SOLVE Southern Spark Grants FAQ

What are the SOLVE Southern Spark Grants?
These $5,000 or $10,000 grants are designed to provide support to community-based organizations in their efforts to fight for a participatory, responsive, inclusive, and expansive democracy and are intended to spark organizational capacity building related to civic education, engagement, and participation work around issues that are most pressing in your community.

What is required to be eligible for a SOLVE Southern Spark Grant?
To be eligible for this grant opportunity, applicants must meet **all** of the following criteria:
- Organize for equitable and inclusive representation with historically underrepresented communities.
- Possess a vision for how voting rights advance social, economic, racial, political, and environmental justice.
- Be led by Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Indigenous, Asian American Pacific Islander, queer and trans, rural, low-wealth, and/or working-class communities.
    - Leadership is defined as individual members of these communities who hold decision-making authority over the applicant's priorities. Examples of decision-making roles could include executive directors, founders, presidents, board members, an advisory council, or group leaders.
- Have an annual operating budget under $1 million.
    - Applicants with annual operating budgets under $500,000 can apply for a grant award amount of $10,000.
    - Applicants with annual operating budgets over $500,000 and below $1,000,000 can apply for a grant award amount of $5,000.
- Be located in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia.

Does my organization or group have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status to apply?
No. While this grant cannot fund lobbying, partisan or political activity, and/or any work conducted by 501c4 organizations, 501c3 status is not required to apply. Please be aware that the grant funds will be considered taxable for entities that do not have tax-exempt status. Please contact us at solve@scsj.org or join one of our Open Zoom Hours if you have questions about your group's tax status and/or eligibility.

What groups and activities are prioritized for funding?
We will prioritize supporting organizations or groups that meet one or more of the following criteria:
- Have a focus on rural engagement. We define rural in multiple ways, including:
    - Areas with low population density and high amounts of underdeveloped land;

- o Open countryside with population densities of less than 500 people per square mile and places with fewer than 2,500 people;
- o Areas not within a metropolitan statistical area, urbanized area, or urban cluster; and/or
- o Areas within the Southern Black Belt.
- Have an existing civic engagement project serving historically underrepresented populations that could be expanded with additional funding.
- SOLVE Network members.
- Previous SOLVE grant recipients and applicants.
- Participants in Community Redistricting Organizations Working for Democracy (CROWD) Academy trainings.

If my group doesn't meet the funding priorities, can we still apply?
Yes, if your group meets the eligibility requirements listed earlier in this document, you can still apply for funding. However, your application will not be given priority consideration.

What kinds of projects will the SOLVE Southern Spark Grants fund?
These grants are one-year project support grants intended to support projects focused on increasing civic participation in historically underrepresented communities, especially rural communities. As anti-democratic efforts are on the rise, we seek to fund projects that support communities in fighting for their right to responsive representation and combating white supremacy. We are most interested in projects that use advocacy, education, organizing, mobilization, and/or communications strategies to promote civic participation and engagement in rural and other underrepresented communities.

Are there any organizations, groups, or projects you cannot fund?
Below are the criteria that is not fundable:
- 501(c)4 organizations.
- Projects that include voter registration activities.
- Projects that include lobbying, political, or partisan activity.
- Projects with indirect costs equal to or greater than direct costs.
  - o Direct costs are expenses specific to the program or project, while indirect costs are expenses required to run the organization as a whole.
- Projects that focus exclusively on direct services without a civic engagement or participation component.
- Organizations or groups who are current legal clients of SCSJ.
- Organizations, groups, and/or projects based outside of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia.
- Organizations or groups that do not meet the eligibility requirements.
- SOLVE Leadership Council Member organizations.
- Current/Previous SOLVE grantees that have not met the reporting requirements.

I understand you can't fund voter registration. Is my group or organization excluded from applying if we engage in voter registration?
Not at all. This grant will only fund the activities described in your project proposal, so your group or organization's other programmatic work will not affect your application for a Southern Spark Grant. We welcome you to submit a project proposal that does not include voter registration activities.

What is lobbying, political, or partisan activity?
Lobbying can include communicating with any official in the legislative or executive branch for the purpose of attempting to influence legislative or administrative action or a ballot issue.
Please see this flow chart to help you understand if your work might be considered lobbying
Partisan political activity is any activity directed toward the success or failure of a partisan candidate, political party, or partisan political group. We ask that all work be non-partisan to meet the requirements of this grant. Please see this flow chart to help you understand if your work might be considered partisan activity.

What are direct vs. indirect costs?
Direct costs are expenses specific to the program or project, while indirect costs are expenses required to run the organization as a whole. You are welcome to include both in your project budget, but indirect costs should be less than 50% of the total budget (i.e. indirect costs should not equal or exceed direct costs). Examples of direct costs include stipends for volunteers, staff or contractor time to work on the project, or meeting expenses. Printed or other materials (e.g. flyers, food, and water for events) specific to the program or project are also considered direct costs. Examples of indirect costs include computer software, general office supplies, or postage.

The RFP says SOLVE cannot fund "projects that focus exclusively on direct services without a civic engagement or participation component". What does that mean?
We cannot fund projects without a civic engagement or participation element to the project. An organization that provides direct services can apply for a grant **as long as** the project includes a civic engagement or participation component. We greatly appreciate organizations that provide direct services (e.g., homeless shelters, healthcare services, child abuse treatment and prevention services, etc.) to their community; however, our funding has to be used for civic engagement and participation efforts. For example, grant funding could be used to support a know your voting rights educational event at a vaccination event but not solely to host a community vaccination event.

How do I apply for a SOLVE Southern Spark Grant and when is the deadline?
Click here to reach the application portal. If your organization has not created an account, you will be asked to enter some basic information, then will be directed to the actual application. Please reach out to solve@scsj.org if you have trouble logging in. The deadline for applications to be submitted is **Wednesday, July 12, 2023, at 11:59 PM CST.**

When are the grants awarded?
Applicants who submit proposals by the July 12, 2023 deadline will be notified about whether or not their project will be funded by the end of August 2023. Projects approved for funding will receive their

grant awards once we receive their signed Grant Agreement Letter. Grant funds will only be distributed with a signed Grant Agreement Letter.

Is there a reporting requirement?
Yes, all selected organizations will need to submit interim and final reports summarizing the work that has been completed with the grant funds. Further reporting instructions will be provided in the Grant Agreement Letter.

Who can I contact for support?
Please reach out to staff at solve@scsj.org for general support questions, including administrative and application questions. Additionally, an informational video about the program and application process can be found **HERE**. We will also offer Open Zoom Hours for additional application support.
Open Zoom Hours:
- June 21, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 pm EST
- June 28, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 pm EST
- July 10, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 pm EST