

UNITED WAY OF OLMSTED COUNTY



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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2022 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

United Way of Olmsted County is a community change organization that fights for the education, health, and financial stability of every person in our community. Olmsted County is a community with tremendous natural beauty, caring neighbors, and a strong economy. But too often, there are people in Olmsted County who are left behind and don't share in the vitality. An unacceptable income gap. Geographic and socio-economic segregation. Personal and collective isolation. Gross inequities along racial and ethnic lines. United Way fights to erase divisions, bridge divides, and right inequities. We work to connect people with resources that change lives and transform our community.

We do this in a variety of ways: We operate programs and shared resources that support the community, such as our 211 information and referral service and our Get Connected volunteer portal. We work collaboratively with partners from many organizations and walks of life to create systems change and implement solutions that elevate our community more than any single program or organization could. We provide financial, technical, and volunteer support for programs that make a difference.

At United Way, we LIVE UNITED with the change-makers, risk-takers, and problem-solvers to create a community where all people can thrive.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Minnesota and Olmsted County consistently report high voter turnout, some parts of our community still face barriers to full participation in civic engagement beyond just casting a vote. Leading up to the 2020 elections, UWOC convened a group of area leaders from key community constituencies—immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, people of color, and people living below 185% of the poverty line—with the goal of understanding what is needed for their communities to participate fully in elections. Together, we listened and learned about issues that keep people from feeling confident stepping into the voting booth and developed solutions to expand local voter engagement.

United Way of Olmsted County knows communities hold the solutions to the problems they face. As such, culturally specific organizations play a critical role in building power for their communities to participate in civic life. These organizations are ideally situated to understand the cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions of the people they serve; effectively engage community members; interpret and remove barriers that impede access to services; and bridge norms between communities and institutions.

United Way of Olmsted County's Civic Engagement RFP is designed to build the capacity of Olmsted County's cultural communities to advocate for self-determined solutions to the challenges they face by supporting civic engagement, providing education on roles and responsibilities of elected officials, and facilitating stronger connections between communities and local government.

We are issuing this Request for Proposals to establish partnerships and offer financial support for civic engagement activities. We will prioritize proposals from agencies serving and led by Black, Indigenous, people of color, and immigrant/refugee communities. Proposals from other communities disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement are also eligible to apply.

*For eligibility requirements and partner expectations, refer to page 5.

UNITED WAY FOCUS AREA: THRIVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Why Civic Engagement?

UWOC envisions a community where everyone has what they need to thrive. Currently, Olmsted County performs well in a variety of quality-of-life indicators, but some communities don't share in the prosperity. Research demonstrates that individuals who engage in civic processes feel more connected to their communities, which in turn has positive effects on their mental and physical health, as well as their economic situation. Access to community building or civic engagement activities allows people to build social capital and trust in their neighbors and community leaders. Strengthening social cohesion in turn leads to less neighborhood violence, greater economic opportunities, and influence to enact positive community change.

When most people think about civic participation and engagement, they think of voting. However, there are many forms of civic engagement. It may look like serving in a local leadership capacity in your neighborhood association, meeting with your city council member, or hosting a town hall. People who participate in civic life through voting, contacting elected officials, or writing letters to the editor have considerable influence on our community.

Barriers to Civic Engagement

The ease by which people can participate in such civic engagement activities varies based on a number of factors. For example, community members who are settling in Olmsted County from another country may face a learning curve on the journey to understand how our local political and governmental systems operate. They may also face barriers to learning those practices depending on their proficiency in the English language. For example, attending county, city, or school board meetings is a way to understand how those institutions operate and what they have jurisdiction over. Beyond attending public meetings, community members can apply or be appointed to local boards and commissions under the umbrella of local institutions (City, County, School District). Cultural, language, and transportation barriers can keep people from being able to attend or participate in such meetings. Until recently, many of those meetings were not accessible unless attended in person and may be held at times and locations that may be inaccessible or inconvenient for some people.

