

Application Questions for Bush Foundation Community Innovation Grant

PROJECT NARRATIVE

1. Provide a two-sentence summary of the proposed work (50 words max)

E-Democracy's Engagement Tech initiative, led by our Open Twin Cities collaboration, will stimulate and inspire local software developers, government units, and community/cultural organizations to develop innovative technologies to address community needs. This project will tap into the local talent of diverse populations to develop inclusive civic technology for all.

2. Provide a brief overview of your organization/mission (100 words max)

E-Democracy has been a pioneer in online civic engagement work for two decades. Our mission is to harness the power of online tools to support participation in public life, strengthen communities, and build democracy. Through our unique focus on inclusion, we strive to create online spaces that reflect the true diversity of communities. Over the past three years, with funding from the Ford Foundation and Knight Foundation, E-Democracy has developed inclusive online Neighbors Forums in low-income, immigrant, and culturally diverse neighborhoods. Currently, we have almost 15,000 Twin Cities' neighbors using our online forums for community and civic engagement.

3. Describe the need or opportunity you're addressing. How did you and your community decide to focus on this particular need or opportunity (200 words max)

According to a recent Pew Research report "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," there are large gaps in online civic participation. Overall, 34% of all adults participated in online "civic communication" in 2012. 47% of households making over \$75,000 per year participated this way compared to only 24% of households making less than \$30,000. Despite huge gains in Internet access and use across races, 38% of Whites participated in online civic communication compared to only 23% of Blacks and 17% of Latinos.

In the 2012 election season, 39% of adults used social networking sites for something political. The data shows that 46% Whites, 38% Blacks, and 34% Latinos "learned about a political or social issue" using social media. However, "taking action" based on what was learned has an almost 2 to 1 ethnicity gap with 20% Whites compared to 12% Blacks, and 11% Latinos.

As government and community participation moves online, now is the crucial time to design inclusive civic technology and combine it with outreach activities to raise new and underrepresented voices. Our extensive history and experience has revealed the need for creating open and inclusive spaces that deliver civic, community, and political value to all.

4. In 500 words or less:

a. Provide a brief overview of the proposed work and its goals; b. Provide a short list of key activities you will engage in and the reason why you've selected them; c. Describe how the community-powered problem-solving approach you're using is inclusive, collaborative, and makes the most of the existing community resources

a. Our Engagement Tech program will build upon Open Twin Cities (OTC), a volunteer-driven group of local software developers working with governments and active citizens to deploy

innovative online technologies for the community. As part of the national Code for America brigade, OTC joins leading local efforts around the nation. In Minnesota, we are working within the national civic technology movement to ensure the design of innovative technologies to better serve underrepresented communities.

Through E-Democracy's current BeNeighbors.org program, we have recruited and engaged thousands of civic participants from low-income, high-immigrant, and culturally diverse neighborhoods. Our nation-leading network provides a unique base for technology development to address the digital civic engagement divide.

Our overarching goals are to:

1. Strengthen collaboration among local government units, the local civic technology community, and citizens for civic technology development and innovation
2. Tap into the local talent of diverse populations to develop ***inclusive*** technology solutions to address real community needs

b. We propose to conduct weekly meetups via what will become the nation's most inclusive local civic tech network made up of staff from local government units, nonprofit organizations, cultural and ethnic organizations, colleges, and others. Meetups will include code-a-thons and other local events promoting the use of government data and civic software applications for community purposes.

Bill Bushey, co-founder of Open Twin Cities and Technology Coordinator for E-Democracy, will act as Project Director coordinating weekly gatherings, collaborating with network participants, and providing project oversight. We will hire an Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator for inclusive outreach to diverse students from local colleges and current developers from local businesses and software companies to participate in the weekly meetups.

Representatives from local government units, diverse tech developers, and citizens will come together at the meetups to discuss community needs and opportunities for civic tech solutions. This collaboration in itself is the first step in the right direction. New technology applications and opportunities developed using inclusive design principles will derive as a result of the dialogue and exchange.

c. The Engagement Tech project is both inclusive and collaborative in nature. We will engage emerging software developers, designers, and others from or connected to communities of color to build technology of diverse communities rather than for them. This project will introduce a fundamental shift in the "civic tech" space where low-income and culturally diverse communities are in theory open to join, but are historically not engaged in shaping the online tools they will use on the Internet or their smart phones. It is extremely important to emphasize that inclusive technology development requires an engagement process that is open and responsive to community input. In addition, the project will include partnerships with local government entities to ensure a valuable collaboration among all interested stakeholders. This project will make use of already existing resources within the community by collaborating with many cultural, ethnic-based, immigrant-connected organizations, engaging the people they serve. Our community-powered, problem solving approach also includes local and national technology partners (See budget narrative for additional partner information).

5. Describe the capacity (skills/resources/staff) your organization has for the proposed community-powered problem-solving efforts and/or your plan for building needed capacity to effectively do the proposed work (500 words max)

Our current capacity provides the foundation needed to implement the proposed Engagement Tech effort. We propose to hire one new position, the Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator.

