

TIDES

ADVOCACY

# HEALTHY DEMOCRACY ACTION FUND

## *Protecting Democracy & Building Progressive Power*

Tides Advocacy has launched the Healthy Democracy Action Fund to support the development of a permanent political infrastructure that tangibly increases movements' influence over elections and policymaking.

After a 2018 midterm election cycle that saw many exciting wins, progressives have seized this pivotal moment to build towards the 2020 elections and beyond. As we face the health, social, economic and political impact of COVID-19, efforts to build long-term political progressive power can help safeguard community wellbeing and advance a social justice agenda during this challenging time. In turn, initiatives to build long-term power will need to address the effects of COVID-19 on organizing, political participation and electoral engagement.

As a 501(c)(4) initiative, the Healthy Democracy Action Fund (HDAF) is committed to fundamentally changing the balance of power in U.S. politics by building the influence of historically marginalized and underrepresented communities, with a focus on mobilizing for elections, shaping the public agenda, and demanding policy change. Above all, to achieve this change we need sustained, vigorous participation of those directly affected by injustice and those disaffected with a political system that benefits from their exclusion.

**Centering on these communities and strengthening their power is essential to securing progressive wins now in a way that catalyzes transformative victories in the longer term.**

## **THE OPPORTUNITY: STRENGTHENING OUR BASE**

In 2018 we witnessed unprecedented voter participation for a midterm election, largely fueled by under-represented groups known to “drop off” in non-presidential years. Turnout rates for Black, Latinx, and Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) eligible voters came as close in 2018 to matching the previous *presidential* election rates as they have in at least 30 years. Voter outreach was critical to this outcome, driven by culturally-competent, community-led

organizations.<sup>1</sup> Surveys comparing the presidential and midterm elections found that higher rates of Latinxs and APIAs were contacted about voting or registration in 2018 than 2016, and nearly half of these respondents were contacted by nonprofit or community-based organizations.<sup>2</sup>

This high turnout context delivered wins for a historically diverse slate of candidates and progressive ballot measures. But we can't expect to continue seeing this degree of voter engagement and electoral victories if they are not followed by policy changes that benefit drop-off voters, and an increase in elected officials who reflect their communities and life experiences. *Without* these, inconsistent voters might take a poisonous lesson from the 2018 midterms: that it does not in fact matter whether they vote.

Linking robust electoral engagement to social justice outcomes will be key in transforming the balance of power and strengthening community voice in politics.

## OUR STRATEGY

The Healthy Democracy Action Fund will focus on geographies with high stakes for the 2020 general election, but also places where key races overlap with a long-term game to transform the political map towards progressive outcomes. HDAF's approach considers: shifting demographics; the importance of political leadership development to build an electoral bench of women and people of color; the need to change state rules to promote a healthy democracy; and viable targets for delivering on a social justice policy agenda.

***Our goal is to build independent political power among communities historically marginalized in politics and policymaking, with attention to two signals of progress:***

- 1. Strong, sustained mobilization among historically marginalized communities in support of electoral targets aligned with Tides Advocacy's social justice agenda.** This includes increased turnout around candidates and ballot measures that advance criminal justice reform, environmental and economic justice, racial justice, immigrant rights, and reproductive justice.
- 2. Historically marginalized communities exercise greater influence over policymaking, with elected officials increasingly responsive and accountable to them.** This more equitable representation is driven by strong, year-round community organizing, political leadership development, and political influence work.

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<sup>1</sup> This included not only in-language outreach, but also effective use of digital media, cultural strategies, collaboration with local influencers and leaders, and local campaign staffing

<sup>2</sup> Nonprofit VOTE and the U.S. Elections Project, America Goes to the Polls 2018: Voter Turnout and Election Policy in the 50 States, March 2019, p. 12.

## FUNDING PRIORITIES

**Focus on elections with a high return on investment up and down the ballot in the immediate and long-term:** Tides Advocacy's approach to setting geographic priorities overlays important swing states with competitive federal and state races, and places where state legislative control hangs in the balance. This both provides a high return on investment and boosts turnout through the 'reverse coattails' effect, where local issues and candidates are used to motivate voters to turn out.

**Promote a healthy democracy by making the rules fair:** Support work in states where 2020 redistricting will have the most impact on future House and state legislative elections. This priority also extends to policy change and implementation that promote a healthy democracy in the long-term, such as automatic voter registration, independent redistricting to fight gerrymandering, re-enfranchisement for returning citizens, and potentially policy changes to safeguard voter access and expand voting methods in contexts of the current COVID-19 and future crises.

**Implement and defend a social justice policy agenda:** Ongoing community engagement is critical to linking electoral wins to policy change. We support organizations doing electoral work that aligns with our inclusive social justice policy agenda; these groups are uniquely positioned to target electeds who have obstructed progressive policy change, and support those who advance our social justice goals.

## KEY STATES

Our targeting focuses on high-impact regions—rather than supporting candidates individually, HDAF partners with state-based groups running field programs around key races up and down the ballot. We're prioritizing states where we can influence several overlapping competitive elections that have significant policy implications.

Arizona  
Colorado  
Florida  
Georgia

Michigan  
North Carolina  
Pennsylvania  
Wisconsin

## GRANTMAKING CRITERIA

Organizations funded by HDAF will meet the following criteria:

- Cultivate strong relationships with leaders and residents of under-represented communities for a broader and deeper base of support year-round.
- Represent and are led by communities with higher potential to grow the electorate (e.g. drop-off or occasional voters) and engage those with more progressive views.

- **Adapt tactics and tools to secure wins and advance strategy**, given that low-propensity voters are typically harder to reach through traditional canvassing and phone banking.
- **Use electoral engagement to accumulate experience and insights to build long-term power.** Investing in building political organizational capacity can help activists scale quickly when needed, effectively respond to political opportunities, and ensure that key voices are represented in broader organizing spaces.
- **Keep growing the leaders who will make a truly representative democracy.** This includes concerted efforts such as programs to position community members for advancement as organizational leaders; to develop people from under-represented communities as candidates, campaign leaders, and/or staffers; and to get candidates from under-represented communities elected to local and state offices.

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE**

The Healthy Democracy Action Fund will be led by Tides Advocacy staff in consultation with movement leaders. We will share periodic updates to contribute to the growing knowledge base around power-building work.

Our position at the nexus of funders and activists gives us key insights on what's needed and what works. Through our network of grassroots allies and our experience on the ground, we can respond quickly to community needs, identify emerging efforts, and scale programs that have a proven track record.

To learn more about the Healthy Democracy Action Fund, please contact Luis Diaz-Albertini at [luis@tides.org](mailto:luis@tides.org).

### **MORE ABOUT TIDES ADVOCACY**

Tides Advocacy is a team of political, legal and financial experts that identify, connect, and fuel movements for social justice and the health of our democracy. Founded in 1997, we leverage our extensive network and design solutions to make advocacy accessible to social change innovators in all sectors.

We help with strategy development, legal guidance, and the grantmaking infrastructure to establish and run high- impact funds in the advocacy space.

With a network of over 70 fiscally sponsored 501(c)(4) projects and funds across the United States, we effectively support grantmaking to strengthen community voice and achieve lasting policy change.