

THRIVING COMMUNITIES GRANTS



**STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS AND CULTIVATING LEADERS
THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Way of Olmsted County (UWOC) is a community change organization that unites people and resources to improve lives in our community. We operate shared resources and programming; collaborate with partners to create systems change; and provide financial, technical, and volunteer assistance to local programs. When we Live UNITED with partners from across the community, we can ensure every person in Olmsted County has what they need to thrive.

Building on the successes of previous funding opportunities that were designed explicitly for Culturally Specific Organizations (CSO), UWOC launched a Civic Engagement grant opportunity in April of 2022. We designed this funding opportunity to support CSOs in their efforts to increase their community members' ability to participate in civic activities. This looked different for each grant partner and the communities they serve, but together, all partners are strengthening civic engagement, providing education on roles and responsibilities of elected offices, and facilitating stronger connections between communities and local institutions.

In their own unique ways and for their own unique purposes, each organization connected the right information to the right people in the right way. We saw mobilization through in-person activities as well as through online videos in people's home languages and dialects.

These different activities are connected by a few common threads. This work was successful because it was focused on building relationships and meeting people where they are. Grantees recognized that relationships needed to be built both within communities and between their community members and institutions.

Each grantee found a way to tell the story of civic engagement as community building. Together, we can identify our greatest challenges as well as our greatest strengths. They helped people see how they can come together to build a better future.

Beyond the community work of grantees, the collaboration between UWOC and grantees also focused on building relationships and meeting people where they are. UWOC took feedback from previous collaborations with CSOs and built a new process for defining and demonstrating success. These processes placed conversation and relationships first and aimed to reduce administrative burdens on grantees, understanding that CSOs' time and energy is best spent on their mission-focused work.

This process was an extension of UWOC's commitment to Trust Based Philanthropy values and practices, which we have been implementing for the past five years. Doing so has required us to have discussions about power imbalances throughout philanthropy, especially in our own organization's practices. With the understanding that communities hold the solutions to the challenges they face, UWOC continues to refine how we support communities that face systemic inequities and barriers.

This report outlines the individual and collective community mobilization efforts of 6 CSOs to increase the civic engagement capacity of their respective communities. We share our lessons learned and advice to fellow funders looking to embark on similar work.

OUR PARTNERS



Somali American Social Service Association (SASSA)

SASSA serves Somali immigrants of Olmsted County through education and advocacy for youth, women, and small business owners. Civic engagement activities focused on educating community members on the voting process and about the roles and responsibilities of elected officials. They also wanted to facilitate conversations about changes the Somali community would like to bring forward to the community at large.



Indian Cultural Association of MN (ICAM)

ICAM promotes the multicultural heritage of the Indian diaspora of Rochester and its surrounding areas. The purpose is to connect, communicate, collaborate, and create a platform to serve and support the cultural and education needs of the Asian Indian community. Civic engagement activities focused on democracy and the importance of civic engagement. Such information, including election information, was provided during important cultural events, via social media platforms, and through partner agencies.



Ethiopian Community of Rochester MN (ECRM)

ECRM builds a strong community that provides social support to each other by volunteering, accessing resources, and sharing Ethiopian cultural values. They help to facilitate and organize the local Ethiopian community to promote better civic engagement and to play a part in the larger Rochester community. Civic engagement activities focused on connecting community members to opportunities to learn about the voting process, the candidates, and the roles and responsibilities of elected officials. They held educational events and provided transportation to civic activities, including rides to the polls on Election Day.

Damascus Way



Damascus Way provides a structured program that helps men transition from the correctional system by addressing their needs for successful integration back into their community. These programs are critical for stabilizing returning citizens as they begin to make adjustments in their lives, seek employment, secure housing, and rebuild relationships with support networks and family. Civic engagement activities included hiring a previously incarcerated project coordinator to educate participants on policy, legislation, elected officials, influential people, and the best pathways to be successful when aiming to influence the legislative system locally and/or state-wide.