Our **Executive Director**, Steven Clift, was named among “The 25 Who Are Changing the World of Internet and Politics” by Politics Online and in 2006 received a fellowship from Ashoka. In 2011, he served as adjunct faculty at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School for Public Affairs teaching social media. He has served as advisor to the Markle Foundation's Web White & Blue online election information partnership and organized a major online presidential debate in 2000. Steven coordinated the State of Minnesota's government portal from 1994-1997 and served as Executive Director of the Minnesota Government Information Access Council in 1997. Steven spent two years 1991-1993 working for the Center for Democracy and Citizenship and their youth civic education Public Achievement project.

Steve will oversee and collaborate with our Technology Coordinator and the Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator to develop and implement the proposed project.

Bill Bushey, our **Technology Coordinator**, provides technology support to maintain existing systems and implement innovations. For this project, Bill will oversee the technology development and deployment that emerges from the network and ensure diversity in the design process.

Bill received a B.S. in Computer Science from Clarkson University and an M.S. in Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. He has developed software and provided technical consultation for Thomson Reuters, IBM, and Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, and has participated in Google's Summer of Code.

The **Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator** will lead the program’s intentional inclusive outreach and engagement efforts, specifically promoting our diversity goals among local technology leaders in private industry, nonprofit organizations, government sectors, and higher education. This person will work in collaboration with volunteers and E-Democracy staff.

The Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator must have deep connections within local diverse communities; experience recruiting, cultivating, and deepening relationships with organizations, community partners, and volunteers; a demonstrated passion for E-Democracy’s mission; belief in the power of community building; and experience in civic engagement technology.

Jennifer Armstrong, our **Project Coordinator**, assists in the day-to-day operations of E-Democracy. She is responsible for contract preparation, invoice processing, managing our internal contact management system, and producing regular evaluation reports. For this project, she will provide essential project assistance to the Engagement Tech Outreach Coordinator, including evaluation and administrative support. Based in rural Minnesota, she adds a vital statewide perspective to our team.

Our **Diverse Community Engagement Leaders** foster forum engagement and bridge-building, specifically across the Latino, East African, Southeast Asian, and African American communities. Primary responsibilities include intentional content seeding, promoting community dialogue, and deepening community engagement. Our team and community focus areas include: Tong Thao (Asian community), Rev. Devin Miller (African-American community), Gloria Castillo (Latino community), and we are currently seeking an East African-focused team member.

6. Describe what will be different as a result of the proposed work. How will you know you're making progress toward addressing the need/opportunity described in question three? (500 words max)

E-Democracy's work is extremely unique and innovative. Our focus on bringing together highly diverse populations, particularly low-income, immigrant, and racially/ethnically communities, for online community engagement and inclusive technology development addresses an overlooked and neglected opportunity. No other organizations are proactively working to make civic technology fundamentally inclusive.

We propose the following short term and long term criteria for success:

Short Term

- Recruit 300 members to the Open Twin Cities network specifically promoting our diversity goals among local technology leaders in private industry, nonprofit organizations, government sectors, and higher education
- Volunteers, including those who work in major local corporations, provide expertise and input to civic technology use in the region on regular basis via the Open Twin Cities online group and other online spaces created for specific apps and pilots
- Demonstrate increasing diversity at the weekly meetups including regular student participation
- Each year, generate dozens of civic tech projects for solution exploration and knowledge sharing opportunities, as well as document the reuse of the best open government/civic tech open source software introduced in Minnesota via Open Twin Cities events
- Locally develop and deploy at least two major civic engagement software applications each year with year two applications fully deploying inclusive design principles
- Have a visible presence at least six major local or national civic engagement technology events during the two year grant period
- Partnerships developed with local government sectors
- Complete StarTribune.com (a new Open Twin Cities gold sponsor) partnership discussions to share the best civic apps with their daily users (and explore other media connections)

Long Term

- Build a robust Twin Cities civic engagement technology community that:
 - Builds inclusion into civic engagement activities and technology design processes to address questions related to the design, technical assumptions, perceived relevancy, and marketing of innovative civic engagement technologies developed through organization activities
 - Promotes constructive communication and collaboration with the broader community using open data resources to build civic technology applications that solve real community needs
 - Increases the social impact of open data and diverse technology professionals in our community
 - Prompts students of color to be more interested in technology professions by showcasing the work and activities of diverse network members
- Generate nationally-relevant lessons and strategies on the intentionally inclusive design and use of digital tools for civic engagement to help the broader online community close the socioeconomic and diversity gap in civic participation
- The Twin Cities' Engagement Tech community becomes recognized as a national and global leader for inclusive technology development
- Expand civic tech engagement into Greater Minnesota including our existing online community serving the Leech Lake area, a primarily Native American population.

List partners or collaborators (we are to list those we want to give credit to, and it can only be up to 30 words, so we need to only include those that are key to the project)

Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, CURA, State of Minnesota: MN.IT and SOS, MN High Tech Association, Immigrant Bridges Network, DevJam, GovDelivery, WareCorp, Sunlight Foundation, and Code for America.

For more details or the proposed budget, contact E-Democracy - <http://e-democracy.org/contact>

To get involved now or to become a sponsor: <http://opentwincities.org>

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