

2008 Civic Engagement Evaluation Assessment and Recommendations for the Field

In collaboration with Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

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FUNDERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

2008 was a historic year for civic participation in the United States. The Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) brings together grantmakers committed to enhancing democratic participation in all aspects of civic life. Its nearly 80 members comprised of private, public and community foundations collectively contributed scores of millions of dollars to non-partisan civic engagement efforts of all kinds nationwide. In addition, FCCP created an evaluation project to assist funders and groups on the ground in measuring and evaluating the impact of civic engagement work.



Tides Foundation, through its Voter Action Fund (VAF), is an active, long-time member of FCCP. In 2008, Tides Foundation made an unprecedented \$20 million in grants to progressive civic participation projects and activities. VAF, a donor collaborative created in 2003 to support long and short-term civic participation and inclusive democracy work, accounted for \$4.2 million of those grants, becoming the biggest single source of civic engagement grantmaking at Tides. Last year, VAF supported 80 organizations from across the nation, working at every level of engagement, from local neighborhoods to nationwide efforts.

In early 2007, FCCP members realized how important it would be to capture the lessons from the field during the critical 2008 national election year. They began to develop an evaluation template that would be useful to both grantees and funders. At the outset of the development process, an evaluation committee, consisting of 12 funders led by a consultant, conducted nearly 70 phone and in-person interviews with field practitioners, academics and funders. These information gathering conversations resulted in a deeper understanding of the necessary elements and goals of a useful common evaluation template. As a member of the evaluation development committee, Tides worked with FCCP partners to shape the final version of the template, which focused on four key themes in voter engagement:

- Activities and outcomes
- Impact
- Data gathering, and
- Fundraising and financial analyses.

The goal was to encourage funders to use a standard reporting process with their civic engagement grantees, and to test the effectiveness and ease with which grantees could complete a standard set of metrics. And the hope was that a common template would enhance the ability for both grantees and funders to develop a fuller analysis of their work by more easily comparing results across organizations. Additionally, the template was intended to lessen the burden on grantees by allowing them to fill out one evaluation that would be accepted by multiple funders.

II. Why Evaluate?

Tides Foundation made a commitment to use the evaluation template with its 2008 VAF grantees because civic engagement work has the potential to make real the promise of inclusive democracy by supporting politically powerful progressive activism. Tides recognized that the FCCP Civic Engagement Evaluation Template could help determine whether and how VAF grants supported the long-term capacity of the field to build progressive political power. This report documents the experience of the 29 2008 Voter Action Fund grantee organizations that responded to the evaluation.

The 80 2008 VAF grantees carried out a wide range of civic engagement projects that advanced the fund's long-term strategies:

Supporting the New Electoral Mainstream: VAF supports organizations whose programs and projects reach the increasingly diverse communities and constituencies comprising the new mainstream of American politics – youth, immigrants, people of color, women.

Seizing the Moment: VAF supports organizations, campaigns, programs and projects addressing domestic and global issues—such as climate change, healthcare, and immigration reform—that speak to fundamental societal issues and have the potential to inspire voters.

Framing and Communicating Progressive Values: VAF supports organizations whose programs and projects are grounded in communications and mobilization strategies that clearly define shared values framed by an inclusive, progressive worldview that lead with what they are *for*, not what they are against.

Strengthening Local, State and Regional Capacity: VAF supports state, local and regional organizations with demonstrated ability to identify and communicate with the public, and build and sustain infrastructures that advance progressive values and support progressive constituencies. A key lesson of the past three election cycles is that permanent, state and locally-based organizing capacity is essential to building an effective progressive movement.

Building Inclusive Democracy: VAF supports efforts to expand the electorate, protect voting rights and build long-term power in communities to hold the government accountable on issues that are critical to voters. For Tides, these are the essential elements of a healthy democracy in the United States –a democracy fragile in the face of voter suppression and wide-spread community marginalization that limits citizens' power at local, regional and national levels.

