



VOTING INTEGRITY & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (VOICE) Program Retrospective

2007-2012



PREPARED BY

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Message from Staff

Over the past five years, we've had an incredible opportunity to support some of the nation's most impactful social justice work, having the great privilege to closely know the communities and individuals that made such work effective. While we always conducted our due diligence with great integrity, many of our grant partners were also in our larger circles of involvement – in organizations that we were ourselves members of or provided leadership within, or were in communities in which we grew up or currently live.

We carried out a strategy where the work we supported – locally as community-based and –led advocacy and organizing strategies, and nationally as efforts that centered on leadership by people of color – provided a unique opportunity to learn deeply the dynamic ecosystems of social justice that have for so long allowed change to happen. We gained insight and first-hand experience around learning realities that pushed beyond the pervasive images of our communities as victims to be saved or problems to be solved, but instead are full of diversity, conflicting voices, strength, courage, leadership, empathy, and a belief in shared faiths and collective action.

We want to be clear that funding such work is an invaluable opportunity to support and play a concrete role in dynamic and ever-evolving community leadership and learn so many otherwise inaccessible truths around how progress happens.

This retrospective documents the progression of our Voting Integrity and Civic Engagement (VoICE) program from 2007 to 2012, and distills the themes and developments that characterize the work of the organizations we have supported.

In short order, the Foundation's work will significantly change, strongly driven by our board's vision of how we can make the deepest impact. Our hope for this retrospective paper is twofold: to share a little of what we've seen and learned, and to convey within this paper the depth of gratitude and admiration for having participated in and witnessed this critical social justice work.

Many thanks to Judi Powell for her insight and precision in helping to tell this story.

Sincerely,
Mario Lugay, Program Officer
Cedric Brown, CEO
Mitchell Kapor Foundation
May 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Mitchell Kapor Foundation's grantmaking in civic engagement and participation grew out of its long-held interest in empowering underserved communities to fully participate and assume leadership roles in political processes. Following its experience hosting a mid-term elections call center as part of the National Campaign for Fair Elections in 2006, the Foundation was propelled to develop the first iteration of what was to become the Voting Integrity & Civic Engagement grantmaking program, commonly referred to as VoICE.

The Foundation's initial grantmaking in this area was under Project 2008, whose goals were to increase voter participation in historically marginalized and underrepresented communities and to ensure that those votes would be counted. Shaped by the disastrous 2000 and 2004 presidential elections in which underrepresented voters disproportionately faced barriers to voting and full enfranchisement, Project 2008 grantmaking focused on two goals:

- » **Voter participation:** support for organizations' strategies to improve voter education, nonpartisan registration, and get out the vote (GOTV) efforts; and
- » **Elections protection:** support for strong elections administration and voter access to polls without intimidation or foul play.

Starting in 2008, the Foundation began to expand its grantmaking to encompass an emerging strategy among nonprofits that melded voter registration and GOTV into broader community organizing work. Known as "integrated voter engagement," this approach recognizes that combining communities' electoral clout with base-building and organized advocacy for specific policy issues gives them increased power and influence over matters that affect their lives. Community organizing groups are generally well positioned to do this integrated work, but it requires that they build capacity for voter participation work which calls for a different skill set. The Foundation saw great promise in this tactic and made it a central focus of its grantmaking.

The Foundation adopted a "concentric circle" lens that focused on groups working at one of three geographic levels: 1) national—umbrella organizations for initiatives in different locations across the country; 2) California—statewide alliances; 3) San Francisco Bay Area—regional collaboratives. This geographic framing was adjusted over the years to put more emphasis on state and regional work, and less on national.

Project 2008 was re-named VoICE after the 2008 elections, and the dual focus became integrated voter engagement and elections protection. In its elections protection work, the Foundation supported several organizations that work proactively and responsively to ensure marginalized communities can exercise their right to vote. They use education, advocacy, monitoring, and litigation to inform the public about their rights, to fight against restrictive voter legislation and practices, to push for equitable elections administration, and to confront unfair practices on Election Day.

