SOLVE Southern Spark Grants Frequently Asked Questions

**UPDATE: The deadline for applications to be submitted has been extended to
Wednesday, June 26, 2024, at 11:59 PM CST.
[Click here to access the Foundant application portal.](#)**

What are the SOLVE Southern Spark Grants?
The SOLVE Southern Spark Grants are $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. Further information can be found at our [website](#).

What is the SOLVE Network?
The Southern Leadership for Voter Engagement (SOLVE) Network is a multi-state collaborative of organizations dedicated to sharing strategies, resources, and support in the ongoing struggle to protect and expand voting rights. The mission of the SOLVE Network is to provide a space for Southern grassroots and Southern state-based organizations to address and rectify policies that have weakened the voting strength of communities. SOLVE accomplishes its mission through grassroots mobilization by providing data-driven communications, organizing, advocacy, legal, and legislative strategies and support, as well as funding. For more information, visit [solvenetwork.org](#). The SOLVE Network and grant program are supported by Southern Coalition for Social Justice (SCSJ).

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.
  - The entire organization's annual operating budget must be under $1 million regardless of the budget size of the program and/or project.
- Be located in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia.

If your organization or group does not meet **all** of the above eligibility criteria, your application cannot be considered for funding. Organizations or groups that are included on the list below of what projects and types of organizations we cannot fund, are not eligible for funding whether or not they meet all the above eligibility criteria.

Are there any organizations, groups, or projects you cannot fund?
Below are the organizations, groups, and/or projects that we are unable to fund:
- 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.
    - Direct costs are expenses specific to the project, while indirect costs are expenses required to run the organization as a whole (i.e. general office supplies).
- 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 listed above.
- Current SOLVE Leadership Council Member organizations.
- Current/Previous SOLVE grantees that are not in good standing with current/previous grants. Good standing means that for the 2022 Southern Movement Grants, the 2023 SOLVE Spark Grants, or multiple grants, the organization was/is in compliance (meeting all grant agreement terms and conditions) and that all grant reporting is complete and current.

Please note that if your organization or group meets **any** of the criteria listed above of what organizations or projects cannot be funded, you are not eligible for this grant, regardless of the eligibility criteria.

Does my organization or group have to 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 501(c)(4) organizations, 501(c)(3) 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:
- A project proposal that focuses on civic engagement, specifically civic participation.
- A project proposal that focuses on building infrastructure for election protection efforts for the 2024 General Election.
- 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.

If my group and/or project doesn't meet the funding priorities, can we still apply?
Yes, you can still apply for funding as long as your group meets all the eligibility criteria and your group and/or project is not on the list of what we cannot fund (listed earlier in the document). However, your application will not be given priority consideration. We strongly encourage applicants to submit projects that fall within the funding priorities.

What kinds of projects will the SOLVE Southern Spark Grants fund?
The 2024-2025 SOLVE Southern Spark Grants are one-year, $10,000 project support grants focused on increasing civic participation and civic engagement in historically underrepresented communities. With anti-democratic efforts on the rise and given the need for increased civic engagement and election protection activities, we are most interested in projects that:
- Support communities in becoming civically involved and projects that support communities in their fight for the right to have their votes counted and their right to vote protected.
- Use advocacy, education, organizing, mobilization, and/or communications strategies to promote civic participation and engagement in underrepresented communities.
- Aim to help ensure that voters feel safe from harassment and intimidation at the polls.
- Aim to ensure that people understand what is needed to cast a ballot.

Below are examples of potential fundable, eligible projects:
- Training community members to be poll observers or canvass monitors.
- Community education initiative that provides information to voters about voter rights at the polls, how voters can obtain assistance should they need it while voting, or the materials necessary for a voter to cast a ballot.
- Education project about voter ID requirements, which disproportionately impact communities of color, disabled communities, trans communities, and many others.
- Communications campaign about the importance of voting and building the habit of voting in each election.
- Trainings for non-English speaking community members who are eligible to vote about what their rights are at polls.
- Projects that engage multiple identities and multi-racial alliance building as core to their pro-democracy work.

These are just examples of potential projects and are not an exhaustive list of projects that may be funded.