III. Findings

Tides distributed the FCCP Civic Engagement Evaluation Template to 80 Voter Action Fund grantee partners and, over a three-month period, 29 of them (or a little more than one-third) responded. (See Appendix A for a list of grantees who completed the evaluation.) The following is a breakdown of the geographic focus, target population and issue-based advocacy, common strategies, and creative approaches reported.

Geographic Focus

The majority (59 percent) of responding groups worked nationally, using a broad array of civic engagement strategies (Fig. 1). Of these nationally focused organizations, 41 percent built or expanded infrastructures in key regions throughout the nation. Some examples include: Campus Compact, which created a major regional presence by organizing college campuses in Ohio, Virginia, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota. Due to its efforts across this region, Campus Compact significantly increased student involvement and maximized relationships with existing and new partners. Similarly, Planned Parenthood focused its work in the West to defeat state ballot initiatives on personhood from the moment of fertilization (Colorado, Montana) and criminalizing abortion (South Dakota).

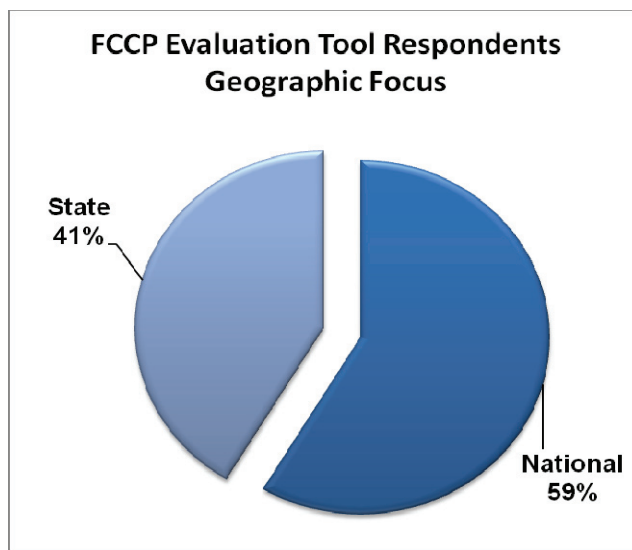


Fig. 1 Geographical Scope of Work by Percentage

Forty-one percent focused their work in the state in which they are located. These included California, Colorado, Oregon, New Mexico, Alaska, Florida, and Virginia, and primarily involved voter education on ballot initiatives and increasing voter turnout through issue education and Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) activities.

Target Population

Ninety-three percent of respondents targeted civic engagement activities towards a specific population or issue area, such as immigrants or reproductive justice, while many organizations overlapped their work to engage multiple constituencies and issue areas (Fig. 2). Almost 14 percent of respondents concentrated their activities on the complex issues involved with justice for all immigrants – registering new citizens, defending the right to vote, educating the media, and building a common immigrant voices platform. Approximately 17 percent of respondents incorporated a focus on youth as a central part of their organizing. HeadCount, for example, used a volunteer base to register voters at more than 1,000 concerts and events, and built a network of grassroots activists online to leverage college-based youth, primarily under the age of 30. Other populations who were contacted through the work of many of the grantees included low to moderate-income individuals and families, people of color (specifically Latino, African American, and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities), infrequent voters, the LGBTQ community, and environmentalists.