As with the Kapor Foundation's other grantmaking ventures, bringing nonprofits together—sometimes with other funders—is part of its VoICE grantmaking approach. Foundation staff and board members believe that funders have a multi-layered role to play in building social change movements. Funder support can extend beyond grantmaking to encompass proactive leadership to advance progressive change. For this reason the Kapor Foundation has brought together nonprofits and funders in a series of *What Works* convenings which help raise the visibility of civic engagement and participation and build networks of organizations with a common cause.

The period between 2008 and 2012 was a time of remarkable developments that had significant impact on the work of VoICE organizations. The period began with the election of the nation's first African-American president as well as the beginning of the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Both developments shaped the work conducted in the field related to civic engagement and voter participation, the former infusing the work with hope and optimism for advancing a progressive agenda, the latter imposing limitations on the capacity to do good work. The period also witnessed the historic Occupy Movement of 2011 which not only demonstrated in a very visible way the might of organized protest, but also introduced wealth distribution and the working poor—in a word, equity—into mainstream political discourse. Several Kapor grant recipients felt that the concept of "the 99%" helped strengthen their own messages. Finally, the end of the period looked very different from the beginning in terms of the heightened level of partisanship among elected officials and the renewed conservative movement that began with the Tea Party's emergence in 2010. These dramatic developments in such a relatively short period of time led the Kapor Foundation and the organizations they support to redouble efforts to achieve their democratic ideals. Between 2008 and 2012, the Kapor Foundation invested more than \$3 million in VoICE organizations.

Integrated Voter Engagement: Joining Get Out the Vote and Community Organizing

Early in its civic engagement grantmaking, the Kapor Foundation became aware of an emerging approach to amplify the impact of conventional GOTV efforts. Until the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, typical GOTV work consisted of concentrated efforts to register voters in target communities just prior to elections, using a strategy of “parachuting” into a community for a limited time and for a single purpose. Increasingly, community-based organizations, as well as GOTV organizations which tend to be national, began to see the value of uniting the power and organizing capacity of community-based civic engagement groups with the ability of GOTV organizations to engage vast numbers of citizens in the voting process. Made possible by new advances in voter file technology, as well as the development of voter engagement “tables” or coalitions, this integrated voter engagement approach has the potential to impact voter turnout and to set common agendas for policy change. Through a year-round process of engagement through community organizing, new and infrequent voters can be cultivated into fully engaged citizens.

Grant recipient **Center for Community Change (CCC)** unites the power of civic engagement and voter participation in its non-partisan Community Voting Project. It works to increase voter participation among low-income people and people of color through a program that incorporates voter education, registration, mobilization, and integration efforts. CCC works with grassroots organizations in targeted states (including California) to help them connect promotion of social and economic justice with electoral organizing and mobilization. CCC provides grassroots organizations with capacity-building support to help them reach their respective civic engagement goals. CCC trains organization staff in voter registration, education strategy, and implementation; it also provides voter data analysis and management, among other services, while ensuring that elections engagement work does not eclipse organizations’ other issue-related objectives but strengthens them instead.

Another grant recipient, **Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV)**, a statewide California organization, also works year-round to help grassroots organizations build capacity to link electoral

engagement with racial, economic, and social justice. Its approach reflects the belief that grassroots infrastructure and strong alliances are built over time and that increased participation during election cycles is lost if the engagement with grassroots leaders and voters is not maintained immediately following elections. MIV seeks to build a movement among low-income immigrant communities of color in California by mobilizing them around key issues, including immigration reform. It focuses on grassroots organizations in six strategic geographic areas, helping build their capacity to register, educate, and mobilize their constituents for electoral participation as well as build their capacity to deliver public policy wins.

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education uses a similar strategy in its work with community-based organizations in South Los Angeles, as does **Filipino Advocates for Justice** in its work to build a network of Filipino organizations throughout California to conduct voter mobilization and increase civic engagement on community issues.

Grant recipient **San Francisco Rising (SF Rising)** unites several grassroots organizations to create a community-based political infrastructure capable of running sophisticated electoral operations and producing wins on key issues. SF Rising’s strategy is to integrate electoral participation with ongoing community organizing efforts to bring about systemic social change in communities of color, immigrant communities, and diverse neighborhoods in San Francisco. SF Rising organizations develop a shared policy agenda and agreed-upon endorsements, as well as coordinate GOTV field plans and messaging. Among the SF Rising members are several Kapor Foundation grant recipients, including **Chinese Progressive Association** (see profile below), **Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights, Causa Justa :: Just Cause**, and **People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER)**.

