



## PREPARING FOR GOTV WORK COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PERSPECTIVES

BY RON ROWELL  
COMMISSIONED BY THE MITCHELL KAPOR FOUNDATION

### INTRODUCTION

The Mitchell Kapor Foundation requested a survey of its Voting Integrity & Civic Engagement (VoICE) grant recipients in December 2009 in order to gather information to inform its planning for grantmaking in these areas moving forward. The Foundation's director selected 32 organizations to be surveyed by telephone. The consultant emailed selected grant recipients on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December to request appointments. The first survey was completed on December 23<sup>rd</sup> and another on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Most surveys were done during the first two weeks of January 2010. The final interviews were concluded on January 25<sup>th</sup>. All the grant recipients selected participated.

The Foundation asked the consultant to answer the following questions based on the survey results:

- How would you prioritize grantmaking for electoral empowerment and elections infrastructure?
- Who else is doing this work?
- Who are the significant players?

### SURVEY RESULTS

***Plans, Processes, Resources, and Partners***—The first four questions on the survey were meant to draw out details on Kapor Foundation VoICE grant recipients' plans for the next two years, how they determined their priorities and strategies, what resources they think are most important to get the work done, and who they considered their primary partners. Please see the attached summary table for detail. (This attachment was also shared with each of the participating organizations.)

***Outstanding Organizations***—Respondents were asked to name organizations doing electoral empowerment and elections infrastructure work they considered outstanding, whether or not the organization was a partner. Table 1 illustrates the results by category. Organizations mentioned more than once are included below. A complete list of all those organizations cited is attached.

ORGANIZATION NAME	FREQUENCY
<b><u>Electoral Infrastructure</u></b>	
Brennan Center for Justice	11
NAACP	11
Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law	6
NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund	5
DEMOS	3
The Advancement Project	3
Common Cause	3
ACLU Voting Rights Project	2
<b><u>Electoral Empowerment</u></b>	
SCOPE-CA Alliance	7
State Voices	5
Southwest Organizing Project	4
Miami Workers Center	3
Pushback Network	3
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation	3
MALDEF	3
MoveOn.org	2
IL Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights	2
Oakland Rising	2
Right to the City	2
The Advancement Project	2
League of Women Voters	2
US Student Association	2
Project VOTE	2
Rock the Vote	2
Neighbor to Neighbor (Massachusetts)	2
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth	2

*Table 1. Organizations in the field of electoral empowerment and elections infrastructure considered "outstanding," mentioned more than once by those surveyed.*

The Brennan Center for Justice and the NAACP were widely seen as doing outstanding, collaborative work by most of the organizations working on voter protection. A relationship map for the Brennan Center indicates what a key role it plays in the field (see below). It is certainly well plugged-in with virtually all the major players and has some influence as well with those doing voter engagement. It appears from an analysis of partnerships to have the most reach of any organization apart from the national office of NAACP of those helping to improve voting systems.

SCOPE-AGENDA was cited numerous times, both as an outstanding organization and as a partner. It is clear that it plays a role as an example, a leader, and a technical assistance organization.

