

Hill-Snowdon Foundation's Draft 2020 Plan

The Hill-Snowdon Foundation is a social justice foundation that at its core believes in the leadership of low income communities of color as primary actors to reinvigorate our democracy and create a fairer and more just society overall. Given the state of our country today, we could not be in more dire need of reinvigorating our democratic principles and practices and creating a fairer and more just nation. It may not be hyperbolic to assert that the 2020 election cycle will be one of the most important elections in our lifetime.

There are at least three major events facing our democracy in the next two years – **the 2020 Census; the 2020 election cycle (federal, state, local); and the aftermath of the 2020 election cycle** (whatever the outcome) **and redistricting**.

- The 2020 Census could be an opportunity to accurately reflect how the American populace is evolving in diverse and exciting ways, or it could be a moment where fear and coordinated government actions suppress participation and codify a warped picture of our nation, leading to an inequitable future for low wealth communities of color. It will be critically important to support grassroots groups with strong ties to historically undercounted communities so that they can encourage their communities to participate in Census 2020.
- The 2020 election cycle, from the local level to the federal level, is really a moment that will reveal the true nature of who we are as a country, what we hold most dear and, what we are willing to fight for. The situation and the stakes could not be clearer or more desperate. It will be a time to fight against efforts to curtail the right and opportunity to vote and to stand up to the divisive forces of fear, racism, nativism and greed. A time to mobilize the citizenry toward an energized hope for tomorrow and move forward a host of critical issues to help secure a more just and equitable future for the nation as a whole. While most of the attention is correctly on the Presidential race, issue based organizing focused on local issues is a very important means by which to increase voter turnout in the November election. Many of HSF's grassroots partners do not focus on the federal or national level, but their work to turnout their constituents on local issues at the local and state level can reverberate up to spark greater civic engagement overall.
- No one knows what the results of the 2020 election cycle will be. Nevertheless, the progressive community has to be ready for both a positive or negative outcome. Thus, groups need support that extends beyond the 2020 cycle so that they can be best prepared for any eventuality. Additionally, 2021 begins the process for states to begin redrawing the election districts, based in part on the results of the Census (which makes an accurate Census count all the more important).

Given this unique and dire moment in our country's history, how should the Hill-Snowdon Foundation respond? What could we do that both aligns with our institutional and personal values and offers concrete support to the communities we care about? After seeing what some colleagues are doing and reflecting on what might be a meaningful response for us, we have developed the following proposed plan of action for the Foundation that we hope will help our grassroots partners and Hill-Snowdon as an institution best engage in this critical time in our nation's history.

HSF Draft 2020 Plan

HSF staff is proposing a multi-faceted two-year plan (Fall 2019 –Fall 2021), that will enhance the opportunity for HSF grassroots partners to engage their constituents in critical civic engagement focused work (e.g., 2020 Census, 2020 election cycle, post-election organizing), to improve the prospects of their communities to thrive. HSF's Board approved the Draft 2020 plan presented below, and the next step is to share it with our grassroots partners so that we can **refine it based on their feedback**. The two-year plan focuses on activities during 2020 and includes:

1. **Democracy's Promise 20/21 Initiative** – a new grantmaking initiative that will infuse additional grant dollars to a select group of 10 current grassroots partners for their civic engagement related work;
2. Expediting and streamlining funding for all HSF partners in 2020 to give them the time and resources to focus on mobilizing and organizing their constituents;
3. Facilitating opportunities for HSF grassroots partners to make strategic connections with one another; and
4. Offering direct support to a sub-section of HSF grassroots partners from HSF staff and board.

Specifically, we are proposing the following actions as part of HSF's 2020 plan:

- I. **Democracy's Promise 20/21 Project** – HSF staff is proposing to select ten (10) current HSF grassroots partners (e.g., PA1, PA2, FDC, MBLM, Defending the Dream) to give them a two year \$50,000 grant in addition to their current grant to allow them to increase their capacity to carry-out their 2020 related civic engagement plans.
 - a. The \$500,000 for the Democracy's Promise 20/21 Initiative would come mostly from not filling open slots after groups roll off (due to the 8-year time limit) over the next two years, as well as some discretionary dollars from the Partnership grants.
 - i. This would mean there would be no grants to new organizations in 2020.
 - ii. The selected groups would get their regular HSF grant of \$30k or \$35k, as well as an additional \$25k/year grant, raising their per year grant amount from HSF to \$55k or \$60k per year over the two years. Defending the Dream groups would receive their \$10k grant through the fund, as well as an additional \$25k/year, raising their per year grant amount from HSF to \$35k over a two-year period.
 - iii. *This would be HSF's first time doing multi-year grants where we would approve the full \$50,000 in 2019 and book it all in 2019.*
 - iv. We would run the Democracy's Promise initiative through the [JustFund portal](#) (the platform that we use for the Defending the Dream Fund), so that we can leverage other funds for these groups directly through the portal.
- II. **One, Streamlined Grant Cycle in 2020** – While we do not have the resources to offer infusion grants to all of our partners, we can offer the next best thing: time. We are proposing to allow all of our grassroots partners to submit streamlined grant applications in 2020. Moreover, we are proposing

