

Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation | Democracy Grant Program | Application Scoring Rubric

Grantmaking focus:

Our Democracy Grant Program will consider proposals that address one or more of the following:

- Organizing across issues (e.g., economic justice, climate justice) that builds power and strengthens democratic participation and/or works to improve the material conditions of Minnesota communities
- Narrative infrastructure and storytelling that expands civic voice and dialogue toward an equitable democracy and a just Minnesota
- Infrastructure and institution building that expands our movement landscape, strengthens leaders and equips our changemaking ecosystem for lasting power-building

We understand this work of realizing and strengthening our democracy manifests across issues. We also understand that organizing leverages various strategies required to shape political agendas and social conditions for long-term change include strengthening narrative infrastructure, organizing resources, increasing democratic participation, and building new institutions.

Organizing that works to change the material conditions of communities will both fortify our civic infrastructure and strengthen the democratic participation of communities across the state. Efforts grounded in strong issue-based campaigns, the defense of democratic institutions, leadership development that brings new leaders into the fold, and an orientation of institution building all lay the groundwork for long-term change.

Funded work could include any of the following and more:

- Cross-issue organizing around topics of economic justice, public safety, environment/climate, LGBTQIA+ rights, racial justice, immigration, Indigenous governance and sovereignty, civic engagement working to improve the material conditions of Minnesota communities
- Organizing strategies that expand base-building and grow new constituencies to build a bigger “we”
- Organizing that builds narrative infrastructure and power to shape storytelling and expand civic discourse for a just Minnesota

Section 1: Overview of Proposed Work & Your Role in Community

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant clearly describe the systems they seek to transform and the central focus of their work over the next five years? Strong applications will articulate how their work addresses root causes of inequities by transforming structures, mindsets, power dynamics, or policies, and demonstrates the benefits to the geography served.

Score	Description
5	The response clearly articulates the systems the organization seeks to transform and presents a focused vision for its work over the next five years. It demonstrates how the work builds power and addresses root causes of inequities through shifts in structures, mindsets, power dynamics, or policies, with clear benefits to the communities and geography served.
4	The organization describes its role and focus with clarity and shows how its work contributes to addressing inequities. Elements of systems transformation and power-building are present, though connections across these elements or to long-term impact may not be fully developed.
3	The response describes the organization's work and community role but remains somewhat broad or programmatic. While there is some reference to equity or change, the connection to root causes, systems transformation, or power-building is only partially articulated.
2	The description of the work lacks clarity around the systems being addressed or how inequities are being challenged. Connections to power-building or long-term change are minimal or underdeveloped.
1	The response does not clearly describe the organization's focus, the systems it seeks to transform, or how it addresses inequities. There is little to no evidence of power-building or meaningful community impact.
Comments or Questions	

Section 2: Current and Future Conditions

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant provide a clear analysis of the social, economic, cultural, and political context affecting their work? Does the applicant identify the barriers, risks, and opportunities that shape their work and describe the root causes of the challenges they are addressing? Strong applications will present a compelling vision of a more just and equitable society, including the outcomes or shifts they seek in structures, relationships, networks, mindsets, and power dynamics.

Score	Description
5	The response provides a clear and insightful analysis of the social, economic, cultural, and/or political landscape, including key shifts, challenges, and root causes. It thoughtfully identifies barriers, risks, and opportunities, and presents a compelling vision for a more just and equitable future with well-defined outcomes across systems, relationships, mindsets, or power dynamics. The connection between current conditions and future change is cohesive and well-articulated.
4	The organization demonstrates a solid understanding of the context and key challenges affecting its work, including some analysis of root causes. The vision for a more equitable future is clear, though connections between current conditions, opportunities, and intended systems-level shifts may not be fully developed.
3	The response describes aspects of the landscape and challenges but remains broad or more descriptive than analytical. A vision for change is present, though it may be high-level, with limited clarity on specific outcomes or how shifts in systems or power will be achieved.
2	The description of context, challenges, or root causes is vague, incomplete, or lacks clear connection to the organization's work. The vision for a more just future is minimally described, and intended outcomes or shifts are unclear or underdeveloped.
1	The response does not clearly describe the context, challenges, or root causes affecting the work. There is little to no articulation of a vision for change or the outcomes the organization seeks to achieve.
Comments or Questions	

Section 3: Strategies & Activities

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant demonstrate strategies to build power, disrupt inequities, and create long-term societal change? Strong applications describe clear approaches such as developing leaders, strengthening infrastructure for lasting power, building alignment tables for collective action, or shaping narratives to support civic discourse.