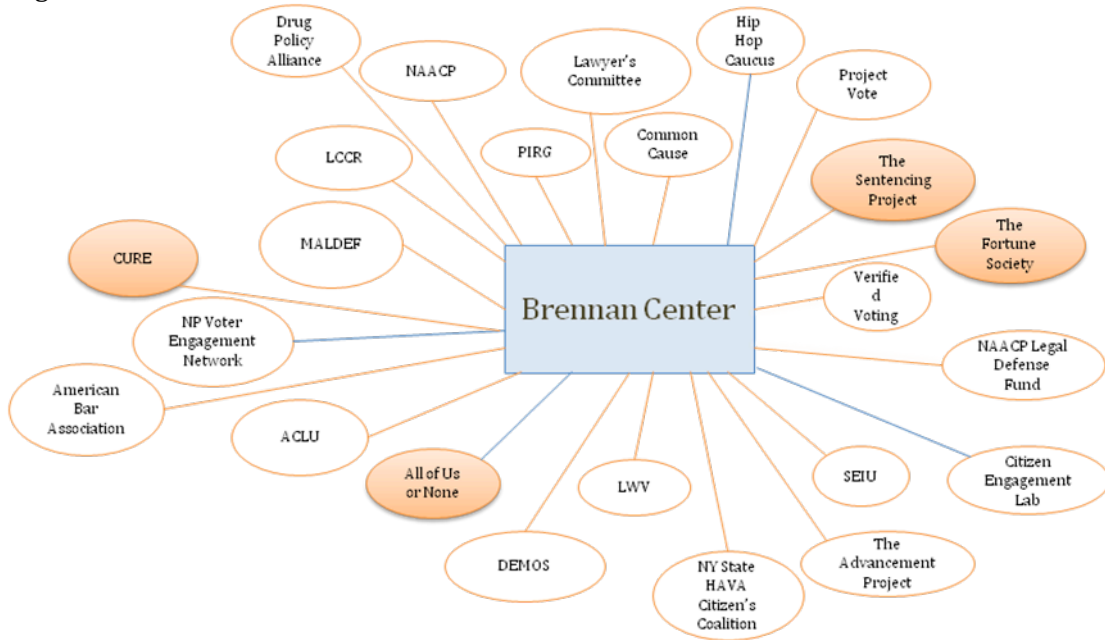


Figure 1. Brennan Center for Justice's Primary Partnerships (gold lines) and other organizations that cited it as a partner in the survey (blue lines). Felony disenfranchisement-related projects are shaded.

**Gaps in the work**—We asked grant recipients to identify any gaps they perceived in the areas of electoral empowerment and elections infrastructure. Table 2 below lists the gaps identified by frequency and type of grantee.

IDENTIFIED GAP OR NEED	FREQUENCY
<b>Electoral Infrastructure</b>	
Communications, messaging, & media	8
Episodic and too little funding for this work	7
Disconnect between field organizations & DC-based national organizations	2
A comprehensive field infrastructure that's less ad-hoc	1
Collaboration between elected officials, techies, and advocates	1
Access to affordable, high quality voter data	1
Education for the public & public officials around felony voter disenfranchisement	1

Hard skills: using voter data, running nonpartisan field campaigns, fundraising	1
Achieving scale	1
Lack of unity - silos	1
Volunteerism	1
Geographic: the South	1
Youth leadership development	1
<b>Electoral Empowerment</b>	
More consistent, timely, & sustained multi-year funding	15
More collaboration, connections, opportunities for peer learning	10
Integration of voter engagement with organizing & issue advocacy	5
Sustained field infrastructure	5
Reaching non-college youth	2
Achieving scale	2
Understanding legal rights of nonprofits re: advocacy, voter engagement	2
More people of color to run for office & leadership	2
Geographic gaps: TX, IN	1
Geographic gaps: CA	1
Professional development for organizers	1
Movement building	1
Smarter use of data	1
Improved metrics & evaluation	1
Access to voter lists & other tools	1
Access to technology, e.g. Palm Pilots	1

Table 2. Identified gaps in electoral infrastructure and electoral empowerment

Several themes stand out from these responses and they overlap to some degree between the two categories of work. Most prominent, and perhaps not at all surprising, is that respondents highlighted the **episodic and sparse nature of funding for voter-related work** as a serious gap. Foundation and donor funding comes primarily for and around elections - particularly Presidential elections - and is often received too late to be effective. Most of those who raised this issue agree that a predictable, sustained, and preferably multi-year funding base is required in order to build the kind of infrastructure and to reach the scale needed to have an impact. During my tenure at The San Francisco Foundation supporting voter registration and GOTV work, I heard this often from my own grant recipients .

*“We often feel like we’re flying by the seat of our pants.”*

The electoral infrastructure cohort identified the need for **better communications, messaging, and media** as the greatest gap in their work. Some expressed the difficulty bringing the issues to the attention

*“We need to look at messaging, ways to talk about the issues that reinforce all the issues.”*

of the public and to public officials given the lack of ability to engage in strategic communication across the board. The media’s random attention to problems with voting quickly disappears post-election. The need to do a better job communicating between national groups and groups on the ground is related to this as well. Communications-related public-opinion framing research was seen as extraordinarily helpful, but becomes quickly stale and requires ongoing support.

**Finding funding for elections infrastructure work** is challenging. The number of funders who support the work is small and respondents cited the need to expand the base of funders.