to do one (1) grant cycle in the first half of the year (between March and May) and get all the grant funds out the door no later than June 2020.

- a. All grassroots partners (except for perhaps new groups approved in 2018) would submit a streamlined proposal that would ask **for 2020 budget; 3 bulleted accomplishments for the past year; bulleted plans for 2020; what are they most excited about in their 2020 work; what are their one or two biggest strategic needs/challenges in 2020.**
 - i. The idea here is that we have some knowledge of the groups and that we can afford for one year not to collect all the information we usually collect. However, if there are some groups that we have pre-existing questions about, we may require more information.
 - ii. All grant applications would be due in February 2020.
 - iii. *We may also ask the groups to do a short recording of their submission as an audio companion to their written application to facilitate sharing their information with other grassroots partners.*
 - iv. *Organizations that would have received their grants in November 2020, would receive their grant in mid-2020, but their grant year would still be November 2020 to October 2021. This means that these groups would have to be careful to manage their grant funds in terms of cashflow.*
 1. *If an organization wants, they can opt to receive their 2020 grant in two installments (in spring 2020 and fall 2020) or could opt to receive the full grant on the regular fall 2020 schedule.*
- b. HSF staff **would not do a grant write up for these groups for the board docket**, and the docket would consist of the direct streamlined application submitted to the foundation. Staff will compile the submissions into a board book and perhaps provide access to the audio recordings if Board members want that as well.
- c. We **would not do traditional site visits** with our partners in 2020 to free up more of their time.
 - i. We would either forego site visits in 2020 OR **do collective site visits with sub-groups of our grassroots partners (5-7 in each group) where the visit would be more focused on them sharing information with each other, rather than for our purposes.**
 1. This is where the audio-recordings of the applications could be helpful.
 2. We might also ask groups who they would like to be in a group site visit with to facilitate strategic connections.

III. **Strategic Connections** - If the groups find it of use, HSF staff can help arrange strategic conversations between our grassroots partners that may benefit their work in 2020 and beyond. Part of impetus for this idea comes from HSF's 360 evaluation in 2018 where the groups asked for more opportunities to meet with and learn from one another.

- a. If we do the collective site visit calls, we can provide access to the streamlined written and audio application to our grassroots partners so that groups can have additional information on each organization.
 - i. We can ask them to choose their top 3-5 organizations that they would like to be grouped with for the collective site visit.
- b. If we do not do collective site visits, we can still provide access to the applications and ask all the groups if they would like for us to arrange video meet-ups and ask for their top three organizations.

IV. “All Hands on Deck” HSF Direct Partner Engagement – The streamlined grant docket and reducing the grant review meetings from two to one in 2020 frees up HSF staff and Board to engage with our partners in a different way. We are proposing that HSF staff and perhaps Board members could volunteer with some of our grassroots partners to assist them in their 501c3 related outreach/organizing efforts (e.g, phone banking, text messaging, door knocking, etc.). We would only do this if it makes sense to our partners.

- a. We might need to restrict the initial offer of volunteer participation to the 10 groups that we select for the Democracy’s Promise initiation in order to manage possible demands from all of our groups. Or perhaps it makes sense to prioritize the groups that are not receiving these grants.
- b. We may have to increase our travel budget to allow staff to travel to do this work. We would also look for virtual volunteering opportunities (like phone banking) for staff and Board who are not able to travel.

Conclusion

We present this plan to our Board in the spirit of partnership, trust and strategic change that lies at the heart of all our work to help create a fairer and more just society. While some of the suggested actions may be novel for the Foundation, we understand that this is not the time for business as usual. The one thing that remains constant though is our belief in the power and brilliance of our partners and their communities to lead us into a better tomorrow. We hope that this plan will help our partners in their work at this critical time, as it helps us to live up to our values. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your questions, comments and feedback.