Kapor Foundation grant recipient **Oakland Rising**, which began as an alliance of organizations that later served as a model for the newer SF Rising, operates similarly. Among its partners are Kapor grant recipients **East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy**, the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights**, and **Causa Justa :: Just Cause**.

By design, the Kapor Foundation supports organizations that rely on coalitions and networks to advance their missions. The Foundation sees it as a way to leverage its grant dollars across many organizations and geographies. All of the organizations mentioned above, among others, work to build not only capacity in individual organizations, but also to form networks that have strength through their coordination and size.

Among a smaller number of organizations is a related trend worth noting: intentionally uniting various underrepresented

communities to advance a shared progressive agenda. For example, **Causa Justa :: Just Cause** is part of a multiracial, multigenerational movement to create strong, equitable communities. Formed in 2010 by the merger of an organization that worked with the African-American community in Oakland (Just Cause Oakland) and a San Francisco-based Latino immigrant organization (St. Peter's Housing Committee), Causa Justa :: Just Cause's mission is to "build bridges of solidarity between working class communities of color." Similarly, **POWER** unites Latina and African-American communities in the Bayview neighborhood of San Francisco to address issues of common concern such

as transportation, food security, and toxic waste cleanup. **Mobilize the Immigrant Vote** adopts a multi-issue agenda that transcends immigrant issues. It recognizes that immigrants are all colors, genders, ages, abilities, and sexual orientations and the organization's agenda reflects that reality. Its communications underscore what the communities have in common. MIV is also explicit in its aim to take on "wedge issues" that typically drive apart various immigrant communities and communities of color more generally, instead framing them in ways that reveal how they serve mutual interests. Both **San Francisco Rising** and **Oakland Rising** are premised on multiethnic, multiracial strategies.

PROFILE

Chinese Progressive Association – San Francisco

"As the Asian population in San Francisco grows, we need to take more leadership to keep our communities united. Alliance building with other communities: it's the only way we'll succeed."

—Alex T. Tom, CPA Executive Director

The San Francisco Bay Area has seen dramatic growth in its Asian population in the past decade. Currently, more than one-third of San Francisco's residents are of Asian descent. Larger numbers and decades of organizing in the Asian community has yielded expanded political power and representation in elected office: for the first time, the mayors of both San Francisco and Oakland are Asian-American, and four of the 11 members on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors are Asian-Americans.

For the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), this demographic shift presents a growing opportunity to improve conditions for all poor and working class people. According to CPA Executive Director Alex T. Tom, this is a call to action for Chinese and other Asian groups to take on a leadership role to keep people of all racial and ethnic groups united in their pursuit of social and racial justice.

The Chinese Progressive Association was founded in 1972 to educate, organize, and empower low-income and working class Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. Its core strategies are community education and organizing, leadership development, and alliance and movement building. The latter, building alliances with other groups, in particular defines CPA's strategy. The reasoning behind this is simple: social justice issues affect all poor and working class people, not just those from one ethnic community. Working together helps build collective power and gives added leverage to achieve results. For years CPA has developed strategic relationships and solidarity with other poor and working-class

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CHINESE
PROGRESSIVE
ASSOCIATION

communities of color and labor unions. CPA co-founded the San Francisco Progressive Workers Alliance, San Francisco Rising (SFR), and Jobs with Justice in San Francisco.

For more than 10 years, integrated voter engagement has also been core to CPA's work. Executive Director Tom views CPA as part of a growing movement of community organizing groups that is integrating organizing with electoral work in new and innovative ways. Electoral work has become increasingly sophisticated and data-intensive, especially since the 2008 elections which made unprecedented use of technology to reach potential voters and track behavior. There's an opportunity, Tom believes, to meld grassroots organizing with

new and innovative electoral tools to have the depth and reach the scale needed to win. CPA has been uniting these two strategic approaches, with ever increasing sophistication, since launching its Political Empowerment Campaign in 2000.