Olmsted County community members of color and foreign-born community members report feeling disconnected from their communities at higher rates than their white, US born counterparts. . One way to ensure people have what they need is for community members to advocate for their community's needs and find solutions to build more equitable systems. In our 2020

convenings to discuss barriers to civic participation, one theme stood out consistently: community members have a desire to learn more about local government and how best to interact with it. We heard that many residents don't fully understand the roles and responsibilities of local elected positions or how to directly connect with elected leaders to advocate for change.

Grant Opportunity

Connecting resources and skill-building opportunities to communities whose voices often aren't considered builds on individuals' innate capacity to advocate for themselves and their communities. For example, hosting a panel or forum for current elected officials to share information and answer constituent questions is an excellent way for community members to stay informed. Too often, however, these types of events don't consider key questions like: Is the event held in an accessible and a welcoming environment for all people? Are there interpreters available for both language and cultural interpretation? Those outside of a particular cultural community may not know what types of things to consider to appropriately address these issues.

For another example, people can support civic engagement by helping their family, friends, and neighbors register to vote. Voting practices and policies differ state by state, making voter education challenging. In Minnesota, people who have been incarcerated can vote once finished with all parts of probation, parole, and supervised release. Unless you're a part of a community that has been touched by incarceration, these nuances may be unknown to you.

When it comes to who are the best messengers and skill-builders, it is clear that members of historically marginalized communities are in the best position to drive civic engagement activities for their communities. Building community power and capacity will result in systems and communities that reflect the needs and aspirations of everyone in our community. As part of our larger commitment to creating a community where all people can thrive, we are investing in culturally specific organizations (CSOs) to build community power, influence, and social capital.

As communities know and research verifies, CSOs play a vital role in communities' wellbeing. Studies indicate that people of color, Native Americans, and immigrants often prefer to interact with organizations that reflect their culture and traditions. However, these organizations are less likely than their mainstream counterparts to receive grant funding and tend to be smaller in size. This underinvestment in CSOs is an effect and a symptom of the historical and ongoing marginalization of BIPOC and other minoritized groups.

To fully participate and drive self-determined solutions to community challenges, a community needs to be able to advocate for its needs and fix broken systems. UWOC aims to strengthen systems and cultivate leaders to build a community where all people can thrive, regardless of race or place. This investment in civic engagement of communities disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement aims to live out those goals. These grants are intended to provide resources and skill-build opportunities to both strengthen our systems to work for everyone and cultivate leaders to hold those systems accountable when they don't.

GRANT DETAILS & REQUIREMENTS

Anticipated Investments:

We anticipate a total investment of \$25,000 in Civic Engagement grants to agencies serving and led by communities that experience barriers to and currently have lower levels of civic participation. Grants are intended to support programs and activities that have the goal of increasing civic participation. All activities must be non-partisan.

The following are examples of non-partisan activity:

- Provide education on roles and responsibilities of elected offices and education on candidates
- Provide education on civic engagement and voting processes broadly
- Host community forums
- Conduct skill-building trainings to engage community members in civic activities
- Write letters to the editor
- Help register people who are eligible to vote

Activities may not include persuasion to support any particular candidate or party. Should an activity violate this non-partisanship requirement, funds must be returned, and your agency or fiscal host agency's tax-exempt status may be in jeopardy.

For more information on what are appropriate non-partisan activities for non-profits, please review either of the following resources from the MN Council of Nonprofits: [Staying Nonpartisan—Permissible Elections Activities Checklist](#) and [What Nonprofit Staff Can Say about the Elections](#).

The award amount is \$5,000. Funds will be disbursed in June.

ELIGIBILITY - KEY PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

To be considered for a Civic Engagement grant, agencies must meet the following criteria:

- Serve primarily low-income residents of Olmsted County
- Culturally specific organization that serves and is led by people from communities disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement (We will prioritize proposals from agencies serving and led by Black, Indigenous, people of color, and immigrant/refugee communities. Proposals from other communities disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement are also eligible to apply.)
- Be an eligible nonprofit agency

Eligible nonprofit agencies include:

- Agencies designated as a 501(c)3
- Faith-based organizations, provided they can demonstrate that there will be no explicitly faith-related content included in their programming and that there are no discriminatory restrictions on service recipients
- Unincorporated community groups, provided they can document their relationship with a proper fiscal sponsor.

