local election administrators at every level, insists on nonpartisan laws, regulations, and practices capable of producing a fair, accessible, and accountable elections system.

It should be noted, however, that there have also been significant successes and recent progress regarding access to the ballot. Civic engagement infrastructure groups have helped increase the number of same-day voter registration states to 20, and, most significantly, have aided adoption of automatic voter registration in 15 states since 2015. This success is an important advance in the path toward full enfranchisement. The Center for Secure and Modern Elections has been the main driver of this work. The 2018 Florida ballot initiative that restored voting eligibility to formerly incarcerated individuals in that state has also overcome partisan obstruction in the courts. When properly implemented, it will enfranchise a significant number of largely African American and Latinx voters across the state. And in places like North Carolina, gerrymandered district maps have been overturned in state courts.

### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM EXAMPLE

For many Americans and democracy leaders, the fundamental impediment to a fair and functional democracy is the presence of private and corporate money, which underwrites both campaigns and lobbying in a closed loop of self-interest. The 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (aka McCain-Feingold legislation) was the last major federal campaign finance reform victory, though there have been some local successes since then. Beginning with *Citizens United*, the Supreme Court, through both action and inaction, has taken the position that most limits on private political contributions are violations of the freedom of speech.

Nonetheless, there is a cohort of groups and funders who continue to press forward on money in politics reform. The Center for Responsive Politics, the National Institute on Money in Politics, and the Campaign Finance Center are the main research and watchdog groups in the field. Common Cause, the Brennan Center for Justice, New America, FairVote, Public Citizen, and the Campaign Legal Center all work on the terrain of laws, policies, and public attitudes regarding the financing of our elections and government by private entities.

Increasingly, and driven by the Piper Fund donor collaborative, money in politics groups have worked with state tables and issue and identity activists to place these campaign finance reforms within the contexts of power and justice. In addition, the Piper Fund has been a leader in working on fair and transparent judicial elections in states and localities. The mantra of all campaign finance reform groups has long been that regardless of the issue you care about, money in politics is the issue defining your issue. ♦

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## SECTION FIVE

# COMMUNICATIONS

Civic engagement groups across the spectrum have rapidly grown sophisticated in their communications strategies and platforms. They continue to test and refine what they say, who says it, how they say it, and whom they say it to.

Gone are the days when mass-blast white papers, news releases, press conferences, passive websites, and accumulated media clips summed up a civic engagement group's communications agenda. Now, in addition to the hour-by-hour use of social media platforms and targeted digital organizing and outreach, groups employ diverse types of targeted discourse able to reach specific allies, push back against adversaries, persuade those open to persuasion, and attract mass media coverage.

Many grassroots groups now have dedicated communications staff or relationships with key outlets to push out their messaging. In a number of states, groups

belong or have access to communications hubs that seek to organize and leverage the groups' messaging. ProgressNow, for example, was created as a national network with state affiliates to act as a 501(c)(3)/501(c)(4) communications hub that can serve as the state infrastructure's central communications director and media contact, and can also help train organizations and community leaders on message development and media relations. In some places, this has worked very well. In other states, the more complex nonpartisan messaging has been neglected and misunderstood relative to the transactional and hard-hitting 501(c)(4) and political work. Civic engagement groups are rapidly hiring staff and accessing technical assistance to extend their programs and reach.

Firms and consultants have also emerged to offer templates and tailored consultancies for groups at every level of size and sophistication. Most cities have local providers and individual consultants that serve advocacy and civic engagement groups. ♦





## SECTION SIX

# NARRATIVE & CULTURE CHANGE

In an increasingly complex and polarized social and political environment, intensified by the exponential proliferation of voices and media and opinion platforms pursuing audiences and voters, civic engagement groups are developing the frames, stories, models, and polemics able to reach, educate, persuade, and activate key audiences.

## NARRATIVE

Narrative work seeks to make progress on the third face of power noted earlier: influencing the terrain of ideology and worldview. As such, narrative goes beyond the point/counterpoint contest of facts and ideas, and seeks to reorient the ways an issue or conversation is understood and experienced by various audiences, thereby driving new actions. Viewed this way, narrative strategy can drive culture change, which will be described in the next section.