In late 2009, San Francisco Rising emerged as a prime opportunity for CPA to live out its principles of forming strategic alliances with other low-income communities and communities of color, as well as using an integrated voter engagement approach to empower community residents. San Francisco Rising is a strategic alliance of grassroots organizations working in the southern and eastern neighborhoods of San Francisco to build the electoral capacity and political power of poor and working class communities of color. SFR conducts campaigns on a shared platform of policy issues,

helps build organizing capacity among its members, and builds electoral strength in communities. As one of nine founding member organizations, CPA has taken a leadership role in the alliance from the beginning and continues to do so to this day.

An early victory for SFR was its role in 2010 in securing passage of Proposition N, a San Francisco measure to increase the real estate transfer tax for properties valued at more than \$5 million. This measure has already brought more than \$90 million in revenue to the city to protect jobs and services. In the most recent election cycle (2012), SFR spearheaded a coordinated get out the vote media campaign and field strategy, and identified and reached out to voters likely to support progressive measures like Proposition 30, a California state ballot initiative that increases

taxes on the most wealthy to save education and services. Over the last three years, CPA has identified more than 20,000 Chinese immigrant voters in San Francisco who support progressive taxation measures. CPA will continue to play a strong role in its local alliances, including SFR. Increasingly, though, it will participate in state and national conversations about the movement to empower poor and working class communities. CPA is on the Strategy Council of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, and partners with APEN Action Fund, and California Calls through SFR. It has also helped to convene Asian/Pacific Islander groups across the country to strengthen the national infrastructure for organizing and civic engagement. As CPA continues to grow in this direction, it has the potential to support and inspire ever larger numbers of community leaders.

The Role of Technology: Using Social Media to Mobilize

Several Kapor Foundation grant recipients capitalize on the power of social media to advance their respective causes. A couple of organizations stand out as having social media central to their strategies. They are **Voto Latino**, which targets Latino youth in its social media-based voter registration and mobilization initiatives, and **Citizen Engagement Lab** (CEL), an incubator of digital citizen engagement and elections protection initiatives in underserved issue and identity groups. (See below for a profile of Voto Latino's work.) CEL creates online organizing communities that maximize the impact of digital citizen engagement. Its two initial projects are ColorOfChange.org and Video the Vote. ColorOfChange.org was founded in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005 as an online organizing initiative to amplify the voices of African-Americans in affected communities. It has since grown to be an independent organization that engages a

nationwide multiracial community of more than 900,000 members. It has had a direct impact on an array of policy issues, such as "stand your ground" laws. ColorOfChange.org has also effectively mobilized voters in election years and supported elections protection. ColorOfChange.org engages its members through a range of social platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, text messaging, and a multimedia blog.

Video the Vote is a national elections protection initiative launched by CEL in 2006 to ensure timely and accurate reporting of voter suppression and election irregularities. Volunteers throughout the nation document elections with video footage and report barriers that voters experience, such as registration problems, machine malfunctions, and deceptive communications. Video documentation is used to make policymakers and the public aware of voting irregularities and the need for reform.

CEL has launched other digital initiatives, such as GOTV in 2010 and 2012, and an online community focused on immigrant-related issues (Presente.org); it has also served as an incubator for others. All projects capitalize on social media platforms, enabling large numbers of constituents to take action on issues they care about and to become involved in all aspects of political and civic life, including voting.

Using social media to reach large numbers of constituents and move them to action—be it voting or organizing around an issue of common concern—is gaining traction as attention is turned to engaging younger constituents in large numbers. **Voto Latino** followed the example of CEL's successful Video the Vote by partnering with PBS and YouTube on its Video Your Vote project in 2008. **Mobilize the Immigrant Vote** increasingly makes use of social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, and is exploring a possible partnership with CEL's Presente.org.

Social media are proving to be powerful tools for engaging large numbers of people in the fastest-growing demographics at minimal cost. They are effective at bringing new and diverse voices into the political process by reaching out to people through the digital channels that are part of their everyday lives. Social media platforms are effective mechanisms for changing the conversation in the media and mobilizing collective action for change in low-income communities and communities of color.

PROFILE

Voto Latino



“Voto Latino is changing the way people reach out to Latino voters. We’re really proud of that—it hasn’t always been easy.”

—Maria Teresa Kumar, Voto Latino
CEO/President

Consider these statistics: 1) There are roughly 9 million American Latino youth, but only a small fraction vote, 2) 50,000 American Latinos turn 18 each month, 3) 74% of Latinos are online, more than any other group, and 4) Latinos are more likely to own cell phones and use them for Internet access than the general population.