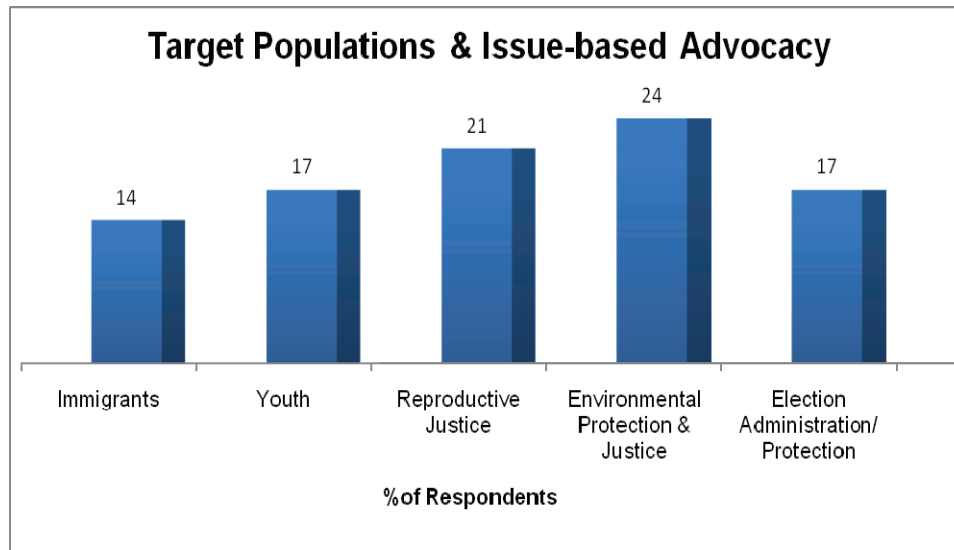


Fig. 2 Target Populations & Issue-based Advocacy by Percentage

Issues

Issue-based advocacy accounted for 62 percent of the strategies used by respondents. Many groups singled out specific issue areas, such as immigration reform, more broadly to build a base of support, while others concentrated on the intersections between movements, e.g., youth and reproductive justice. These two approaches successfully unified diverse constituencies, and resulted in the creation of effective messages that also galvanized interest in online organizing. Some highlights in this area include:

Twenty-one percent used reproductive justice advocacy as the primary vehicle for engaging communities, which resulted in defeating extremist ballot propositions.

Twenty-four percent utilized environmental protection and justice as their focus to promote clean water, climate change, renewable energy and green jobs.

Seventeen percent worked to eliminate barriers and address voting rights through legal advocacy, direct assistance, research and Election Day protection work.

Often, if an organization conducted issue-based advocacy, its efforts also targeted a specific community. For example, the Virginia League of Conservation Voters - Education Fund (VALCV – EF) focused its nonpartisan voter participation activities in underperforming populations, specifically minority-dominant districts in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, to build a base of support for environmental protection and justice. Through its organizing work, VALCV – EF demonstrated that effective voter education includes outreach efforts to a targeted community on especially salient issue areas, such as climate change. In addition to its efforts with disenfranchised districts, VALCV-EF reached out to a new population by working with the National Wildlife Federation to mobilize hunters and anglers who care about climate change because of its impact on wildlife. The direct link between issue-based voter education in the constituencies most impacted and the resulting increase in community engagement accentuates the importance of inclusive approaches.