In contrast to unidirectional communication, narrative is more conversational, and employs elements of story development, rhetoric and tropes, and audience response theory to cut through media echo chambers of current affairs coverage and opinion, and to help audience members make sense and meaning of what's relevant to their own lives and experiential frames of reference. Narrative provides a path for political education, organizing, consciousness raising, and mobilization strategies.

The field has expanded greatly as policy wins that seemed remote only a few years ago — same-sex marriage, marijuana legalization, clean energy investments, and minimum wage

Narrative goes beyond the point/counterpoint contest of facts.

increases — suddenly found opposition waning due to a change in the way these reforms were framed narratologically. The same-sex marriage victory is especially illustrative. When the campaign shifted its narrative framing away from an appeal on behalf of a marginalized group for the civil rights offered to similarly situated couples, and into poignant stories about love and family, public opinion moved quickly. This narrative strategy shifted culture as a way to shift government, the courts, and policy.

An extremely compelling example of narrative work is Anat Shenker-Orsorio's Race-Class Narrative Project, which seeks to engage simultaneously around these identities in ways that shift participants' understanding of their own and one another's social and economic circumstances, and thereby strengthen social solidarity and insulate them against partisan scapegoating. This consciousness-raising process then creates a viable social and cultural foundation for public-interest policy advancements.

Leading narrative change providers and activists include Topos, Color Of Change, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Caring Across Generations, the Opportunity Agenda, The League, ReThink Media, and many academics and individual consultants.

## CULTURE CHANGE

Polarization and issue gridlock have made traditional advocacy — in which competing ideas are pragmatically sorted relative to a mutually desired policy or social outcome — increasingly difficult. There is so little basic agreement or goodwill around the process and substance of such outcomes that the field of deliberation often begins not with political institutions, but rather with ideology and culture.

The compelling charge for civic engagement and advocacy reformers is thus to shift attitudes through cultural activism. As noted author Jeff Chang has written, "politics and policy are where some people are some of the time, but culture is where all of the people are all of the time." Political change is almost always a lagging indicator of a culture change that has already occurred.

Currently, culture work tends to take two forms. The first consists of close partnerships between civic engagement groups and popular artists and cultural leaders who can reach audiences that otherwise might not be civically active. This strategy has been especially successful with young voters and activists, who may reference pop culture figures when it comes to issues and political engagement. With Twitter and Facebook follower numbers that dwarf the audiences of civic and public affairs leaders in size and reach, these sophisticated cultural creatives can exert enormous influence. The Alliance for Youth Action and Midwest Culture Lab groups have been trailblazers in this cultural organizing strategy in Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

The other strand of culture work is the one alluded to in the narrative section: influencing the ways events, ideas, and conditions are transmitted and processed by individuals and in the broader public sphere. As a global culture engine, Hollywood has become a key site of activism. Ava DuVernay's work as a performer, writer, director, and producer is emblematic of a groundswell effort to increase racial representation and diverse lifeworlds in mass-distribution film and television. Another highly successful example of this work has been led by Color Of Change, which has approached corporate sponsors of Fox News and other media programmers and leveraged their corporate reputations and market interests to rectify and have withdrawn dis/misinformation and bigoted content, and otherwise to broaden the information and points of view available to media consumers. ♦



## SECTION SEVEN

# CIVIC TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL ORGANIZING

The advent of digital tools and technology has transformed the ways civic engagement groups develop and execute field programs and communicate with constituents and the broader public.

Beginning in the late 1990s with groups like MoveOn.org, digital organizing, mobilization, and advocacy are now central to the way civic engagement is understood and conducted at every level. The work to create these tools and platforms has been led by organized labor, political digital campaign consultants who migrated to civil society groups, tech innovators, digital trainers and coaches, and academics. Through these innovations, groups achieve amplification and extension of traditional people-powered organizing techniques and strategies augmented by an array of tools, platforms, and practices now commonplace in the digital age. Examples of community-specific digital outreach and organizing media organizations include Pulso, ParentsTogether, PushBlack, and Revolution English.

Groups achieve amplification and extension of traditional people-powered organizing techniques through digital organizing.