Voto Latino (VL) connected the dots and realized two things: that Latino youth would be a powerful civic force once mobilized, and that one needed to think outside of the box in order to reach them. The organization began as a series of public service announcements in 2004 and quickly grew to become the leading non-partisan Latino youth civic engagement

organization. It successfully experimented with various social media platforms—it was the first group to use text messaging in a voter registration campaign—a strong celebrity component, and, later, an on-the-ground operation to effectively reach Latino youth.

Voto Latino was founded in 2004 by Latina actress Rosario Dawson and VL CEO/President Maria Teresa Kumar to engage Latino youth in the democratic process. Since then, it has registered more than 120,000 young Latinos to vote. From the beginning the organization played to its strengths: a vast celebrity network, strong media connections, experience in telecommunications, and a willingness to experiment with emerging technologies. For the past several election cycles, VL has conducted viral marketing campaigns that included voter registration widgets placed on targeted Latino youth sites; enlisting Latino bloggers to discuss voter registration; partnering with MTV, SiTV, Univision, and other networks to promote the campaigns; employing a Celebrity Coalition of more than 40 top entertainers

(e.g., Rosario Dawson, Eva Longoria Parker, Wilmer Valderrama, Jessica Alba); and using text messaging to educate youth about voter registration and to make election-related announcements.

VL expanded its reach and impact by uniting media work with on-the-ground efforts, for the first time hiring field organizers in 2010 to be the community-based support for VL's United We Win campaign. Field organizers partnered with local community-based civic engagement organizations and VL youth volunteers in targeted states to register voters and galvanize them around policy. They registered more than 10,000 new voters in California, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, and Texas, and made contact with more than 30,000 new and first-time 2008 voters.

VL has also deepened its impact in recent years by moving from focusing solely on voter registration and get out the vote efforts to promoting advocacy and civic engagement for issues that have an impact on the Latino community. Using social media as an engine for mobilization, VL

has galvanized support for the 2010 Census, the Dream Act, and immigration reform, as well as opposition to Arizona's anti-immigration law of 2010.

It's not an overstatement to say that VL has changed the way organizations reach out to Latino youth on a scale and at a cost not previously possible, using social media and innovative on-the-ground strategies. In time for the 2012 election cycle, VL

developed a mobile app that allowed people to register to vote on their cell phones and made this app available to other organizations doing similar work. Instead of only knocking on doors, VL also uses celebrity DJs at clubs, fraternities, and sororities to promote their message. At these large crowd events, VL can register 60 to 70 voters in just one and a half hours.

Voto Latino CEO/President Maria

Teresa Kumar credits the Kapor Foundation for taking a chance on what was viewed by some as a radical strategy. The Foundation's support allowed VL to experiment with technology many times over. When VL received funding from the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations for the first time in 2012, it was because the Kapor funding "gave us the seal of approval that we had gone through rigorous analysis."

The Role of Technology: Building Infrastructure

To fully realize the benefits of integrating GOTV and community organizing, nonprofits need a level of technology infrastructure that few currently have. The power of integration relies on organizations' ability to maintain and nurture relationships with new voters from underrepresented communities between elections so they are coordinated and mobilized to advance issues, causes, and policies that will benefit their communities. Unfortunately, the technology available to many grassroots organizations isn't up to the challenge. Specifically, many organizations lack the technology needed to merge the information they collect in GOTV efforts with their existing member databases, making it difficult if not impossible to expand their outreach to encompass newly registered voters. Some grant recipients, such as **Filipino Advocates for Justice**, appear to have such technology, including online access to voter files, bar-coded voter lists to track behavior, e-advocacy software, and social networking innovations. But far more grant recipients are at the early stages of having access to and being able to use these tools.

Kapor Foundation grant recipient the **Progressive Technology Project** (PTP) has taken a leadership position to address the low level of technology in many grassroots organizations. PTP builds the capacity of groups that work with low-income, immigrant, and nonwhite communities nationwide to integrate technology strategically. They offer

training, support groups, and, most recently, an in-depth, yearlong Innovation and Integration Partnership Project that provides intensive support for select organizations (Causa Justa :: Just Cause and POWER are participants).