Barbershop & Social Services



Barbershop & Social Services is a unique one-stop non-profit that utilizes the existing infrastructure of the barbershop to provide historically vulnerable populations the resources to be successful, all under one roof. The mission of Barbershop & Social Services is to break the cycle of poverty by promoting economic independence to low-income men and their families via financial literacy training, career development tools, job readiness preparation, a network of support, and essential life-skills training. Civic engagement activities included forums with elected and political leaders through their popular Barbershop Talk Facebook Live series. Local and statewide NAACP leaders, Attorney General Keith Ellison, and other local Black leaders discussed the state of the Black vote, how policies impact the Black community, how to vote with a criminal record, and other relevant topics.

Pamoja Women



Pamoja Women's mission is to empower and liberate East African women and girls through advocacy and amplification of their voices. Pamoja Women's programming includes health education and physical fitness, youth sports, English classes, and food distribution. Civic engagement activities included educational sessions on how to get involved civically, helping women register to vote, providing adult mentors for youth joining their school government, and hosting a large community event to discuss the importance of exercising your voice and being represented in local leadership.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING COMMUNITY, BUILDING POWER

When most people think about civic participation and engagement, they think of voting. However, there are many forms of civic engagement. We asked partners what “civic engagement” meant to their communities. Some people said it went far beyond “door-knocking” and voting, that it was about building confidence, agency, and a sense of control over policies that affect one’s life.

WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

“SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, GIVING YOUR TIME AND MONEY, OR WHATEVER IT MAY BE”

Indian Cultural Association of MN (ICAM)

“SHOWING HOW YOU ARE INVESTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY”

Damascus Way

“COMMUNITY ADVOCACY”

Barbershop & Social Services

“WORKING TOGETHER”

Somali American Social Service Association

“UTILIZING YOUR RIGHTS (AS A CITIZEN)”

Pamoja Women

“LEARNING WHAT IS GOING ON IN YOUR COMMUNITY”

Ethiopian Community of Rochester MN





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING COMMUNITY, BUILDING POWER

People who participate in civic life through voting, contacting elected officials, or writing letters to the editor have considerable influence on our community. In Olmsted County, community members of color and those born outside of the United States report feeling disconnected from their communities at higher rates than their white, US-born counterparts.¹

Access to community building or civic engagement activities allows people to build social capital and trust in their neighbors and community leaders. Strengthening trust in turn leads to increased social cohesion, greater economic opportunities, and greater influence to enact positive community change. We asked partners to share what barriers and challenges people faced when trying to engage civically. For some, language and transportation barriers prevented people from participating in civic activities. Others cited a lack of knowledge and familiarity with the process, both for US- and foreign-born community members. Many partners noted that there was a general lack of trust in voting and government based on experiences in their home countries.

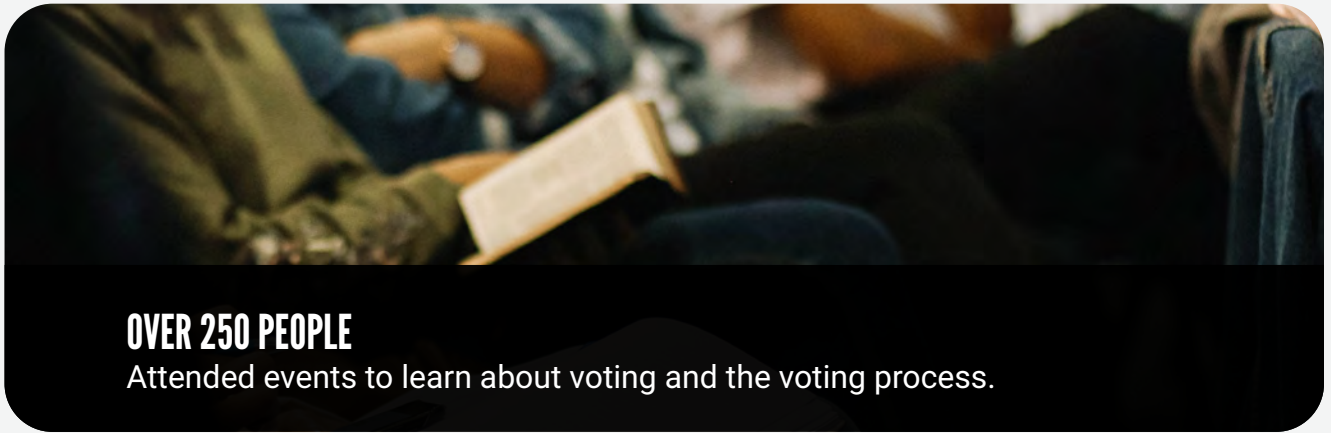
“Many of the Somali immigrants who settled in our community were fleeing war and corruption in the governments back home. One of the first hurdles SASSA had to overcome was dispelling myths about supposed retaliation for community members depending on how they cast their votes, which is what they could have faced in their home country.”

