



Investing in Civic Participation and Engagement

Our experience at the Langeloth Foundation as a Public Health Funder

The Langeloth Foundation's investments in civic participation and engagement are a reflection of our commitment to support equity, justice and opportunity for all people. As the COVID-19 epidemic disproportionately affected people of color we felt a duty to rise to meet the crisis. Our response was two-pronged: 1) to provide rapid response grants to support in-the-moment needs, and 2) significantly increase funding in civic participation to achieve long-term structural changes through an actively engaged electorate. In support of the latter, the Board voted to draw \$10 million from our then \$88 million endowment to invest in two funder collaboratives, the State Infrastructure Fund and the Heartland Fund, with a smaller reserve fund for opportunities that will arise over the next several months.

Why civic participation & engagement?

For almost all funders motivated by the pursuit of a more just world, the issues and populations we care about are directly impacted by policies and systems. COVID-19 and the recent uprisings for racial justice are laying bare how systems need to change and how crucial the upcoming elections will be in how we respond to those changes and ensuring that all voices are included. To change those policies and systems, people need to vote. However, not all voters have equal and safe access to polls. Supporting a fair and inclusive election is critical so that we as a society can pursue those changes and not revert to past practices. In the wake of the ongoing uprisings for racial justice, we believe philanthropy must act to restore faith in democracy, and promoting civic participation via voting is an important component of that.

How can your organization legally fund 'political' work?

We have focused our funding on non-partisan organizations that improve access for voters regardless of political persuasion. We cannot advocate or lobby for a particular candidate, party, or specific legislation but that does not prevent us from taking action to ensure that the upcoming elections are fair and to ensure that every citizen has the ability to exercise their constitutional right to participate in the democratic process. As a foundation that embraces a public health lens this is our responsibility and within our purview.

Why funder collaboratives?

Supporting funder collaboratives is consistent with past Langeloth practice and recognizes that these pooled funds have staff dedicated to this topic with extensive field knowledge and experience, thereby optimizing resource allocations. Additional funding will allow these

organizations to respond quickly as they resource different groups working to ensure access to the ballot, and provide nonpartisan support to voters as they navigate registration and election obstacles. Both the State Infrastructure Fund and the Heartland Fund were already grantees, so we were able to build on our existing relationship and research. These organizations are also focused on voters of color since Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities are disproportionately targeted by voter suppression and oppressive policing tactics.

What other research did you conduct?

To expand our understanding of the current environment and field needs we reached out to several individuals who collectively have decades of civic participation organizing, advocacy and funding experience. It was a quick and steep learning curve, but one that gave us confidence that the recommended approach was thoughtful and sound. We also reviewed the literature of the impact of civic participation, including voting, on health.

What was your rationale for drawing from your endowment?

We recognized that \$10 million was a significant funding request, but it was one that was based on urgency and need and the following rationale:

1. **Putting Words into Action:** The proposed investment is putting our articulated values and operating principles into action.
2. **Urgency:** Attempts to undermine the rights and access to voting are not isolated. This was so pre-COVID and even more so now as the pandemic continues to spread, coupled with the fight for racial justice. Ensuring that each individual is able to exercise their fundamental right to participate in the democratic process is essential to preserving the health of our democracy and the health of individuals. If not now, when?
3. **Financial Implications:** Foundations are sitting on hundreds of billions of dollars in assets that can and should be put to use for philanthropic purposes during this critical time. The financial markets are unpredictable and we have the opportunity to invest significantly now or run the risk of losing assets should the markets destabilize further. If the markets improve then we gradually recoup this investment.
4. **Setting an Example:** Langeloth hoped to serve as a model for other small and medium-sized foundations on the importance of investing a significant portion of assets when they are most needed.

Other Resources:

- Our announcement [press release is available here](#).
- President Scott Moyer spoke with [Inside Philanthropy about our decision here](#).
- Learn more about the [State Infrastructure Fund here](#) and the [Heartland Fund here](#)

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