PTP identified the absence of uniform and high-quality constituent relationships management (CRM) software as a crucial problem. In response, with Kapor Foundation support, in 2009 and 2010 PTP developed an open-source application, PowerBase, that allows for the integration of voter and member data, and, as a uniform platform, allows for sharing of information across organizations. PTP began distributing PowerBase to organizations and developing a viable technical support infrastructure in 2010; as of 2012 approximately 25 organizations were using the software.

There are many more instances in which the existing technology needs to be adapted for community use. For example, volunteers making calls for the Chinese Progressive Association are mostly monolingual Chinese immigrants, but the typical available technology for predictive dialing relies on volunteers being bilingual. CPA was able to pilot an innovative solution that could go to scale.

In another example, **Mobilize the Immigrant Vote**, which includes Data BootCamp among its technical assistance for grassroots organizations, is shining the light on systemic deficiencies in the voter data that's available on communities of color. It was found that many for-profit data vendors place a low priority on cleaning data for communities of color and on making it either accessible or affordable. As a result, available data are of low quality, containing unacceptably high numbers of inaccuracies. MIV staff are in conversation with their peers about how to coordinate efforts to remedy this situation.

Elections Protection: A Growing Challenge

Kapor Foundation grant recipients that work in elections protection have experienced the highs and lows of the political shifts over the past five years. Following the 2008 election of President Obama with the support of a highly mobilized grassroots electorate, there was optimism that the time was right to advance an agenda of progressive election reforms. This optimism was deflated all too quickly by the electoral barriers that were erected before the mid-term elections of 2010. All the same, organizations supported by the Kapor Foundation continued their good work, sometimes shifting strategies to meet challenges presented by the increasingly antagonistic landscape.

Grant recipient **William J. Brennan Center for Justice, Inc.** (Brennan Center) works to ensure that every eligible voter can easily register to vote, cast a ballot, and have that ballot counted accurately. With its research, advocacy, litigation, and public education, the Brennan Center seeks to counteract the barriers to voting that continue to block access to millions of American citizens. As with the **Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law** (Lawyers' Committee), **Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action Ltd.** (Demos), and the **Advancement Project**, a central strategy of the Brennan Center is to push for Voter Registration Modernization which calls for a universal voter registration system that uses technology and better coordinates various public agencies involved in registering new voters and updating the registration rolls. Elements of the modernization plan include automatic or "affirmative" registration that registers voters based on existing lists, such as drivers' license lists; permanent registration as long as a person continues to reside in a state; and election-day registration. As of 2011, elements of the modernization plan have been adopted in at least 17 states.

Demos' chief focus is on getting states to implement the requirements called for in the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This legislation was intended to increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote by designating social service agencies (public assistance offices) as voter registration agencies, but the requirements have been largely ignored. In some states Demos works on compliance

with the act in partnership with the Advancement Project and the Brennan Center.

Leading up to and just following the 2010 elections, elections protection organizations saw a marked shift in the political climate toward more conservative policy and leadership. Demos' efforts to institute same-day registration in new states were stalled, and bills to fight it were introduced in several states. By early 2011, more than 32 states had introduced suppressive voting laws that required voters to present government-issued photo IDs in order to vote. Several states instituted restrictions on conducting voter registration activities, and/or sought preclearance under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to make changes to elections policies that were likely to have a discriminatory effect.

Several Kapor Foundation grant recipients turned to litigation to halt the proposed legislation or to overturn legislation already enacted, as well as to improve elections oversight and protection in the 2012 election. The **Advancement Project** emerged as a national leader and expert in the debate on ID voter laws, and in April 2011 issued a widely cited report that provided legal and policy analysis of the implications of the proposed laws, *What's Wrong With This Picture? New Photo ID Proposals Part of the National Push to Turn Back the Clock on Voting Rights*. **Lawyers' Committee** and **Brennan Center** also took on leadership roles challenging suppressive legislation: they published analyses of the impact and successfully litigated against laws in Florida, Texas, and South Carolina.