– Abdullahi Yussuf (SASSA)

Andre Crockett, founder of Barbershop & Social Services, has highlighted the feeling of forgottenness experienced by many Black community members. He shared that time and time again, candidates show up to their community spaces to share campaign information and ask for support, but by the time they are voted in, the promises go unfulfilled. Providing ongoing connections between the Black community and elected officials is necessary to build sustaining and trusting relationships.

¹ *Community Health Needs Assessment 2019. Olmsted County, MN www.olmstedcounty.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/2019CHNA.pdf*

THROUGH THIS WORK



OVER 250 PEOPLE

Attended events to learn about voting and the voting process.



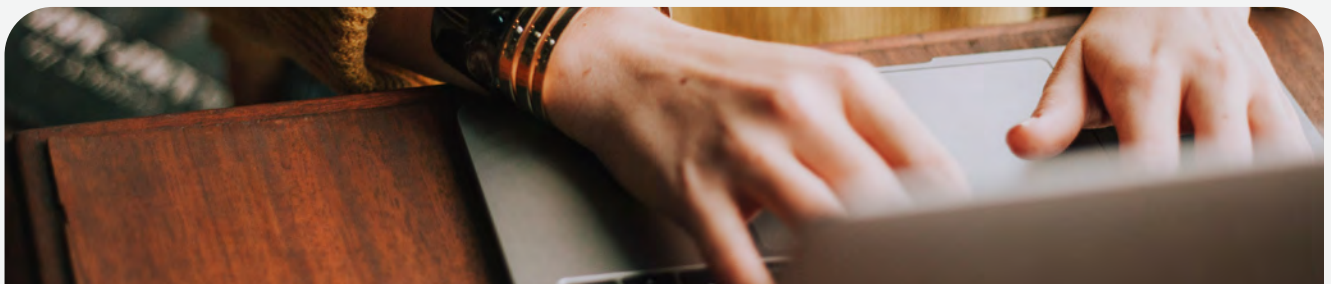
6 MEETINGS

Were held with elected officials to learn about processes and share community insights.



AROUND 500 PEOPLE VOTED

After being provided necessary resources, such as transportation or interpretation support.



NEARLY 6,000 PEOPLE

Accessed civic engagement information through their preferred media channels.

OUR PARTNERS' JOURNEY





Source: SASSA

SOMALI AMERICAN SOCIAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION BUILDING TRUST WHILE EMPOWERING PEOPLE

In the fall of 2022, six nonprofits embarked on a journey to connect and activate members of their communities.

SASSA leaders understood that community members held distrust and fear when it came to participating in civic activities. They knew that that it would take a lot to convince people of the value of exercising their civic responsibilities.

SASSA held a large community forum in August 2022, followed by several smaller events through the fall. Nearly 150 people attended these forums, during which community members discussed the voting process, ballot review, and the impact of civic engagement on the community.

Once community members started talking about the challenges facing their community, it was easier to help people see how voting can impact their day-to-day life. Many community members highlighted the lack of access to affordable housing or challenges finding resources to help their kids succeed in school.

“Civic engagement is...“Kaqeybgalka Madaniga” – a word with many meanings but the main definition is to provide solutions to the problems the public faces. While the context of this word may vary the essence is serving the public to engagement and dialogue is widely accepted.”

- Abdullahi Yusuf, SASSA

One conversation ended up inspiring parents to help support other parents in the community to navigate the education systems to support their children. They realized they could use each other as resources when their kids were struggling, or they were struggling to understand what the schools needed from them. When it came to much larger issues beyond their personal control, they realized those issues could be addressed through civic engagement.

“We started with politics, but it turned into a much larger discussion.”