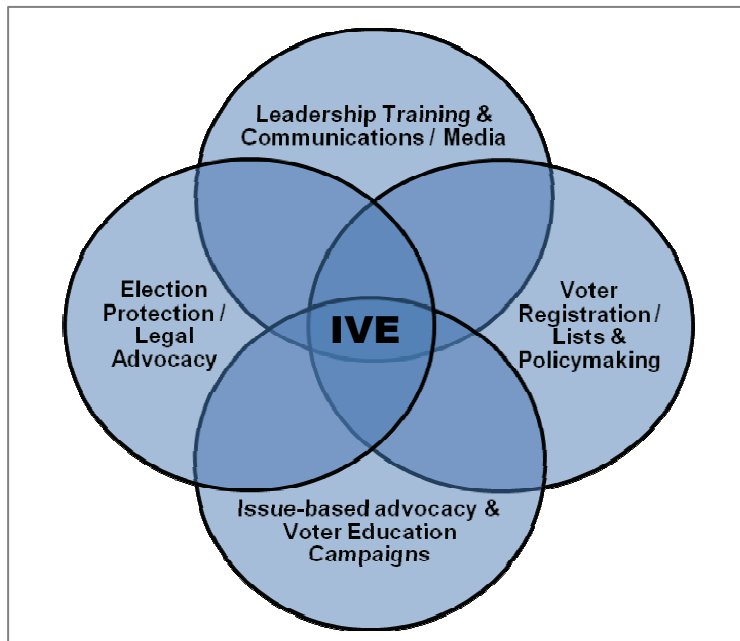


Fig. 3 Integrated Voter Engagement Venn Diagram

Strategies

Nearly 28 percent of respondents had the capacity to conduct **Integrated Voter Engagement**, or **IVE**, a new name for an approach that is proving to be the most effective way to build inclusive democracy and long-term power in underserved communities (Fig. 3). This model incorporates most, if not all, of the wide range of civic engagement activities most organizations use to further their work for social justice. These strategies overlap and tend to build upon the successes of one another. Some of the most popular of these interwoven strategies include: voter registration campaigns, issue-based advocacy, education on ballot propositions, grassroots community organizing, coalitions and alliances, strategic framing and messaging, communications with local and national media outlets, and elements of election protection work. Most organizations with the capacity to conduct successful integrated voter engagement are well established and broadly funded.

The majority of groups in the sample were unable to conduct the full scope of IVE activities due to capacity constraints and/or organizational focus. This is no surprise, but what is exciting to learn is that several groups carried out a number of other creative civic engagement methods throughout the grant cycle. They collaborated and formed partnerships with organizations both smaller and larger themselves to create new mechanisms that enhance and lay the groundwork for future alliances.

Over half of respondents (Fig. 4) used media and communications in their work to increase the number of viewers, readers and listeners who receive progressive information. These included crafting messages on critical issues to engage marginalized communities, conducting interviews on key ballot measures for ethnic media outlets, and creating 30-second television ads on cable TV news networks in suburban areas. In addition to the voters contacted directly through these vehicles, these activities reached countless more people through earned media amplification, including key press coverage by the Associated Press and *The New York Times*. Thirty-one percent of responding groups utilized popular social networking tools, such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, and blogs to engage more prospective voters. Accordingly, most of these groups incorporated youth organizing into their engagement approach. Others redesigned and updated their web presence to enhance email outreach and online advocacy strategies.

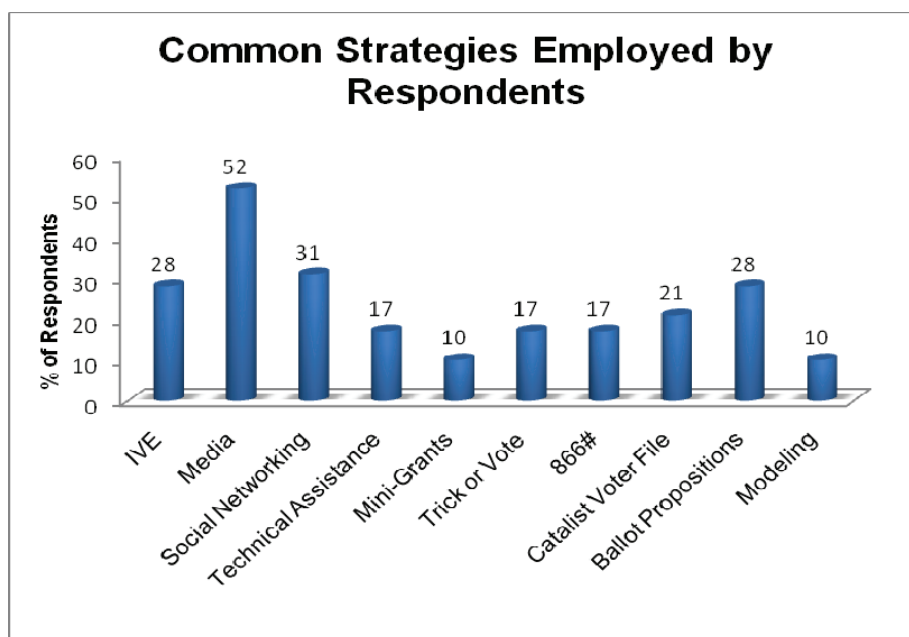


Fig. 4 Common Strategies Used by Respondents by Percentage

While some of the grantees who completed the evaluation did not engage in any direct voter registration or GOTV work, some (17%) were able to increase capacity-building resources to their members by providing trainings and technical assistance stipends. In addition, 10% of respondents provided technical assistance through mini-grants to grassroots partners to help build infrastructure and support ongoing, collaborative efforts. A good example is the Center for Community Change's re-granting process, which assisted community-based organizations to develop integral skill sets, plan for year-round advocacy, and gain access to invaluable data and lists during the election season.