These same organizations, along with others, heightened elections protection by monitoring voter intimidation, misinformation campaigns, crowded and confused polling places, and other forms of voter challenges. They ran media and voter education campaigns in partnership with community-based organizations that reaffirmed voters' fundamental right to cast a ballot, they worked with election officials to improve staff trainings to guard against voter challenges, they worked with law enforcement to advocate that they prevent or address voter suppression efforts, and they mobilized the media to monitor voter suppression as it occurred. The Brennan Center, Lawyers' Committee, the Advancement Project, Voto Latino, ColorOfChange.org, and Vote the Vote were partners in the non-partisan Election Protection coalition which organizes call centers to respond to hotline questions on and before Election Day, and organizes volunteers in the field to monitor polls.

PROFILE

Advancement Project

“Historically, every time there’s a shift in demographics and power, we see voting rights being challenged.”

—Judith Browne Dianis,
Advancement Project Co-Director

Like other organizations working to remove barriers to full enfranchisement, in recent years the Advancement Project has had to shift its strategy to respond to a well-financed and highly orchestrated opponent: those on the political right who are determined to restrict voter participation among people of color and other vulnerable groups. Fortunately, elections protection is much more robust than it was when the Advancement Project was founded in 1999. There are more players and they’re more coordinated. And, importantly, the media are recognizing the importance of their work.

The Advancement Project’s Voter Protection Program (VPP) works to ensure full enfranchisement of all eligible Americans, with a particular emphasis on persons of color and other vulnerable voters. It removes barriers to the ballot by working with grassroots organizations and coalitions serving communities of color in priority states on a number of strategies, including pushing for full implementation of the National Voting Rights Act and working with election officials to reform potentially harmful election administration policies and practices. The Voter Protection Program also protects against voter suppression efforts by



educating voters about their rights and about voting requirements, and by advocating for proper training of poll workers. The VPP also produces research and other information for dissemination to a range of stakeholders.

Central to the VPP’s approach has always been building and strengthening relationships with election officials as a way to bring about sought-after reforms. In its experience, long-term interactions with election officials and policymakers, combined with legal analysis, advocacy, and strategic communications, are effective at instituting reforms to increase voter participation. However, that approach began to be challenged in the months leading up to the 2010 election and has continued to be ever since. Reports of voter suppression efforts were emerging in the fall of 2010, leading the VPP to intensify on-the-ground efforts and publish *Legal Protections Against Voter Suppression* guides for Florida, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. By early 2011, more than 32 states had introduced legislation that required voters to have government-issued photo IDs in order to vote. A *New York Times* editorial quoted the Advancement Project’s view that these laws represented “the largest legislative effort to scale back voting rights in a century.” Voter ID laws were not the only barrier being put forward; other restrictive policies included overuse and undercounting of provisional ballots, increased restrictions on third-party voter registration groups, and coordinated national

campaigns that promoted unlawful challenging and intimidation of voters at the polls.

The Advancement Project through the VPP was a vocal and visible opponent to these developments, garnering extensive media coverage. Increasingly, the Advancement Project determined that litigation was necessary to stop restrictive initiatives from moving forward, filing suits against Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Ohio. In addition, it testified against bills in six states and engaged in advocacy in five states that led to gubernatorial vetoes.

In late 2011, the Advancement Project set up war rooms in about a dozen target states in advance of the 2012 elections to monitor state and local activities, identify and map “hot spots,” and mobilize rapid responses to voter suppression—all in partnership with local organizations and coalitions, and teams of VPP’s attorneys, Local Voter Protection advocates, and communications specialists. Kapur Foundation’s increased level of support in 2012 allowed the Advancement Project to hire an additional staff member to work in the field.

Despite the setbacks of the last few years, Advancement Project Co-Director Judith Browne Dianis believes this is a potential moment to build a movement. As she put it, “The field is tired of playing defense. People are looking to push progressive changes.” To build on this

moment, the Advancement Project and its allies are advancing a vision of what full enfranchisement looks like—*should* look like. The Advancement

Project’s ongoing Right to Vote campaign in Florida has helped change the discourse about voting rights. Even if the campaign is not successful

in Florida, Dianis believes, it will become part of the national narrative. And that’s how movements grow.

