

GIVING INSIGHTS

Strengthening Our Democracy



The interests of our funding community inform the choice of issues we cover in each Giving Insights publication.

Overview

There are many strategies a donor can use to approach democracy-building work. For example, donors can focus on increasing voter access and voting rights, supporting legislation and lobbying efforts, or expanding civic education and participation (citizenship). These efforts may be nonpartisan (do not take sides on an issue), partisan (favor one side of an issue), or bipartisan (both sides work together on an issue). Below are various giving strategies for you to consider.

Guide Update, July 2020

We created this guide to organizations working to strengthen our democracy in 2018. The recommendations still stand. The organizations are all doing excellent work to ensure that we live in a country that represents the people, with appropriate checks and balances to power. We also recognize that this is an unprecedented time, with more concerns surrounding election security and voting access than ever before. In this context, we have updated this guide with four additional organizations that focus specifically on ensuring that the 2020 election is safe, secure, and accessible to all voters.

Using a Donor-Advised Fund to Strengthen Democracy

Donors with donor-advised funds (DAFs) at the Federation may recommend grants to tax-exempt organizations classified under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. These organizations operate for religious, charitable, scientific, or educational purposes and are not supposed to engage in any partisan, candidate-related activities. Tax-exempt organizations may engage in convening, educating, issue advocacy, organizing, and other activities, such as voter registration (if conducted in a nonpartisan manner).

Some 501(c)(3) organizations are affiliated with 501(c)(4) partners to engage in additional advocacy work. Based on our policy, you can recommend grants to the 501(c)(3) organization and can deploy funds outside of your DAF to contribute to the 501(c)(4) organization.

Our community is giving to many of the Jewish and secular organizations listed below. You may want to consider these when implementing your giving strategy.



Advocacy



Bipartisan



Citizenship



Nonpartisan



Voting

ORGANIZATIONS FOCUSED ON VOTING & ELECTIONS

<p>Center for Secure and Modern Elections</p>	<p>Aligns bipartisan, pro-voter campaigns in states across the country to modernize the voting system, making elections more efficient and secure. Works with community leaders to create state-by-state plans to make elections more modern, secure, and easy to access. For the 2020 election, focusing on specific cities and states where there is concern about people's abilities to vote. Actions also include recruiting and training poll workers.</p>	
<p>Democracy Works</p>	<p>Develops technology and upgrades the infrastructure of our democracy to make sure everyone can vote in every election. Projects include TurboVote, an online tool to ensure ease of voting (including the backend for Facebook's voting reminders) along with other tools and critical data for voters and elections officials.</p>	
<p>Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights</p>	<p>Advances and protects the right to vote and to ensure that the right is afforded equally to all. Runs the 866-OUR –VOTE election protection hotline and works to make lawyers available on election day to ensure election protections.</p>	
<p>Voter Participation Center</p>	<p>Helps people register and vote, focusing on the 'rising electorate' of young people, people of color, and unmarried women. Since 2003 VPC has helped 4.6 million people register and get to the polls.</p>	

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)	Represents Jewish values and concerns in the public sphere and civic arena. They believe that the Jewish community's safety depends on a robust democracy and strong relationships between minority groups. JCRC partners with many of the secular organizations listed below.	   
Bend the Arc	A movement of tens of thousands of progressive Jews across the country building a more just society. They work in solidarity with other progressive organizations to fight for the soul of our nation.	
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)	Strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.	 
The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC)	Mobilizes around federal, state, and local legislation, supports and develops congregational leaders, and organizes communities to create a world overflowing with justice, compassion, and peace.	

SECULAR ORGANIZATIONS

Brennan Center for Justice	Based at NYU School of Law, works to reform, revitalize – and when necessary, defend – our country's systems of democracy and justice.	 
Convergence Center for Policy Resolution	Convenes people and groups with divergent views to build trust, identify solutions, and form alliances for action on critical national issues.	
Faith in Action Bay Area	A network of congregations and community leaders. They take action locally, statewide, and nationally on key issues impacting communities.	
Generation Citizen	Believes all students have the right to civics education that prepares them to participate in our democracy.	
The League of Women Voters	Envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate.	 
Protect Democracy	Works to prevent our democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.	 

Strengthening Democracy Outside of a Donor-Advised Fund

Organizations conducting partisan, candidate-related activities may not support their partisan political initiatives with grants from DAFs. Below are descriptions of four different groups.*

501(c)(4) Group — 501(c)(4) groups are commonly called “social welfare” organizations. They may engage in political activities including lobbying, endorsing, and opposing political candidates and, subject to applicable campaign finance laws, donating money to political campaigns, as long as these activities do not become their primary purpose. Note that some nonprofit organizations establish both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) entities to conduct different types of work.

527 Group — A tax-exempt group classified under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code that raises and spends money on influencing the election or appointment of individuals to public office. These groups are typically parties, candidates, committees, or associations organized for the purpose of influencing an appointment or election, be it federal, state, or local. Though IRS rules permit these organizations to raise unlimited funds from individuals, corporations, or labor unions, federal and state campaign finance laws often limit the amount and source of contributions that they may accept. Section 527 organizations must register with the IRS (and possibly the FEC or state campaign finance regulators) and disclose their contributions and expenditures.

Strengthening Democracy Outside of a Donor-Advised Fund *(cont.)*

Political Action Committee (PAC) — A political committee that raises and spends contributions for the express purpose of electing or defeating candidates. PACs that wish to contribute to candidates at the federal level must raise money within the federal source restrictions and contribution limits. PACs may either be free-standing (“nonconnected”) or associated with a for-profit corporation (e.g., the Microsoft PAC), labor union (e.g., the Teamsters’ PAC), or nonprofit membership corporation (e.g., the National Rifle Association PAC). Freestanding PACs may raise money from the public at large, while PACs associated with a corporation or union may only raise money from the group’s executive employees or members. Individuals contributing to a PAC may also contribute directly to candidates and political parties, even those also supported by the PAC. A PAC that has attained “multicandidate” status can give \$5,000 to a candidate per election (primary, general, or special) and up to \$15,000 annually to a national political party. PACs may receive up to \$5,000 each from individuals, other PACs, and party committees per year. A PAC must register with the Federal Election Commission within 10 days of its formation, providing the name and address of the PAC, its treasurer, and any affiliated organizations. PACs should not be confused with public affairs committees, of which there are a number in the Jewish community, and which do not engage in partisan politicking.

Hybrid PACs (Carey Committees) — A hybrid federal political action committee that is not affiliated with a candidate and has the ability to operate both as a traditional PAC, contributing funds to a candidate’s committee, and as a super PAC, which makes independent expenditures. To do so, Carey Committees must have a separate bank account for each purpose. The committee can collect unlimited contributions from almost any source for its independent expenditure account, but may not use those funds for its traditional PAC contributions.

**This information is adapted from materials by the Center for Responsive Politics.*

Have Questions or Suggestions?

If you have additional suggestions or questions on this topic, or would like information on other causes and ways to give, contact your philanthropy advisor or call us at **415.512.6211**.

Federation Philanthropy Partners connects impact and meaning by helping others view the world through the lens of Jewish values. Our 100 year history at the center of Bay Area generosity—supporting both those who give and those who benefit—grants us a unique ability to amplify results and create moments of transformation in the world, our community, and ourselves.