- Abdullahi Yusuf, SASSA

This election season also saw multiple Somali candidates running for local office. Somali community members shared how inspired they were by seeing people who look like them and share their culture finding success in local politics. Many people shared that they hope to run in upcoming elections and work toward increasing representation in our local government.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNITY EVENT




- ✓ Voting Process
- ✓ Voter Registration
- ✓ Ballot Review
- ✓ Community/Civic Impact

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5TH
3:00 P.M - 6:00 P.M

ROCHESTER AREA FOUNDATION
12 ELTON HILLS DR NW,
ROCHESTER, MN 55901

Contact Us

 www.sassamn.org

INDIAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

SHARING RESOURCES AND CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Rochester is home to vibrant and active South Asian communities. ICAM wanted to work within this existing network to engage and motivate community members to participate in the 2022 election. Through a variety of collaborations with other community organizations that serve Asian communities, as well as the broader Rochester community, ICAM was able to share resources about the voting process to help people feel prepared for the upcoming election. They successfully incorporated voting awareness into their existing community events, newsletters, and through one-on-one conversations. Voting resources focused on how to register, what to expect on your ballot, and how to get information about candidates.

One of ICAM's primary accomplishments was cultivating a community of volunteers. India has 25 official languages, and ICAM volunteers spent numerous hours creating educational videos in 10 of those languages. Volunteers were quick to provide their help with video work and interpretation, with one volunteer arriving to their video shoot still in their work scrubs and with the clock nearing 8 pm. ICAM leaders were impressed by how much the community wanted to help with this project.



Source: ICAM

DEMOCRACY IS IN OUR

HANDS

“When this work happens, the volunteers find you. They are inspired by the work and want to join. Volunteers will come forward when the cause interests them.”

- Shyamala Bhat, ICAM

In total, ICAM volunteers produced 11 promotional videos that were viewed over 300 times before the election. They effectively used their social media presence to share content and timely communication. ICAM leaders also shared that this project allowed them to move outside of their comfort zone and make new connections with leaders and governmental institutions. They look forward to continuing and expanding their civic engagement work and have created a new grant committee to pursue additional funding.



Source: ICAM



ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY OF ROCHESTER MN

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

“We live here geographically, but emotionally, socially, everything, we live back at home. Their attachment is to their hometowns back home. We have to engage our community to be part of this larger community.”

- Yit Mirete

Member of the ECRM leadership team describing a common sentiment among members of the Ethiopian community.

A lack of connection with the community here in the US was one of the reasons civic engagement stood out as an important activity for ECRM. Typically, Ethiopian community members stay up to date on politics in Ethiopia, especially since the last two years have been tumultuous. The United States became involved in conversations with Ethiopian representatives regarding the country’s conflict, which in turn inspired local Ethiopian Americans to start paying closer attention to United States politics.

This was perfect timing for ECRM to start talking about voting, roles and responsibilities of elected officials, and other ways to get involved in local politics. During the most recent election, because many Ethiopians across the United States were paying close attention to both American and Ethiopian politics, there were instances of Ethiopians advocating on Capitol Hill. In the Washington, DC, area there is a large population of Ethiopian Americans, and their spirit, drive, and fight were inspirational to the community in Rochester, MN.

Source: ECRM

READY?




SET?

VOTE!

Through their civic engagement work, ECRM was able to engage and inspire community members to get involved in the things they care about. ECRM connected with over 200 community members through two well-attended community forums and additional online engagements. People became comfortable sharing what topics they'd like to learn more about in the future. Through these discussions, ECRM learned how important getting access to starting businesses is for members of their community. They also learned that many community members want to build better relationships with the local police force as well.

ECRM plans on hosting town halls in the future to explore the topics community members brought up during 2022 forums.