Digital organizing is defined here as using digital tools, platforms, and practices to inform, engage, and mobilize a constituency, membership, or following to take collective action toward a common goal. Currently, civic engagement groups are utilizing digital organizing in a variety of ways and toward many different civic engagement outcomes. A partial list of digital organizing efforts includes the following:

- Crowdsourcing, peer-to-peer texting, direct action mobilization
- Surveys and petitions

- Providing community-specific information about the 2020 Census
- Recruiting and activating trusted messengers to reach hard-to-count-communities for the 2020 Census
- Voter registration and expanding the electorate
- Mobilization and voter turnout
- Database management and data collection
- Unity map building for 2021 redistricting
- Event promotion and management
- Fundraising and constituency engagement
- Content creation and dissemination to inform and combat misinformation

Both civic engagement groups and funders would stress, however:



Digital organizing and base building are not simply a combination of paid digital ads, media consultants, trolls, bots, tools, and platforms. Its success and impact fundamentally depend on the in-person work of organizers and community leaders.

Seamlessly integrating digital and terrestrial organizing with engagement programs is the next innovative wave already underway.

Although adoption of digital organizing practices has grown very rapidly, the digital divide in both access and expertise remains wide, often exacerbating existing divides in the civic engagement and cultural space related to class, gender, and race. The velocity of innovation in this sector means that continuous funding and technical assistance resources are required to make leading digital tools available throughout the civic engagement infrastructure.

Among the core elements of an effective digital organizing plan are:

- Creative development and distribution: creating informed content through experimentation and having available distribution channels to realize desired levels of engagement
- Constituent Relationship Management (CRM): technology and people capacity for the effective utilization of data to engage a target audience and constituency
- Analytics, evaluation, and data: testing and assessing what works
- Social listening: creating an accurate and authentic feedback loop with constituents to facilitate two-way conversation
- Paid digital advertising: to push and broadcast content to and outside of constituent universes

There are dozens of credible leaders, capacity builders, platforms, and general resources for digital organizing. For example, The Movement Cooperative (TMC) centralizes high-value digital tools and technical-support provisions and makes them available and useful to the wider nonpartisan civic engagement infrastructure. By providing a hub for national voter/consumer files, shared infrastructure management and resources, modeling, and group purchasing power, TMC is helping groups of all sizes and sophistication gain access to and proficiency with the latest digital products.

As new digital tools and providers continue to proliferate, there will be an ongoing need for curation, technical support, and cultural bridge-building between the tech community and civic engagement groups and advocates. One funder network serving this role is New Media Ventures, which connects and convenes investors and civic tech designers, and generates start-up funding for the most promising new ideas, products, and leaders — especially tech leaders of color. ♦





## SECTION EIGHT

# CAPACITY BUILDING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

From the outset, civic engagement funders and groups have considered capacity building providers as peer strategists, innovators, and skill builders — and essential to the success of the field.

This partnership makes sense given that the task has been to build an infrastructure capable of collectively coordinating resources and activities, assessing complex contexts, responding in multitiered and multiperspectival ways, gauging program success, and course-correcting. To succeed, this continuous circle of learning/adapting/executing/assessing in a rapidly changing cultural and political environment requires a cohort of embedded experts able to assist with each element.

For example, in many ways, the creation of State Voices and its state affiliates was a major capacity building intervention: to make the voter file and its data available and accessible to frontline groups as they conduct electoral and other program work. State table staff convened meetings of grassroots and advocacy groups and helped steward collective strategies, connected table groups to communications and other technical assistance expertise, developed local leaders and organizational growth and fitness, and coordinated with funders on behalf of, but often unreachable by, individual organizations.

*This continuous circle of learning/ adapting/executing/assessing in a rapidly changing cultural and political environment requires a cohort of embedded experts able to assist with each element.*



## LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participating in an infrastructure of civic engagement groups requires organizational leaders to develop skills in three arenas: leader as use of self, leader of an organization and its responsibilities and systems, and leader among leaders in a network. Both funders and field leaders have increasingly realized the importance of investing in ongoing development and skill-building in each of these leadership domains.

A growing sector of management trainings, executive coaches, and in-depth leadership programs now exists to meet these demands. For example, The Management Center offers trainings, coaching, and consulting to help leaders gain operational and human resources skills, design and enact organizational and strategic changes, and build team cohesion in groups both large and small. Rockwood Leadership Institute has been a touchstone in providing in-depth, whole-person, curated retreats and experiential learning opportunities to organizational leaders across a field or geographic region. For more than

a decade, the Leadership Learning Community has served as a laboratory of innovative leadership development and organizational development research, fields of practice, collaborations, and provisions not only for the civic engagement and social justice sectors, but for the independent sector as a whole.