Seventeen percent of organizations focused on ensuring that voters' rights were protected and elections carried out fairly. These groups provided their partners with, or directly used, national election protection hotlines (866-OUR-VOTE) managed by the Election Protection Initiative of the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. The hotlines, staffed by volunteers and supported by pro bono resources, recorded, reported and helped solve problems ranging from malfunctioning electronic poll machines, to voter intimidation. Launched in August 2008, the hotline answered more than 200,000 calls, and nearly 100,000 on Election Day alone. Additionally, the www.866ourvote.org website received nearly 300,000 visitors after a September launch. Successful media outreach increased awareness of the hotline, including attention through a partnership with NBC and MSNBC that featured the number in the days leading up to the election. The Lawyer's Committee also partnered with the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) to share a platform with 888-VE-Y-VOTA (Spanish for "Go out and vote!"), a Spanish language voter hotline. Another election protection activity was litigation to improve Election Day preparations. The Advancement Project filed a lawsuit against the Virginia State Board of Elections on behalf of the Virginia NAACP that challenged the state's outdated system of polling place resource allocation that disproportionately harmed communities of color. Although the lawsuit was unsuccessful, the jurisdictions in question reallocated their resources to nearly eliminate racial disparities.

Twenty-one percent of evaluation respondents used data from the Catalist Voter Activation Network (VAN), an online voter file, for their voter outreach. Many groups were able to access this technology—some for the first time—and took advantage of vital demographical information about voters in their regions. One organization, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, provided their partners with access to the VAN

web interface as part of a collaboration project with California VoterConnect. Some groups used this data to assess the needs of voters in their areas, and merge member lists with lists of new voters registered, which allowed them to expand their contacts and upgrade their organizational databases. Due to the partnerships formed through shared lists, nearly 28 percent of grantees conducted effective voter education into new areas on alarming state ballot propositions, including those that threatened the lives of women and immigrants, and proposed to cut equal opportunity programs.

A small number of groups conducted research through a fairly new mechanism called modeling, or micro-targeting, that includes carefully designing questions asked of a very large sample of individuals in a poll. The model then predicts the responses of the remaining poll participants, which are then compared to actual answers for verification. Once the model is verified, it can be applied to people outside of the sample who match the sample population demographics, increasing voter mobilization efforts while significantly lowering the cost. Women's Voices. Women Vote created a state-of-the-art vote by mail responsiveness model that accurately predicted how an individual would respond to mailings, increasing efficiencies significantly.

Creative Approaches

Youth Engagement

Not surprisingly, the youth vote was front-and-center for many national and statewide organizations that focused on mobilizing new and first-time voters. Generational Alliance, a collaboration of national youth organizations focusing on low-income youth, youth of color, and LGBT youth, ran a unique campaign with Black Entertainment Television (BET) called *Vote Hip Hop*. This project asked young people to express creatively which election issues were important to their communities and why. The winner's work was featured on BET.com and other high profile websites, and received \$500 along with the opportunity to perform at the awards ceremony. Two winning performers were selected: The Faculty for *Change the Nation* (view video at <http://www.myspace.com/thafaculty510>) and Napalm Clique for *We Need a President*, (view video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI20MIXB7Yo>). This program demonstrates the power of supporting youth through messages that originate and resonate with them and is a great model for future years.

Following this youth engagement trend, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ), working primarily in California, trained and coordinated its first *Youth Media Team*, comprised of young women in high school. The young women became spokespeople on reproductive justice issues and the power of voting in 13 media and communications activities. The *Youth Media Team's* early exposure to messaging and framing concepts, and opportunities to practice in front of media outlets are vital components of long-term advocacy and leadership development. It should be noted that all of the respondents who mobilized youth participated in the popular *Trick or Vote* campaign led by Generational Alliance, a fiscally sponsored project of the Tides Center; the program was a non-partisan, costumed, Halloween mass canvass to get-out-the-vote in urban, youth-dense communities that took place in 55 cities and on dozens of college campuses.