Below: Drawing on Ethiopia's love of running, ECRM created a voter information brochure with a running theme and in the colors of the Ethiopian flag that would resonate with Ethiopian-American voters.

| Ready? | Set? | Vote! |
|---|---|--|
|  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > ለመምረጥ ከዚህ በፊት ተመዝግበዋል? (Are you registered to vote?) > https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us/VoterStatus.aspx > ከምርጫው ቀን በፊት ለመመዝገብ (To register to vote) > https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/register-to-vote > በምርጫ ወረቀቱ ላይ ያለው ምንድነው? (What is on my ballot?) > ለምርጫ የቀረቡት ዕውቀቶች እንዲሁ እንደሆኑ በትንቢት ሁሉ በደንበ ማወቅ እንዲችሉ ፡ እትዳቸውን ሊሰሩ ያስገቡትን ለመረዳት > https://candidates.sos.state.mn.us/ |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> በኅዳር 8፡ 2022 አጠቃላይ ምርጫ ላይ ድምጽ ለመስጠት የሚጠበቅ ሰዓት ከስራ ዕረፍት መውሰድ ይቻላል <input type="checkbox"/> አሰሪዎችን በመጠየቅ ከስራዎ ሽፍት እስከ ሁለት ሰዓት የሚደርስ ጊዜ የደዋዝ ክፍያ የሚያስቆርጥ አረፍት በመውሰድ ምርጫው ላይ እንዲሳተፉ ህግ ይፈቅድሎታል <input type="checkbox"/> የት ነው የም መርጠው? (Where do I vote?) > የሚጠቀሙትን አድራሻ በማስገባት፡ የት ሂደው መምረጥ እንዳለበት ለማወቅ ይችላሉ > https://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/ > ምርጫ ወረቀቱ ምን ይመስላል? (Sample ballot) > https://myballotmn.sos.state.mn.us/ |  <p>2022 የምርጫ ቀናት</p> <p>ቀደም ብለው መምረጥ ከፈለጉ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ከሰኔ 24 እስከ ነሀሴ 8 ድረስ በፖስታ ወይም በአካል ይምረጡ። <input type="checkbox"/> ህምሉ 18፡ በተዳሚ የምርጫ ቀን ጊዜ ለመቆጠብ ከኮምፒውተር 18 በፊት እስተደመው ይመዝገቡ። <p>ቀዳሚ ምርጫ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ማክሰኞ ነሀሴ 9 (እስራኢን ከሆን) <p>ቀደም ብለው ይመጡ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ከመስከረም 23 እስከ ህዳር 7 ድረስ በፖስታ ወይም በአካል ይምረጡ። <input type="checkbox"/> ጥቅምት 18፡ በተዳሚ የምርጫ ቀን ጊዜ ለመቆጠብ ከጥቅምት 18 በፊት እስተደመው ይመዝገቡ። <p>ዋናው አጠቃላይ የምርጫ ቀን</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ማክሰኞ ህዳር 8 (November 8)</p> |



Source: Damascus Way

DAMASCUS WAY RE-ENTRY CENTER

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Damascus Way (DW) works with previously incarcerated community members and understands the stories most often told about this community. A primary focus of DW's civic engagement work was "narrative change," showing how valuable and important these folks can be in their home communities.

Damascus Way's Civic Engagement Coordinator, Jim, worked to make sure that DW residents were a positive presence in their neighborhood. Residents worked alongside other neighbors to address traffic issues and installed safety measures to ensure safe crosswalks for kids to access the local park. Jim also coordinated with other community members to volunteer alongside DW residents and create authentic relationships.

As part of their narrative change strategy, Damascus Way works with youth interns to sensitize the next generation to the barriers faced by people who were previously incarcerated. This year, their youth intern faced his own internal biases while working at Damascus Way. He learned about the way that race affects how people experience the larger systems in our country and how it doesn't always come down to the individual choices people make. Their intern proudly shared his new perspective with his peer community and just how powerful his experience was for understanding people's life experiences.



Many great conversations were had about what it means to return to a community post-incarceration and how to start investing back into the community. The success of these narrative change strategies energized Damascus Way staff to pursue additional resources to continue this type of work and expand it throughout their other sites state-wide. “(Through this grant) We learned how integral this type of work can be to move the Damascus Way vision forward.”

- Tierre Webster, Executive Director

Source: Damascus Way

Damascus Way has since received a grant from another funder to create civic engagement teams at each of their locations which will help coordinate employment, housing, and legislative advocacy work.