Entrepreneurs for Good: The Kapor Foundation Grantmaking Approach

The Kapor Foundation is a values-driven grantmaker, an attribute that is clearly reflected in its approach to philanthropy. Foundation board and staff alike value racial and social justice, entrepreneurial spirit, and a measured level of risk-taking. The Foundation’s commitment to progressive racial and social issues is embodied in the missions of the organizations it chooses to support. Without exception, Kapor Foundation grant recipients are organizations that are committed to advancing democratic ideals, including racial and social equity. The Kapor Foundation is not unique in this regard, but it is unusual, particularly in the ways it translates these values into support for civic engagement and elections protection, issue areas that receive relatively little philanthropic support.

For several grant recipients, the Kapor Foundation played the role of seed funder, providing funding, encouragement, and support to help new projects and organizations get off the ground. The Foundation provided start-up or early-stage funding for **San Francisco Rising**, **Oakland Rising**, **Voto Latino**, and the **Black Organizing Project**, as well as support for ColorOfChange.org to become an independent 501c3. Kapor Foundation funding also supported new directions and new projects, including an accountability program at the **Public Campaign**, a new grassroots network strategy at the **Piper Fund**, and experimentation with social media at **Mobilize the Immigrant Vote**.

The Kapor Foundation has demonstrated a willingness to take on risk when the benefits have the potential to be field-changing in terms of scale or impact. Its early support for San Francisco Rising, for example, allowed that organization to change the landscape of San Francisco community organizing to great effect. Likewise, the Foundation chose to take a risk on **Voto Latino** when many funders thought the organization’s social media-based approach was “crazy.”

The Kapor Foundation saw the potential for field-level transformation and in this case it was right.

The Foundation’s willingness to be an early and vocal supporter of its grant recipients helped nonprofits secure funding from other foundations. Almost all grant recipients mentioned this specifically as a benefit of receiving Kapor support. For example, Kapor Foundation support for the **Piper Fund** sent a “message to other funders that [their] issues remain at the forefront of progressive reform efforts,” thereby allowing Piper to leverage additional resources (2011 grant report). Similarly, as the first funder of the emerging **San Francisco Rising** alliance (through Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth), the Kapor Foundation was a “stepping stone” to other funds (2011 grant report). For the **Progressive Technology Project**, Kapor Foundation support served as an endorsement of its work using technology to support community organizing. According to the executive director, “Because organizations and other funders look to the Mitchell Kapor Foundation for leadership in questions around technology, receiving support from MKF legitimizes the work that PTP does.” (2011 grant report.)

The Kapor Foundation’s commitment to providing support “beyond the grant” is central to its grantmaking approach. Assistance includes help with technology, including websites, communications, and evaluation training; access to pro bono professional support; and free meeting space. In addition, the Foundation hosted and helped staff elections protection call centers more than once. The Foundation’s commitment to providing support beyond the grant is reflected in its decision to staff a full-time director of assistance and advising who designs and coordinates all assistance programs, consults directly with nonprofits, and acts as a liaison between nonprofits and external consultants.

The Foundation’s investment in technical assistance supports its goal to build a movement for social change in communities of color. Beyond the types of assistance already mentioned, the Foundation brings together cohorts of grant recipients and funders for *What Works* convenings that dive into topics of common interest—civic engagement and race, post-election report back, etc.—and provide opportunities for extensive engagement with nonprofit peers. Several grant recipients spoke of the great value of these meetings. They help create a network and community among the nonprofits which, at times, leads to new or better partnerships.

CONCLUSION

A vibrant and healthy democracy requires an informed and active citizenry with the means, access, and channels to participate. The organizations profiled throughout this report are exemplary at developing and defending this end goal of engaged democracy through both transactional and transformative approaches.

From its start, the Kapor Foundation's approach has been expansive in understanding all the necessary levers required for impact in the civic engagement field, while at the same time holding an intense focus on low-income communities of color.

Through its grantmaking, the Foundation has had the unique opportunity to support, uplift, and most importantly connect the dynamic leadership from communities of color to opportunities that have reshaped civic engagement practices in the United States.

We hope that as the Foundation transitions to a new organization and strategy aligned with our founders' deep commitment to technology for social impact, the lessons contained in this report encourage continued reflection on philanthropic practices, and prompt ongoing investment from other funders supporting civic engagement and elections-oriented work.

On May 15, 2013
the Mitchell Kapor Foundation
will become the
Kapor Center for Social Impact

www.kaporcenter.org

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