The electoral engagement grant recipients emphasized the need for **consistent and sustained multi-year funding**. They pointed out that building the infrastructure on the ground to engage people in both voting and participating otherwise in the democratic process is a long-term project. Much frustration was expressed (not at the Kapor Foundation but at funders generally) about the process of scaling up for elections and immediately having to scale down, without being able to consistently engage those who had been encouraged to register to vote and then to cast a vote. Almost as important was the need expressed by many of the grant recipients for more opportunities to come together with others doing this work in order to share strategies, information, and best practices. Several respondents cited the Kapor Foundation’s convening in early 2009 as an outstanding example of what is extremely useful and worthwhile. They only wish there were more such opportunities.

**Building the capacity of the field itself** is a common thread in many of the comments. For example, the issue of messaging,

*“We need to make a stronger case for investment in technology in the field.”*

communications, and working with media is something that is highly valued but few respondents appeared to believe they had the capacity to do what is needed. Need exists to build both technological infrastructure and skills to use technology, e.g., voter databases. Several people mentioned the lack of connection between national organizations that work primarily through the Web and community-based organizations on the ground. Making high quality voter databases accessible and affordable for organizers is an important element in building the field’s capacity. Although such lists are sometimes made available in swing states, it is very difficult for those not in swing states to get access, and when there is access, costs are \$25,000-\$30,000 per year per organization. The proprietary nature of those lists is an obstacle to the work. Fundraising skills too remain a critical need. Many would welcome more legal education about what a c3 can and cannot do, such as the training provided by Alliance for Justice.

\* \* \*

*“Small grants are extraordinarily important to the voting work because there are fewer and fewer funders granting in this area.”*

*“Everything can’t be done in 15 minutes. Electoral organizing is nitty-gritty hard core labor-intensive and it takes time and planning.”*

*“The more [FOUNDATIONS] can legitimize groups led by people of color, youth, and serving communities of color, the more they’ll get an exponential return on their investment.”*

## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF ALL ORGANIZATIONS CITED AS OUTSTANDING

#### By Electoral Empowerment Grant recipients

A Philip Randolph Institute  
ACORN  
AFL-CIO  
American Federation of Teachers  
Ballot Initiatives Strategy Center  
Be the Change  
Black Economic Council, Oakland  
Born Again Christian Center, E. Palo Alto  
Bus Project  
C3 Roundtables in the states  
California Alliance  
Center for Civic Participation  
Center for Civic Policy (New Mexico)  
Center for Community Change  
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists  
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity & Reproductive Rights (COLOR)  
Colorado Progressive Coalition  
Community Voices Heard, New York  
CREDO  
Declare Yourself  
Democracia  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Emily's List  
Free at Last  
FRESC (Colorado)  
GALEO  
Generational Alliance  
Georgia Citizens' Coalition on Hunger  
Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda  
Georgia Impact Collaborative  
Greenlining Institute  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights  
Jobs with Justice Network  
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth  
Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of Women Voters  
Maine People's Resource Center  
Miami Workers Center  
MoveOn.org

NAACP  
NAACP Legal Defense Fund  
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation  
National Education Association  
National Urban League  
Neighbor to Neighbor (Massachusetts)  
Oakland Rising  
Obama Campaign  
Ohio Industrial Areas Foundation  
Ordinary People's Society (Alabama)  
Partnership for Working Families & its affiliates, especially

- Georgia Stand Up
- Good Jobs, Livable Neighborhoods (GA)
- Wisconsin Citizen Action
- Presente
- Pushback Network

Right to the City Alliance  
Rock the Vote  
SCOPE-AGENDA  
SEIU  
Sentencing Project  
Southern Christian Leadership Conference  
Southern Echo  
Southwest Organizing Project  
Southwest Workers Union (Texas)  
State Labor Federation  
State Voices  
Tenants and Workers United (Virginia)  
USSA  
We Are America Alliance  
Washington CAN  
Western States Center  
WORK (Montana)

**By Elections Infrastructure Grant recipients**

ACLU Voting Rights Project  
Advancement Project  
Brennan Center for Justice  
Campaign Legal Center  
Center for Election Excellence (Ohio)  
Common Cause  
Democracy 21



DEMOS (especially Brenda Wright)  
Election Reform Network (Pennsylvania)  
Election Verification Network  
Fair Vote  
Florida Fair Elections Coalition  
Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights  
MALDEF  
Mobilize.org  
National Association of Latino Elected Officials  
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation  
National Conference on Citizenship  
Project VOTE  
Public Campaign  
SAVE  
Save Our Voices  
USSA  
Voter Action  
Voters Unite