Other capacity building and strategic assistance offerings core to the civic engagement sector involve organizer training groups such as the Midwest Academy, re:power (formerly Wellstone Action), and various labor and organizing training centers. These groups provide training curricula and consulting to demonstrate

the latest and best practices, build networks, and improve campaign strategies and execution.

Bolder Advocacy at the Alliance for Justice provides extensive trainings, consultations, and online informational resources regarding IRS rules and compliance. These resources have been especially helpful for 501(c)(3) advocacy and civic engagement groups as they engineer and execute their organizing, mobilizing, and communications programs.

In addition, like much of the nonprofit sector, civic engagement groups and funders are focusing on transforming themselves into culturally competent and race-forward organizations. There now exists a large cohort of excellent firms and consultants that work with leaders and groups to promote equity strategies, programs, and accountability. In this way, organizational culture, program culture, and theories of power and impact all align toward greater civic and cultural equity. ♦

Civic engagement groups and funders are focusing on transforming themselves into culturally competent and race-forward organizations.



## SECTION NINE

# RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTATION, & ASSESSMENT

Civic engagement funders and field leaders have always been eager to measure change and impact, and have embraced evaluators and researchers as key colleagues in their work. Indeed, civic engagement leaders have themselves become inordinately sophisticated about social science measurement methodologies, designing experiments, and parsing outcomes.

The challenge lies — as it does for most of the social change sector — in identifying protocols appropriate to the work civic engagement groups actually do. When the work is reducible to quantifiable measurement (e.g., cost per voter registration), the metrics are clear and available. The Analyst Institute (AI) has been an invaluable partner in this kind of controlled research and measurement. Through AI, the field now has a large-scale, multi-election cycle continuum of data regarding effective registration and persuasion tactics.

However, most civic engagement, movement building, narrative, and culture change work does not easily conform with this assessment regime. Fortunately, a new cohort of academic researchers, many of whom have worked in grassroots groups and organizing, have emerged and are coordinating to create rigorous metrics and research protocols that measure and analyze the change and impact civic engagement groups aspire to. Hahrie Han, the inaugural director of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, is a leader in this transformative work. She and colleagues have developed their metrics and analyses while working with organizing groups such as Faith in Action and the



Center for Popular Democracy, as well as many issue advocacy groups. The result is a portfolio of tools, methodologies, and other learnings that can investigate and assess civic engagement and movement strategies and programs.

Funders, too, have made a commitment to building this suite of research and metrics provisions, and are engaging with academic and institutional leaders. The Research Collaborative Fund, for example, is a donor collaborative that supports field experiments and protocol development designed to further our understanding of how assessment tools and schemes can be applied to grassroots groups' work. In addition, the Collaborative hosts an ongoing and staffed working group of diverse academics interested in understanding social and political change through civic engagement programs and movements. ♦



## SECTION TEN

# FUNDERS

To a degree unusual in social and policy change philanthropy, civic engagement funders have invited both field leaders and capacity builders to be peer strategists and conversation partners as the field expands in scope and scale, and evolves its theories of change and impact.

Many of the philanthropic trailblazers in civic engagement fields have been medium-sized and place-based funders that ordinarily have closer ties to grantees and their needs than do large funders, and also are creative and flexible about resources they can provide beyond grants. In addition, these funders have played an active role in building and legitimizing the civic engagement field to larger and national funders. For example, staff from medium-sized foundations and donor tables have served on boards of leading intermediaries, such as FCCP and Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG), and have developed informal working groups among themselves and other funders to share learnings and coordinate funding and strategy.

Indeed, just as funders have encouraged groups to collaborate and share resources, civic engagement funders overall have themselves coordinated with one another to ever-greater degrees. A major outcome of this ethic is the proliferation of donor collaboratives aimed at supporting different aspects of the infrastructure. Housed at various intermediaries such as NEO Philanthropies, New Venture Fund, Windward Fund, and Proteus Fund, some of the national civic engagement funder collaboratives include the State Infrastructure Fund, the Partnership Fund, the Four Freedoms

As issue and identity funders find that progress demands electoral programs and grassroots and power building allies, they have looked to civic engagement as an engine for their work.