Source: Damascus Way



Local Candidate Forum (Source: Babershop & Social Services)

BARBERSHOP & SOCIAL SERVICES CENTERING BLACK VOICES

Barbershop & Social Services has been creating a space for real conversations for many years. In prior election cycles, they have shared critical information with their audience; this time around, the tone shifted.

During this election season, they hosted 6 forums and saw 600 views across all videos. Their audience came prepared and saw the value of the connections this platform can provide for them. One of the most popular forums featured candidates running for County Attorney and highlighted the importance of criminal justice reform to the Black community in Olmsted County. With the recent closure of the local Juvenile Detention Center, this conversation allowed community members to get answers on what's next for our community's youth who are involved in the justice system.



Barbershop & Social Services discussed how they want to be seen as a key culturally specific news outlet on par with more mainstream media outlets. They felt like this election season helped candidates see them as a strong partner to reach the Black community. When Attorney General Keith Ellison and Senator Bernie Sanders hosted a rally in town, Barbershop founder Andre Crockett was given a press pass, which was a great success.

Outside of the online forums, Barbershop & Social Services connected with community partners to knock on doors and share information on the upcoming election. They were able to connect with nearly 30 community members; the experience transcended what we usually consider door knocking to be about. "Door knocking is not just about getting out the vote, it's about community engagement, building rapport and relationships."

- Andre Crockett Founder of Barbershop & Social Services

In all things Barbershop & Social Services does, love and accountability for community comes first.

Source: www.postbulletin.com





PAMOJA WOMEN CULTIVATING LIFELONG COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

For Fatuma Ahmed and Khadija Ali, co-founders of Pamoja Women, civic engagement was as much about building confidence and empowering women and girls as it was about getting people to the polls. Pamoja Women did this by hosting voter education and mock voting sessions, promoting voting through social media and at events, and supporting and advocating for Somali voters at polling places.

Pamoja Women helped register 500 women to vote through their events and worked with 15 volunteers to help facilitate support for people at the polls. They also held weekly mock voting and study sessions so women could learn about candidates and know what to expect on Election Day.

One of Pamoja Women's strengths is cultivating a strong volunteer base who collectively represent multiple dialects of Somali and other East African languages spoken in Rochester. These women gave people rides to events and polling places, provided food and water to people waiting to vote on Election Day, and served as interpreters and advocates when people went into the voting booth.

Due to the contentious political climate, Pamoja Women and their volunteers were prepared to advocate for individuals should they experience any questioning from people at the polls. In the past, Somali community members said their citizenship had been questioned. They also shared that they lacked guidance if someone made a mistake, like coming to the wrong polling place, and that poll workers had not been forthcoming with assistance in those cases. In anticipation of these needs, Pamoja Women volunteers were there to answer questions and serve as advocates so community members would feel supported and be able to cast their ballots successfully.

Pamoja Women worked with a woman who had become a citizen in 1996 but had never voted in an American election. She attended multiple events at Pamoja Women, sitting quietly and taking notes. She cast her vote this past fall and remarked, “I didn’t think it was going to be this easy. What we did today was good.”

By the end of Election Day, almost 1,000 people had shared with Pamoja Women that they had successfully voted.

In addition to getting out the vote, Pamoja Women worked with 35 high school girls to learn about student council and meet with previous student council members. They learned about student council as a vehicle to start getting involved in our local community and meet elected officials. Pamoja Women looks forward to seeing these girls either run for student council or start volunteering their time to support the efforts at their schools this coming fall.

Fatuma and Khadija see momentum for their community, especially for women and girls. Through these civic engagement activities and their existing programs, Pamoja Women is gaining visibility in the community and seeing the impact of their work grow.

“This experience gave them [women] more confidence and gave us more hope. Instead of being stuck in one place, we see movement happening. People are finally doing something with their citizenship status. It’s working for us and giving us hope”

- Khadija Ali, Co-Founder of Pamoja Women



OUR LEARNING JOURNEY

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT GRANTS: OUR LEARNING JOURNEY

In 2020, UWOC staff coordinated community leaders from a wide variety of cultural communities to learn more about the barriers faced by community members as they entered the ballot box to cast their votes. In this Get Out the Vote work, the issue that rose to the top was the gap in access to culturally and linguistically appropriate voting information.