Score	Description
5	The response presents a clear and cohesive approach to building collective power, strengthening democratic participation, and expanding civic dialogue. It demonstrates how strategies such as organizing, narrative change, leadership development, and infrastructure building work together to disrupt inequities and drive long-term societal transformation.
4	The organization outlines well-defined strategies that contribute to building power and advancing civic engagement. Key elements such as leadership development, narrative change, or collective action are present, though connections across strategies or to long-term transformation may not be fully developed.
3	The response describes activities or approaches that relate to civic engagement or community work but may feel programmatic or disconnected. While there is some alignment with power-building or equity goals, the connection to sustained systems change or democratic transformation is only partially articulated.
2	The strategies are described in broad or unclear terms, making it difficult to understand how the work will build power or create meaningful change. There is limited evidence of how the approach strengthens democratic participation or contributes to long-term outcomes.
1	The response does not clearly describe strategies that build power or advance democratic participation. There is little to no indication of how the work will disrupt inequities or contribute to long-term societal change.
Comments or Questions	

Section 4: Community Voice

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant show that their work is informed by, formed with, and benefiting the communities most impacted? The applicant should demonstrate how community voices shape their strategies and how they collaborate with organizations, coalitions, or public partners to build collective strength toward shared goals.

Score	Description
5	The response clearly demonstrates that the work is informed by, formed with, and directly benefits the communities most impacted. Community voice is meaningfully integrated into decision-making and strategy, not just consulted. The organization shows strong, authentic collaboration with partners, coalitions, or public entities to advance shared goals and collective impact.
4	The organization describes how community voices inform and influence its work and identifies who benefits. Collaboration with partners is evident, though the depth of shared decision-making or collective strategy may not be fully articulated.
3	The response identifies the communities served and suggests some level of engagement, but it is unclear how deeply community voice shapes decisions or strategy. Partnerships may be mentioned but appear more transactional or loosely connected to shared goals.
2	The description of community engagement is vague or surface-level, making it difficult to understand how communities inform or shape the work. Collaboration with others is limited, unclear, or not meaningfully connected to the work.
1	The response does not clearly identify the communities most impacted or how they are involved. There is little to no evidence that community voices inform, shape, or benefit from the work, and collaboration is absent or unclear.
Comments or Questions	

Section 5: Financial Health and Organizational Capacity

Scoring Description: To what extent does the applicant demonstrate the organizational capacity and financial health needed to sustain their work over the next five years? Strong applications describe how their budget aligns with their goals, identify areas of growth, and outline the resources needed to carry the work forward.

Score	Description
5	The response clearly demonstrates organizational capacity and financial health to carry out the work over the next five years. It thoughtfully connects budget, staffing, and infrastructure to systems change goals, while also naming areas for growth and how resources will support long-term sustainability.
4	The organization provides a clear overview of its capacity and financial position, with general alignment between budget and goals. Areas for growth and resource needs are identified, though connections to long-term sustainability or systems change may not be fully developed.
3	The response includes general information about staffing, budget, or operations but lacks depth or clear alignment to systems change goals. Resource needs or areas for growth are mentioned but remain broad or not fully connected to sustaining the work.
2	The description of organizational capacity or financial health is minimal or unclear, making it difficult to assess readiness for long-term work. The relationship between budget, goals, and resource needs is loosely addressed or underdeveloped.
1	The response does not provide enough detail about organizational capacity or financial health to determine readiness. It is unclear how the organization will resource or sustain the work overtime.
Comments or Questions	