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 eligibility for a Southern Spark Grant. We welcome you to submit a project proposal that **does not include voter registration activities or any mention of associated voter registration activities, even if not requesting funding for those.**

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. Lobbying can also include interactions with candidates and voters, including advocating for the adoption or rejection of a ballot measure.
[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. All project activities must 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.](#)

I understand that you can't fund lobbying, political, and/or partisan activity. What electoral activities can you fund?
All activities must be non-partisan and not include any type of lobbying. This means that all project activities must be educational and to encourage civic participation, non-partisan, not include endorsements of candidates or parties, and not take any stance on specific legislation, policies, and/or ballot measures. Project activities cannot directly or indirectly tell people how to vote or for whom to vote. More information about election year advocacy can be found [here](#).

If your project activities include candidate education, forums, and/or meet and greets (which are allowed), they must be non-partisan and in compliance with IRS guidelines regarding candidate contact during an election year. More information on this can be found [here](#).

If your project activities include any work around a ballot measure, we can only fund general education activities for ballot measures and cannot fund any advocacy for a specific ballot measure. Since members of the voting public act as legislators when they vote "yes" or "no" on the legislation proposed in ballot measures, advocating for the adoption or rejection of a specific ballot measure is considered IRS lobbying. While 501(c)(3)s are permitted to engage in this type of advocacy work in certain circumstances, we cannot fund any lobbying activities with the SOLVE Southern Spark Grants. Examples of general education, non-lobbying activities around ballot measures include:
- Communications to the public on the general subject addressed by the ballot measure, which do not refer directly or indirectly to the ballot measure itself.
- Communications to the public that refer to the ballot measure, but do not reflect a view on it.
- Researching the issues, conducting surveys of voter attitudes, and community organizing, as long as the primary focus of these activities are not focused on the ballot measure and are not a form of preparation for lobbying.

What are direct vs. indirect costs?
Direct costs are expenses specific to the 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 project are also considered direct costs. Examples of indirect costs include computer software, general office supplies, or postage.

What is required for the project budget?
We ask for a breakdown of how you plan to spend the requested funds. Please ensure that the budget is project-specific and not your organization or program's operating budget. You can give your response in the space provided in the application portal, upload your own budget document, or use our [optional template](#). A budget document upload or use of the template is optional and not required. Regardless of the format you use, you must provide a numerical breakdown of how the funds will be used, i.e. $5,000

for staff time, $3,000 for volunteer stipends, $2,000 for event/meeting costs. This breakdown is provided only as an example. An instructional video for creating a project budget can be found [here](#).

Categories could include (but are not limited to) staffing, contract services, event/meeting costs, printing, office supplies used for the project, transportation, etc. This budget should total $10,000. Due to the competitive nature of these grants, we are not able to fund higher requests.

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 access the Foundant application portal.](#) If your organization has not previously created an account, you will be asked to enter some basic information, then will be directed to the actual application. The application asks for basic information about your organization or group and details about your proposed project, including a budget.

Please reach out to solve@scsj.org if you have trouble logging into Foundant. The deadline for applications to be submitted is **Wednesday, June 26, 2024, at 11:59 PM CST.**

We communicate vital information via email. Please ensure you are checking the email accounts (including spam folders) associated with your Foundant account.

Once I submit my application, is there anything else that will be needed from me and/or my group?
If there are questions or concerns about your application, SCSJ staff will contact you via the email account associated with your Foundant account (typically, the email address used for your username). Your response is required for your application to be considered for funding. If you are contacted and do not respond by the deadline provided in the email, your application cannot be considered for funding.

How are the funding decisions made?
The SOLVE Leadership Council and other SOLVE-state-based evaluators will evaluate all eligible applications and make funding decisions based on the eligibility criteria and priorities listed above. The SOLVE Leadership Council is SOLVE's governing body comprised of key organizational leaders from each partner state who provide direction for the Network. We anticipate making 30 grant awards for this program across SOLVE's partner states: Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Texas.

When are the grants awarded?
Applicants who submit proposals by the application deadline, June 26, 2024, will be notified about whether or not their project will be funded by the end of July 2024. Projects approved for funding will receive their grant awards once we receive their signed Grant Agreement and all required information.

Grant funds will only be distributed with a signed Grant Agreement and submission of all required information.

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 3, 2024, 6 – 7 pm EST
- June 11, 2024, 2 – 3 pm EST
- June 13, 2024, 6 – 7 pm EST

Please click on the dates for the registration links to each Open Zoom Hour.