Media

Using the media as a force to create new progressive frameworks, Media Matters Action Network (MMAN) released *Fear & Loathing in Prime Time: Immigration Myth and Cable News*, a report documenting the hateful rhetoric surrounding illegal immigration heard almost daily on influential cable news channels. In collaboration with several members of Congress and prominent immigration groups, MMAN held a press conference and as a result, the report received considerable attention in mainstream media. Following its release, progressives began to push back against inaccurate immigration coverage. Specific examples include: the Hispanic Institute launched a boycott against CNN, a Chicago City Council resolution condemned the tone used in the national immigration debate, and the National Hispanic Media

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Coalition sent a petition to the Federal Communications Commission calling out the hate speech prevalent on national cable news and requesting the Commission address this pervasive problem.

Issue Advocacy

Grantee partners also used creative tactics to engage constituencies in community organizing and issue-based advocacy. Catholics United, based in Washington, D.C., played a pivotal role in reframing the abortion debate by arming local activists in Catholic households in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and New Mexico with *Pro-Life Means All Life* flyers and candidate comparison charts for distribution at church events. The group also organized the first-of-its-kind *Parish Protection Program* to guard church parking lots from partisan flyering operations on the weekend before the 2008 election. Colorado Progressive Coalition (CPC), a membership-based group, prioritized organizing people with criminal records and people in the LGBTQ community. Following the leadership of the Colorado Criminal Justice Coalition, CPC was the only group in Colorado to conduct voter registration efforts in county jails. Furthermore, CPC ran its final GOTV campaign from the Lambda Community Center, the only LGBTQ center in Colorado to conduct canvass-based efforts in 2008.

VAF grantee's innovative programs connected civic participation to everyday activities, showcasing the depth and dedication that enabled them to achieve outcomes that surpass those possible using more traditional voter strategies.

IV. A Note on Methodology

Tides Foundation was one of the first funders to use the FCCP Civic Engagement Evaluation Template and, in many ways, the evaluation process was a beta test. In order to capitalize on the momentum created by record-high numbers of new voters, including the historically disenfranchised and young people, Tides first disseminated the Evaluation Template to its Voter Action Fund grantees in late November 2008 with a one month timeline. Tides based its decision to use the December 31st deadline given the high number of email updates, electronic newsletters, post-election analyses, and academic reports received only days after the election. Staff reasoned that because so many election post-mortems were flooding inboxes, grantees who wanted to participate would be able to extrapolate information easily and share their successful civic engagement activities via the evaluation template. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Tides staff received numerous phone calls and emails from grantee partners telling staff that one month was insufficient to thoroughly and thoughtfully complete the evaluation. At the end of the year, given the low response rate and aforementioned issues, Tides established a new deadline: early February 2009. Minimal response throughout January 2009 forced Tides to extend the deadline one last time to early March 2009.

In addition, recognizing the blanket of activities surrounding the holiday season and subsequent inauguration of President Obama, Tides took feedback from grantees seriously and was able to provide another option for completing the FCCP Civic Engagement Evaluation Template. To ensure maximum response, Tides shortened the original version of the evaluation in January 2009 to require a two-page narrative and a brief financial report. In addition, Tides requested that grantees provide a short paragraph detailing why the first version of the evaluation was not completed. In response to this request, grantees identified five reasons for the delay:

- The evaluation template was lengthy and therefore burdensome
- Lack of staff capacity, often a result of post-election and economic downturn- related lay-offs and staff turnover
- The evaluation seemed inapplicable to their work, and
- Response was not mandatory

V. Final Thoughts

Despite some bumps in the road, for Tides staff and VAF grantees the experience of piloting the 2008 Civic Engagement Evaluation Template was a success. Tides staff gained extensive knowledge about the range of grantee expectations and communication styles, and the need to create realistic timelines for deliverables in partnership with groups on the ground. Staff deeply appreciates the time spent by VAF grantee partners who completed the evaluation to share concerns and provide lessons learned; this willingness to take on additional reporting after the work had been completed demonstrates a level of trust in Tides and its FCCP partners that should not be taken for granted.