UWOC staff worked to provide access to multi-lingual voting resource materials (print, web, and video) for partners to share with their communities. Partners reported these materials were helpful to their mobilization efforts; however, UWOC staff felt the process was more “top down” than they had intended. In preparation for the next election cycle in 2022, UWOC staff wanted to shift this process to be community-built from the ground up. This led us to develop Civic Engagement Grants of \$5,000 for CSOs to directly engage and support their community members in participating in civic activities.

To do this work differently, we leaned on our Trust-Based Philanthropy (TBP) values and re-examined our grantmaking practices. One of the core TBP practices is to simplify and streamline paperwork, which focuses on dialogue and leads to mutual accountability and trust. Many grants include funders assigning which metrics partners should capture and report on, which prioritizes the learning of the funding organization over the learning of the grantee. Some of those metrics may not be useful for other purposes or may not even be captured and collected for any reason other than that funding report.

6 PRACTICES OF TRUST-BASED GRANTMAKING



Give Multi-Year, Unrestricted Funding

Long-term flexible funding allows organizations to allocate resources where they are most needed, making room for innovation, emergence, and impact.



Do the Homework

It is the funder's responsibility to get to know the issues and organizations in their funding landscape, saving nonprofits time in the early stages of the vetting process.



Simplify & Streamline Paperwork

Nonprofits spend an inordinate amount of time on reports and applications. A more relational approach saves time and helps funders gain a deeper understanding of the work.



Be Transparent & Responsive

When funders model transparency, power awareness, and vulnerability, it helps build relationships rooted in trust and mutual accountability.



Solicit & Act on Feedback

A foundation's work will be inherently more successful if it is informed by the expertise and experience of grantee partners and communities.



Offer Support Beyond the Check

Funders have more to offer than dollars alone. Responsive, adaptive, non-monetary support bolsters leadership, capacity, and organizational health.



In the spirit of collaboration and mutual accountability, we met with each of our Civic Engagement partners and asked, “What does success look like to you?” or “What is your end goal?” This allowed grantees to decide what information was relevant to them and would help move their work forward instead of potentially being a burdensome activity. When it came time for reporting back on those metrics, we also took a conversation-based approach. We positioned UWOC staff as the note-takers and report writers to reduce the administrative burden on grantees.

Through this conversation-based practice we learned more about our partners, their work, and their communities than we may have otherwise. Instead of taking in static information without the dynamic ability to ask for elaboration, we had a lively exchange that told a better story. We believe this change allowed us to learn alongside our grantees and support their success without taking too much time and attention away from their mission critical work.

When we asked those learning questions of our grantees, we saw patterns emerge. While they were working within different community contexts, many organizations had the same end goals such as seeing more of their community members represented in elected positions or seeing more of their community input implemented.

UWOC staff saw the opportunity to bring people together to help our grantees achieve their goals. Community work is powered by relationship-building, and we aimed to have multiple ways to create new relationships. We brought our grantees together to build trust with institutions and understand pathways to share feedback or run for office. We also brought our grantees together to share wisdom and learn from each other.

Through these relationships and conversations, UWOC learned many things as well. We heard real-time feedback from partners on how critical it is for community institutions to be able to reach them and how helpful it was to be in that space together to build relationships. We saw new relationships develop between culturally specific organizations, and we saw how eager everyone was to share resources and support. We gathered feedback through a post-process survey and learned how to make our processes clearer and more rooted in trust.

Through every iteration of work and through every stage of the process, learning was happening. **We invite you to follow along on our learning journey.**



LEARNING ALONGSIDE OUR INSTITUTIONS

When we convened our Get Out the Vote work in 2020, our partners told us that their communities didn't have easy ways to access information about local governmental institutions, especially when it came to information about voting. When we embarked on this work again in 2022, we knew we needed those institutions at the table. For our first partner meeting with all six grantees, we invited representatives from local County, City, and School District leadership. These representatives shared information on their institution's roles and responsibilities, which elected officials represent them, and how community members can stay connected and provide input.

This was an engaging conversation that also led to important discussion about how different communities access information. There was tension between the idea that communities need to educate local government on how to best connect with them versus the idea that local government needs to intentionally create relationships and be in community spaces that aren't mainstream.