Fund, the Heartland Fund, Piper Fund, the Youth Engagement Fund, the New American Majority Fund, and the Climate and Clean Energy Fund.

Additional collaboratives don't pool or formally align funds the way other collaboratives do, but rather provide knowledge resources and recommendations. The Democracy Funders Collaborative convened by the Democracy Fund serves as a learning community for major funders concerned with structural democracy and other civic engagement endeavors such as media integrity, the census, and redistricting. And Both/And provides state civic engagement landscaping, strategic recommendations, and program gaps tracking to meet both short-term needs and long-term power and community building in the states. While these groups often include mostly institutional funders, a parallel network of civic engagement donor collaboratives exists made up largely of individual donors, labor union funders, and some place-based foundations.

Overall, the civic engagement sector is seeing a rapid increase in funders interested in all aspects of its thinking and work. As issue and identity funders — nationally and in states — find that progress on their strategies and goals demands electoral programs and grassroots and power building allies, they have looked to civic engagement as an engine for their work, and have in turn contributed significantly to the intellectual and relationship capital of the field. ♦





## SECTION ELEVEN

# ANALYSIS & CONCLUSION

The civic engagement infrastructure described in this paper has both propelled and responded to the high-velocity political and social changes of the past 15 years.

Indeed, it's hard to imagine that criminal justice reform, the Affordable Care Act, same-sex marriage, automatic voter registration, increases in the minimum wage, and many other federal and state reforms would have occurred without the spontaneous movements and long-term civic engagement commitments that created and supported these advancements.

This is why foundations from across the ideological spectrum have come to see civic engagement as a crucial strategy in realizing policy and issue objectives and other programmatic goals. In every election cycle, more foundations support allowable nonpartisan voter engagement work, and fund grassroots organizing and advocacy as a means of building authentic public will toward desirable change. And as racial, gender, disability, and economic rights and equity become priorities for funders across philanthropy and their grantees — who are increasingly led by women and people of color — there are added incentives to consider civic engagement as a core strategy toward justice and public interest policies.

*In every election cycle, more foundations support allowable nonpartisan voter engagement work, and fund grassroots organizing and advocacy.*

The 2020 census has been another doorway for national and state funders to think about and participate in civic engagement as a part of their overall institutional and programmatic strategies. Many have joined the 2020 Census Subgroup: the national census funder table. Others have joined funder tables in their cities and states, collaborating with funder colleagues for the first time, and learning about various civic engagement

endeavors. It will be interesting to see how, and how many of, these funders continue along a civic engagement funding path.

New opportunity has meant creating more civic engagement infrastructure and embracing new tools and methods to reach, organize, and mobilize.

For both funders and groups, this leap in opportunity has meant creating more civic engagement infrastructure in ever-more places, and embracing new tools and methods to reach, organize, and mobilize community members toward actions. In some states, dense and robust infrastructure has been funded and built.

While more investment and building are always needed, organizations in these state infrastructures are starting to wield influence and power.

In other states, the infrastructure can be somewhat thin and under-resourced. This is especially true where there are no in-state funders to help underwrite the infrastructure's development and connect with national funders. And it can take years to build and align sufficient leadership and organizational capacity to the point where they can affect opinion and policy. Funder patience, however, is often rewarded.

For funders interested in learning more about the strategies and sectors of civic engagement, one option is to join a funder collaborative that reflects the topical, regional, constituency, and risk tolerance most consonant with the funder's priorities. These collaboratives can be a crash course in the range of issues, groups, and leaders that constitute the collaborative's priorities.

On the other hand, sometimes funders wish to support civic engagement activities and thus find collaboratives useful precisely because the funder cannot devote time to becoming an expert, and therefore wishes to rely on colleague experts who can deploy their funding effectively. This scenario occurs frequently with election-related grantmaking.

In summary, the civic engagement infrastructure will continue to evolve rapidly to accommodate changing cultural and political circumstances. It will do so at the national, state, and local levels, and the degrees of collaboration and learning will accelerate with the increase of digital tools and forums for funders, field leaders, and capacity builders to convene.