Funding will not be provided for:

- Individuals
- For-profit entities
- Political campaigns, candidates, parties, or partisan activities
- Programming that includes theological functions or requires religious participation.

For the purposes of this proposal, we are defining CSOs as non-profit or community-based organizations that serve and are led by people from communities disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement. This includes, but is not limited to, organizations serving and led by Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and/or immigrants and refugees. **To be considered a CSO eligible for a Civic Engagement grant, organizations must meet all three of the following criteria:**

- At least 50% of people served by your agency activities are from a single group listed above or another population group disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement
- Programming generally provided, as well as civic engagement programming, is explicitly and intentionally designed to serve that community
- Organizational leadership, including but not limited to the Executive Director, reflects the community served

We welcome questions and open dialogue with potential partners. If you'd like to discuss your proposal or are wondering if this grant opportunity is a good fit for your agency, please contact Grace Pesch at gracep@uwolmsted.org or 507-287-1533.

EXPECTATIONS OF PARTNERS

Civic Engagement partners will be expected to:

- Meet 3 times as a cohort of funded agencies to build community together and discuss activities, successes, and areas for improvement.
- Set and maintain an agreed upon communication schedule with UWOC staff
- Provide a brief report on how funds were used to build capacity for their community to participate in civic engagement activities
- Reports may be provided either in writing or in a feedback conversation with United Way staff. Reports must be completed by December 31, 2022.

United Way of Olmsted County strives to cultivate relationships with community partners that are grounded in trust, open communication, and reciprocity. United Way strives to provide benefits to partner agencies beyond financial support, and we request (but do not require) that Civic Engagement partners support our community change efforts by:

- Creating or maintaining your organization's 211 listing
- Making volunteer engagement opportunities available to United Way's stakeholders, where appropriate
- Promoting United Way programming, where appropriate (e.g. providing SingleCare prescription discount cards to program participants)
- Offering a United Way employee giving campaign.

[A sample partner agreement for recipients of one-time grants can be found on our website.](#)

PROPOSAL & REVIEW PROCESS:

Timeline:

- Proposals due May 16, 2022
- Awards announced no later than May 23
- Funds disbursed no later than June 30

Proposal Review Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated by United Way of Olmsted County staff and community volunteers. Reviewers will look for evidence of the following:

- Organization serves and is led by people from a community disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement
- Proposed program or activities demonstrate strong impact or potential impact on civic engagement
- Agency demonstrates capacity to effectively engage their identified community

Financial Statements

In accordance with United Way of Olmsted County policy, applicants for one-time awards of \$20,000 or less are required to submit a program budget and the organization's most recent annual financial statement before board approval of funding.

There are additional restrictions to one-time award recipients that receive more than 2 one-time awards within a single UWOC fiscal period.

UNITED WAY'S ONLINE GRANTS PORTAL

[Proposals are accepted through United Way of Olmsted County's online grants portal.](#) The grants portal works best in Google Chrome.

In your web browser, type in to learn more about our funding priorities. To submit a proposal, click on "Funding Opportunities" to access the most up-to-date listing of funding opportunities. Select the opportunity that interests you and click on "apply". You'll be asked to log in or create a new user account in order to access the proposal materials.

For technical support with the proposal process, you may contact Zeni Aly, Community Impact Administrative Assistant, at 507-287-7877 or ZeniA@uwolmsted.org.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

My organization operates a program that already receives United Way funding through a different funding area. Can I submit a proposal to this RFP as well?

Yes. The purpose of this RFP is to increase participation in civic engagement activities for communities who disproportionately face barriers to doing so. Civic Engagement grants are independent of other United Way of Olmsted County funding.

I represent a faith-based organization / unincorporated group. Is my organization eligible?