This was a space that allowed for dialogue and relationship building. One of our partners had been struggling to connect with someone at the city to help address a traffic safety issue and said the face time with city staff was valuable for moving that process forward. Beyond gathering key information for community members and building important relationships, bringing together leaders from CSOs and local government was also a way to showcase the multiple types of power and influence in the community. While governmental leaders have deep connections with residents who have the time, money, and individual power to engage with local government, nonprofit leaders have the power and influence to mobilize their respective cultural communities. Each set of leaders needs each other's expertise to be successful.



LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Peer learning was an additional way to support the leadership of partners. Half of the organizations funded through the grant were relatively new, while the other half had been operating for more than a decade. We intentionally facilitated meetings where our partners could network with each other and learn from each other's successes.

For example, Andre Crockett of Barbershop & Social Services shared his experiences navigating the nonprofit and community advocacy landscape. He shared ways leaders can remain non-partisan when mobilizing their community during the election season.

Multiple partners shared similar challenges of wrestling with the dual roles of nonprofit leader and community member of color, especially when interacting with elected officials at seemingly non-partisan events. For example, taking photos with political candidates can be viewed by some as partisan or an endorsement by the organization when one was not intended.

Such challenges are especially nuanced for leaders of culturally specific organizations participating in civic engagement work. Leaders of color find it is difficult for others to disentangle their identities as an individual and as a leader of their organization, given the type of community engagement work they do. These discussions were important for partners, including those who already had years of experience in community work. In addition to opening up about their challenges and learning from each other, some of our partners had never worked together before and were able to forge new relationships for future collaborations.

LEARNING FROM OUR PARTNERS

Through our partner convenings, performance measure conversations, and reporting conversations, we continue to learn how to best partner with grassroots and culturally specific organizations. In a post-funding survey, all our partners reported that both the connections we made and the resources we provided were valuable for helping move their activities forward.

We learned that we need to improve the clarity and communication of our partnership expectations. Some partners felt that reporting requirements and the deadline for spending funds could have been more clearly spelled out. We plan to use this feedback to improve the clarity of all our grant agreements moving forward.

This grantmaking process was developed in response to community needs expressed through previous convenings and collaborations. Most (80%) of our grantees reported that they had plans to begin civic engagement work before this funding opportunity was announced. We did hear from our partners that while the grant funding was helpful, they could do more with more financial resources. Such broad community interest suggests that there are existing opportunities for funders to support non-profit organizations in this kind of work.

What we couldn't provide through additional funding at this time, we aimed to provide through support beyond the check, another Trust Based Philanthropy practice. Support beyond the check is how funders can contribute additional resources to their grantees beyond their funding commitments.

Many small nonprofits, especially CSOs, must prioritize mission work over marketing and fundraising. To better support our grantees, we hope this Civic Engagement impact report will provide our partners with a ready-to-use report that they can leverage to showcase their organization's work and secure additional funds. At the time of this report, three of the grantees have sought or secured additional civic engagement focused funding, and we hope this report will support those continued efforts.

We appreciate our partners' honesty and willingness to provide constructive feedback about our processes. We find that candor is necessary for building the types of relationships we know can lead to successful partnerships. We believe "work only moves at the speed of trust" and look forward to even greater impact as we build a deeper sense of trust between us and our community partners. For other funding entities that are interested in pursuing this work, please see our "Advice to Fellow Funders" section.





ADVICE TO OUR FELLOW FUNDERS

United Way of Olmsted County is a learning organization. We are committed to gathering feedback from our partners to understand how we can reduce burdens, improve connections, and provide meaningful support through our grantmaking and other partnerships. We would love to share what we have learned so far.

If you are a funder looking to fund civic mobilization in your community or partnering with culturally specific organizations:

- Get familiar with Trust Based Philanthropy practices
- Build relationships with grassroots or culturally specific organizations year-round, not just when funding opportunities are open
- Have conversations with the culturally specific organizations in your service area about topics other than funding: How can their work inform your understanding of community need? How can you share opportunities to help them advance their work?
- Don't be afraid to design entirely new application and reporting processes that meet the goals of your work

If you would like to learn alongside United Way of Olmsted County, please don't hesitate to reach out.

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