As both governmental and civil society institutions seek to transform themselves to accommodate the next social, economic, and political era, civic engagement groups will be key advocates for a fair, inclusive, and prosperous common good. ♦



# TYPES AND METHODS OF NONPARTISAN VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Nonpartisan voter and electoral programs are central to civic engagement organizations, strategies, and theories of change. This section briefly describes the ways these organizations conduct their electoral and voter engagement work.

Civic engagement groups can engage voters for a variety of purposes. They can connect with voters in regard to an election to register them or to encourage them to vote. They can also educate them about an issue or persuade them to contact elected officials to express support or opposition regarding a matter that is the subject of debate for that official. In addition, they can use voter data to expand their base of supporters engaged with the organization as volunteers or donors.

For **voter targeting in connection with an election**, nonprofit groups typically target voters for one of two reasons. If the groups have the capacity to engage in grassroots lobbying, they can target voters to persuade them to vote a specific way on an issue that will appear on the ballot. Most 501(c)(3) civic engagement and issue advocacy organizations engage historically

impacted populations to encourage members of those groups to vote — increasingly important given rampant voter-suppression laws and policies across the country.

If organizations target voters to **engage them around pending legislation**, whether or not the communication constitutes grassroots lobbying depends on the circumstances. In other words, it depends on whether the matter is state or federal, as well as on the details of the communication — such as whether the communication simply reflects a view held by the organizations, or instead urges voters to take some specific action. Organizations rely closely on the advice of legal counsel and groups like the Alliance for Justice to determine whether a particular communication's effort must be categorized as grassroots lobbying or as public education, which would not draw on the organization's lobbying budget.

Civic engagement organizations use a number of methods to contact voters. One of the primary methods is through **door-to-door canvassing**. Organizations rely on volunteers or paid canvassers to work through lists containing the names and addresses of specific voters to contact. Canvassing is done in connection with elections to connect community residents' issue interests to the election and its outcome, thereby both educating people on the issues and persuading them to vote.

Canvassing can also be divided into two general groups in terms of the type of canvass being employed. Most canvassing can be considered "short-form" canvassing, which involves limited time at each door for the canvasser to maximize the number of doors canvassed. Another form of canvassing is referred to as "deep" or "conversational" canvassing. It involves greater expenditure of time at each door (often 20 minutes or even longer), but deeper conversations that are more interactive. Evidence suggests that deep canvassing yields the greatest benefits in terms of persuasive impact, but it's employed less often because of scalability challenges.

Another method of voter contact often employed by civic engagement organizations is **direct mail**. It's less engaging than canvassing, but is very cost-effective; with certain cohorts, such as voters over the age of 40, it has proven highly effective. The return on investment, therefore, can make direct mail an attractive option for groups.

In the past decade, **digital voter targeting** has become increasingly prevalent. Like direct mail, digital targeting — through platforms like Google ads, Facebook ads, or YouTube — is a relatively low-cost method for targeting voters and can be used for both persuasion and turnout. There is debate as to the efficacy of digital ads, particularly with regard to their persuasive impact.

**Phones** are another way civic engagement organizations reach voters through a variety of methods — from automated/recorded messages (robocalls), to volunteer phone banks, to paid (or “vended”) phone programs. Phone programs can be easier and more cost-effective for groups than canvass programs and, like other contact methods, can be used for both persuasion and turnout.

Finally, **text** can be used for voter contact in a number of ways, from longer-running, vended programs that automate texts sent to large swaths of voters, to newer platforms that enable peer-to-peer texting.

Overall, though, the nonpartisan civic engagement sector believes increasingly that deep canvassing and relational organizing programs that accent depth rather than transaction or shallow scale will, over the long term, be a more effective strategy for increasing civic engagement, especially with voters of color, single women, and young voters. Emphasizing deep and ongoing relationships also dovetails with civic engagement groups' efforts to build power and wield governing majorities. Other more expedient tactics can be aligned and layered into this core approach of depth, but alone they have mixed results.

There are additional tools and capacities civic engagement groups rely on for their voter engagement programs. What follows is a brief overview of some of the terms, assets, and practices civic engagement groups employ during elections.

**Voter data:** One of the key ways civic engagement groups organize and mobilize people and build power is through direct engagement of registered voters. State and local groups are able to do this because each state maintains a file of registered voters that is public information (with the exception of North Dakota, which has no voter registration but keeps data for everyone who votes). Voter registration is managed by a lead elections official for each county/parish and is then aggregated at the state level by the state elections official.

