



Item 7. Staff

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Nicolas Heidorn, Executive Director

TO: Public Ethics Commission
FROM: Nicolas Heidorn, Executive Director
DATE: September 29 2023
RE: Pursuing Grant Funding Opportunities to Support the Democracy Dollars Program

The Public Ethics Commission (PEC or Commission) will likely be invited by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund (Haas Jr. Fund) to submit an application for a grant to fund a Democracy Dollars community engagement and outreach specialist position at the PEC for one year. This position, if funded, will enable the PEC to build a robust outreach and education plan well before the distribution of Democracy Dollar vouchers and begin building relationships with community organizations and leaders that can help educate the public and diverse communities about the Program. The grant is intended to be a proof of concept, with a goal of the City permanently supporting the position in its next budget cycle, if the concept proved successful. The outreach specialist would be a City employee or contractor reporting to the Democracy Dollars Program Manager; the Haas, Jr. Fund would have no role in directing or supervising the outreach specialist's or the PEC's outreach activities.

Staff is requesting the PEC's approval to submit an application and delegate to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair, the power to sign off and execute any necessary agreements to apply for and receive the grant.

Background

In November 2022, voters passed Measure W, to replace Oakland's existing, reimbursement-based public financing system with a voucher-based public financing system, modelled off of Seattle's system, called the Democracy Dollars Program. Under the Program, eligible Oakland residents will receive four, \$25 vouchers which they may contribute to any eligible candidate running for a City or Oakland School District office. Measure W required that the City provide a specified minimum budget and at least four staff positions to the PEC to administer the Program, which was intended to be implemented in the 2024 election cycle.

However, in light of the significant budget deficit the City was facing, the City Council voted to eliminate funding for Democracy Dollars in the 2025 Budget, effectively postponing the Program to 2026, and provided the PEC with one staff position to begin Program implementation, instead of the four required under Measure W. Unless the City Council provides a budget adjustment, the soonest the PEC could be budgeted the three additional positions would be in July of 2025. If it takes several months to hire for these positions, which has been the PEC's experience in the past, these positions may not be filled until a few months before vouchers are mailed out to Oakland residents.

PEC staff has been exploring opportunities to find grant funding to enable earlier hiring of contractors or staff who can assist the PEC in preparing for Democracy Dollars implementation, with outreach and education being one crucial area that will require early planning and preparation. Measure W expressly provides that the City may accept voluntary donations to the Democracy

Dollars Fund, which is the fund the voucher contributions are paid out of. (OMC 3.15.060.) The City of Oakland, although not the PEC, also routinely applies for grant funding to support specific programs or operations.

Contemplated Outreach Position

A core need of the Democracy Dollars Program will be preparing a robust outreach and education program to let the approximately 245,000 Oakland registered voters know that about the Program, and how to use their vouchers. As part of its commitment to equitable outreach, and in keeping with the goals of Measure W to “expand public participation in the local democratic process and empower all Oakland residents with an opportunity to engage meaningfully in the campaign process,” it is particularly important that this outreach and education encompass all of Oakland’s diverse communities and emphasize communities that have traditionally been underserved or that have lower levels of political engagement.

Staff is proposing to apply for a grant to contract for or bring on a community engagement and outreach specialist to assist with the development and implementation of an equity-centered Democracy Dollars engagement plan to build awareness of, and encourage broad participation in, the Program, including in traditionally underserved areas of Oakland. The community engagement specialist would assist with developing the PEC’s community engagement infrastructure in the lead up to the launch of the Democracy Dollars Program and would assist in developing a communication strategy and comprehensive outreach plan for educating voters on the Program.

The PEC will seek grant funding to, at minimum, hire or contract with a specialist for one year, likely from at least July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. Because outreach and education will remain a critical component of the Program, if this specialist role is successful, staff anticipates requesting that the City Council continue the position permanently at the end of the grant.

Haas, Jr. Fund

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund is a San Francisco-based, 501(c)(3) nonprofit private foundation established by Evelyn D. Haas and Walter A. Haas Jr. in 1953. Today, the Fund’s board positions are held by the children and grandchildren of Evelyn and Walter Haas, including Board Chair Walter J. Haas. According to its mission statement, among other priorities, the Haas Jr. Fund seeks to “build a fair and inclusive democracy in which all Californians have equal opportunities for participation and representation.”

The Haas Jr. Fund has a long history of grantmaking in the Bay Area, including supporting the Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative’s (BayPEC’s) initial research into how to design a more inclusive public financing system, including the Democracy Dollars approach the Collaborative ultimately advocated for. The Haas, Jr. Fund also supported Maplight’s research into political giving in Oakland, and the work of the Oakland Fair Elections Coalition.

Current 2023 Bay Area grantees include \$100,000 to the East Bay Community Foundation for “the Fund for Multiracial Democracy to support City of Oakland leadership and community co-governance,” \$250,000 over two years for the Oakland Rising project “to support community engagement, leadership development, and alliance building in Oakland and Alameda County,” and \$115,000 over two years to Oakland Kids First “to support efforts to implement youth voting, activism, and leadership development in Oakland.” A list of past and current grantees may be found at the Haas, Jr. Fund’s website: <https://www.haasjr.org/grants/search>.

The Haas, Jr. Fund does not engage in or make grants in support of or opposition to political campaigns, including supporting or opposing candidates or ballot measures, and does not engage in or make grants to support lobbying.

Grant Approval

The Executive Director is able to apply for and accept grants on their own authority. However, given the likely size of the grant, I am requesting the full PEC's input and authorization in this case.

According to the City Attorney's Office, the receipt of any grant over \$50,000 must be approved by the City Council. If the PEC receives this grant, staff will work with the City Council to finalize approval of the award.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the PEC adopt a motion authorizing staff to apply for a grant to fund an outreach specialist position and, if successful, to take any necessary steps to execute the grant, in consultation with the PEC Chair and Vice Chair.

Additional Attachment: Haas Jr., Fund Mission Statement

Haas Jr., Fund Mission Statement

<https://www.haasjr.org/about/mission-statement>

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund works to advance equality and justice so every person can thrive and live life with dignity and hope.

The Haas, Jr. family's love and deep appreciation for the vitality and beauty of the San Francisco Bay Area and its diverse people and cultures inspire our work. Guided by the values of inclusion, respect, collaboration, and courage, we are compelled to confront injustice and some of society's most difficult issues. In all [our work](#), the Fund strives to be a voice of hope and a force for positive change.

Motivated by our values, the Fund seeks to:

- Build a fair and inclusive [democracy](#) in which all Californians have equal opportunities for participation and representation.
- Make [higher education](#) more affordable so all young people have opportunities to realize the dream of a college degree.
- Help [immigrant children and youth](#) thrive and unleash their potential to shape the future of California.
- Advance full equality for [LGBT people](#) so they have the same civil rights protections other Americans take for granted.
- Build the skills of organization and movement [leaders](#) so they can advance the cause of social change
- Ensure [Crissy Field](#) remains a beautiful and beloved gathering place for all people.
- Channel the generosity of the Bay Area to provide [emergency assistance](#) for individuals and families.