- Faith-based organizations are eligible, provided they can demonstrate that no religious participation is required in their programming and that there are no discriminatory restrictions on service recipients.
- Unincorporated community groups are eligible, provided they can document their relationship with a proper fiscal sponsor.
- Individuals and for-profit entities are not eligible to receive United Way funding.

How can I make sure my proposal is as strong as possible?

Please review the eligibility (page 4) and review criteria (page 5) outlined in this Request for Proposals, as well as our complete evaluation rubric available on our website ([Civic Engagement Rubric](#)). Our staff is also happy to discuss your proposal plans with you.

What is the award amount?

We intend to support 5 agencies at \$5,000 each.

Can I save and edit my progress on the online proposal?

Yes. Our online grants portal requires a login to be created, which allows you to create, save, edit, and submit your proposal online. Go to our Grants webpage and click “Enter the Grants Portal”.

When can I expect to hear back from you?

You should expect to receive an automated notification that your proposal has been received shortly after submitting it. If you believe you’ve successfully submitted your proposal but you haven’t received an acknowledgement, please contact Zeni Aly (ZeniA@uwolmsted.org or 507-287-7877) for assistance. After submission, you should anticipate hearing about the status of your proposal by May 23rd, 2022.

APPENDIX—PROPOSAL QUESTIONS:

We have included the proposal questions here for your reference. All proposals should be submitted online through United Way's grants portal as described above. If you feel more comfortable sharing your answers via a phone conversation, please sign up for a time here.

1. Describe your organization's mission and programs/activities (1-2 paragraphs)

2. Civic Engagement grants are designed for organizations that primarily serve low-income residents and communities that have been historically marginalized (including, but not limited to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Hispanic, and Asian). Please describe the racial and ethnic identities of the primary community you serve. (1-2 paragraphs)

3. What percentage of the individuals you served last year are a part of that primary community?

4. Civic Engagement grants are designed for organizations that are led by people from the communities they serve. Is your Executive Director from the primary community you serve? Is 50% of your staff from the primary community you serve? Are 50% of your Board Members from the primary community you serve?

5. Please briefly describe how the community you serve has been impacted by barriers to civic engagement. (1-2 paragraphs)

6. Please describe the proposed activities and how they will increase your community's participation in civic engagement. (1-2 paragraphs)

7. Please attach the following:

- a. Your program budget for proposed activities under this grant (with full revenue and expense details)
- b. Contact list for your Board of Directors, including phone numbers and email addresses (for fiscal host and sponsoree if applicable)

If recommended for a grant award, you will be asked to submit the following additional documents by June 6th, 2022:

- c. Your organization's most recent financial statement
- d. Most recent 990 (or that of fiscal sponsor)
- e. IRS determination letter (or that of fiscal sponsor)
- f. Most recent audit (for organizations with annual revenues over \$750,000)
- g. Letter documenting fiscal sponsor agreement (for sponsored agencies)

APPENDIX—EVALUATION RUBRIC:

	Exceptional alignment may look like:
1. Agency serves and is led by a population disproportionately impacted by barriers to civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collects and shares participant demographics -Programming is culturally relevant to communities served -Clearly explains how agency's target population has been impacted by barriers to civic engagement -Agency is designed to serve Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrant, and/or refugee communities -At least 50% of participants are from agency's target population -Organization's Executive Director is from the community served -At least 50% of staff are from the community served -At least 50% of the board are from the community served
2. Activities show impact or potential impact in increasing participation in civic engagement by breaking down barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrates clear understanding of key barriers to civic engagement facing community -Proposed activities address identified barriers -Provide education on roles and responsibilities of elected offices and education on candidates -Provide education on civic engagement and voting processes broadly -Host community forums -Conduct skill-building training to engage community members in civic activities -Write letters to the editor -Help register people who are eligible to vote
3. Agency demonstrates capacity to execute community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Agency has led community mobilization activities before with identified audience -Agency demonstrates holding strong relationships with community members, leaders, and key cultural institutions -Agency demonstrates understanding of local

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