**Voter data vendors:** Groups can purchase voter file data directly from a state, but usually do not. Instead, voter file data is typically acquired by national vendors who augment that data with other data sources, such as consumer data. Those vendors, such as Catalist or TargetSmart, then make their data available as a contracted service to progressive organizations. Voter data vendors typically work with either progressive or conservative organizations, but not both.

**Voter engagement tools:** Organizations also need tools that help them use voter file data for the programs they run. The lead tool vendor for most progressive civic engagement organizations has been a company called NGP VAN (known as “the VAN” for short), although some data vendors also provide their own tools to interface with and use voter data. This is true for most states other than California, which has utilized a separate system solely for California. Tools like the VAN enable organizations to identify and pull lists of voters with whom they can communicate through various contact methods, such as canvassing, phone banking, direct mail, and online. Following their interactions with voters, groups can then add their own new data to individual voter records,



such as whether a voter has expressed an inclination to vote in a particular way, or has articulated other policy interests or concerns.

**Constituency communications and engagement:** In addition to voter contact programs, civic engagement organizations run programs to track and communicate with people to develop constituencies that identify with the organization's mission and can be engaged over time to support the organization and its work.

Organizations engaging through new online channels use a variety of tools and vendors. Typically, organizations work with two types of vendors. The first type provides organizations their primary database for managing constituent data with a related suite of tools that help organizations acquire and manage those relationships. These vendors are sometimes referred to as **constituent relationship management (CRM)** vendors. Examples include companies like Blue State, NationBuilder, Action Network, or Salsa Labs.

Working with CRM vendors, organizations can acquire constituent data through tools that encourage people to provide their name and contact information to the organization, such as various types of web forms, including petitions. Once acquired, constituents are engaged through tools that enable them to take various actions, such as sending an email to an elected official or a news outlet to express their views on a matter of public debate, as well as making a donation to the organization.

Some organizations work with vendors to match their constituent data to voter-file data in order to enhance their constituent database with publicly available information from the voter file, such as party affiliation, vote history, and/or more complete contact information. Most constituents can be matched to the voter file using simply their full name and zip code. If a match can be made, the organization can add to their CRM database all of the information on the matched voters that is available in the voter file. This helps the organization segment and communicate

with their own constituents in more targeted and personally relevant ways.

In addition to CRM vendors, organizations often work with vendors who provide constituent engagement tools designed for one specific function, such as enabling donations or other discrete actions. These vendors, such as ActBlue, may enable data integration with CRM vendors or other digital-tool providers so that vendors can pass constituent data back and forth, which makes for a more seamless interaction for the constituent.

**Public opinion and messaging:** The work of understanding public opinion can generally be broken down into two areas of focus. "Snapshot" polling is intended to gauge attitudes on a particular topic in the current moment; "deep research" is intended to more deeply understand public attitudes about one or more topics.

**Snapshot polling:** This method is generally more associated with the work of 501(c)(4) and political organizations in either electoral or lobbying contexts. The purpose of snapshot polling is to understand the current state of opinion (the "horse race") on an issue to either inform strategy or to influence the public and/or lawmakers.

**Deep research:** Deep research is intended to be more exploratory in understanding public attitudes that likely persist beyond the current moment. The purpose of this kind of research is typically to provide insight that can help organizations communicate more effectively on issues that will endure.

These are just some of the elements and tools civic engagement groups depend on as they conduct electoral and field building work. ♦

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## ABOUT FCCP

For more than thirty five years, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) has been a driving force in civic engagement grantmaking. FCCP is an innovative and thought-provoking network that shares an underlying conviction that all people deserve a voice in our democratic process. We seek a society where impacted communities have the power to make a difference on issues that affect their lives, a culture of participation that inspires their engagement, and an open and equitable democracy that offers meaningful opportunities to exercise their voice. From individual family foundations to state funding collaboratives to national grantmakers, our members come in all forms with varying interests and experiences in the civic participation space. We provide members the tools they need to support short- and long-term civic engagement strategies, create meaningful spaces for them to foster collaboration and strategize on critical areas of need, and deepen philanthropy's engagement in civic participation overall.

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