Based on this shared experience and the work of the VAF grantees, Tides makes the following recommendations to civic participation funder colleagues:

Based on the success of VAF grantees, Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) strategies point the way toward long-term political power; Tides encourages other funders to explore this approach and make it the cornerstone of their funding. These strategies can be used nationally, at the state level, and at the most local levels and are the building blocks of power. However, they require a long-term commitment and patience; they also require support for collaboration among groups.

To ensure that funding is not limited to the ebb and flow cycles of elections, funders should consider multi-year investments in organizations. This will build up capacity and allow non-profits, in a time of economic uncertainty, to plan ahead for their between-election-cycle integrated voter engagement work, which is the heart of IVE strategies.

These findings encourage even more discussion in the FCCP community about how best to build long-term political power and to identify and support models that maximize the impact of funding in both the short and long terms.

Tides Foundation would like to use this opportunity to thank the 2008 VAF grantees for their patience throughout this pilot process, and to thank the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation for its vision and leadership in developing the Civic Engagement Evaluation Tool. This process is only one step in continuing partnerships with all of you.

Appendix A:

Tides Foundation Voter Action Fund Dec. 2007 – Oct. 2008 Grants

* = Grantee completed evaluation

Building Inclusive Democracy

- Advancement Project*
- Brennan Center Strategic Fund
- Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law*
- NAACP Legal & Educational Defense Fund
- Opportunity Agenda, project of Tides Center*
- Right to the City Alliance, a project of Miami Worker's Center
- Voter Action*

The New Electoral Mainstream

- ACORN
- Campus Compact, a project of Center for Ethical Leadership*
- Civic Engagement Fund
- Defenders of Wildlife*
- Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund
- Democracia USA , a project of National Council of La Raza
- Generational Alliance, a project of Tides Center*
- HeadCount*
- League of Young Voters
- NAACP National Voter Fund
- National Hip Hop Political Convention, a project of National Black United Fund
- National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
- New Voters Project, a project of PIRG
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America*
- Project Vote
- Rock the Vote Action Fund
- Rock the Vote
- VoteVets Action Fund, Inc.
- Voto Latino
- Women's Voices. Women Vote*
- Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund*
- Working America Education Fund*
- Youth Engagement Fund, a project of Tides Foundation

Seizing the Moment

- Campaign for America's Future
- Campaign for Consumer Rights
- Campaign to Defend America
- League of Conservation Voters
- National Wildlife Action
- Sierra Club*

Strengthening State & Regional Capacity

- Advancing Wisconsin
- Arizona Advocacy Network Foundation
- Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice*
- Border Action Network
- CAUSA*
- Campaign for Community Change
- Center for Civic Action (NM)
- Center for Civic Participation
- Center for Civic Policy (NM)*
- Center for Community Change*
- Clean Water Action*
- Clean Water Foundation
- Colorado Conservation Voters*
- Colorado Conservation Voters Education Fund*
- Colorado Progressive Action
- Colorado Progressive Coalition*
- Colorado Unity
- Conservation Minnesota*
- Conservation Voters of New Mexico
- Democracy in Action
- Gamaliel Foundation
- Latina Initiative Project*
- Miami Worker's Center*
- Michigan League of Conservation Voters
- Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, a project of Partnership for Immigrant Leadership and Action*
- Montana Conservation Voters
- New Strategies Fund, a project of Tides Foundation

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- Our Oregon
- Progress Now
- SouthWest Organizing Project
- US Action
- US Action Education Fund
- Virginia League of Conservation Voters Education Fund*
- Western Organization of Resource Councils
- Western States Center
- WIN Minnesota

Framing and Communicating Progressive Values

- American Progress Action Fund
- Brave New Foundation
- Catholics United*
- Institute for America's Future*
- Media Matters Action Network*
- NDN, Inc.
- Progress Now Action
- Working Families Organization