



Reflective Democracy Pilot Projects: Request for Proposals

Overview

The Women Donors Network (WDN) is advancing a more fair, just, and equitable world by leveraging the wealth, power, and community of progressive women donors. WDN programs are designed to ignite change, providing donors with opportunities to deepen their knowledge, take action in partnership with allies, and engage in nimble and strategic grantmaking that supports movements and incubates high-impact initiatives.

In 2014, WDN launched *Who Leads Us?* to identify and dismantle the structural barriers that exclude women and people of color from elected office. Our research found that of the more than 42,000 elected officials nationwide who represent us from the county level up to the President, 90% are white, 71% are male, and 65% are white male.

Compared to the rapidly changing demographics of our country, this imbalance is unsustainable. We need look no further than Ferguson, Missouri, to see that when our political leadership doesn't reflect the full range of American experience, our system breaks down. The challenges we face require the best and brightest leaders from among our diverse population, with the full range of talent, experience, and perspectives that America has to offer.

We call this inclusive vision of leadership **reflective democracy**.

Funding Opportunity Description

WDN will support innovative work to dismantle the structural barriers preventing a truly reflective democracy from flourishing. We aim to support pilot projects that will help to improve our understanding of how barriers to a reflective democracy can be removed or overcome. We hope that successful projects will serve as models for work that can be replicated on a larger scale in the future.

We will make grants to up to ten (10) organizations/individuals undertaking work that promises to challenge the ways the political system and structures exclude women and people of color from elected office. We are especially interested in projects focused on at least one of the priority areas where we believe structural barriers to reflective democracy exist (listed below), but we are also open to other kinds of projects as long as the proposal clearly outlines which structural barrier(s) the project intends to challenge and how, and why that barrier is significant.

The four priority areas in which we encourage proposals are:

1. **Gatekeepers:** Projects that will take on different aspects of the current gatekeeper system—political parties, major donors, and other powerful political organizations that determine which candidates will receive money, resources, and endorsements—that continues to produce elected leaders who do not reflect the American people. Proposals in this area could focus on how gatekeeper behavior can be changed or held accountable in order to produce more reflective candidates; the development of alternative gatekeepers committed to reflective democracy; or other interventions in this often-informal and/or invisible part of the political process.
2. **Civic institutions:** Projects focusing on leadership development in new, alternative, or existing civic institutions, especially in communities of color, with the goal of developing more potential candidates reflective of their constituencies, supported by diverse organizations. Proposals in this area could aim to build the capacity of new and diverse organizations to develop candidates from within their ranks; empower those organizations to engage as actors in the political process; or take other approaches to strengthening the ability of community organizations to develop and support candidates who reflect their communities.
3. **Economic barriers:** Projects that confront the economic realities of electoral politics. Broadly, we are interested in projects that tackle economic obstacles that ordinary working people face when pursuing elected office: the difficulty of holding a regular job while campaigning and/or serving in an elected position, since few pay enough to support oneself; the cost of campaigns; and the influence of big money.
4. **Voting structures:** Projects working to reform voting systems and district composition to empower communities of color and women. Areas of interest include alternatives to our primary election system, winner-take-all voting, and off-year elections. We also encourage proposals that seek to change the composition of electoral districts in ways that empower women and people of color. Possible areas of focus could include multi-member districts, district vs. citywide elections, new approaches to ensuring representation of minority communities, and exploration of the implications of the 2020 census for political jurisdictions.

Three types of support will be available to applicant organizations/individuals, depending on the structure of the proposed pilot project:

1. Programmatic: Funding to support a specific project where work is already underway or is ready to begin.
2. Planning: Support for a short-term planning process that prepares an organization or individual or project team to execute a pilot project.
3. Research: Support for a short-term research project that will help develop strategies and approaches for longer-term work.

Eligibility

Depending on the type and structure of a proposed pilot project, an applicant may be:

1. A nonprofit organization with proof of current 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, or
2. An individual/team applying as an independent contractor(s), who will sign a contract and Memorandum of Understanding with WDN, a 501(c)(3), and be paid as a project consultant, with required submission of an IRS Form W-9.

Pilot project proposals will ideally be based on a timeline of 2-6 months, with plans (even if tentative) for implementation or subsequent phases beyond the pilot.

WDN will give priority to organizations and individuals that can demonstrate:

- Proven experience working with women and/or communities of color.
- A strong track record on a related project or projects
- The capacity to move a short-term pilot project.
- A clear vision for the development of the project beyond the pilot phase. Ideally this will include potential leveraged funding possibilities.
- A novel, promising concept that does not duplicate existing work.
- A team of emerging or new leaders where pilot project support will help to build new capacity.
- A plan that proposes significant impact within the community/location of focus.

Award Information

Estimated award amounts: grants will range from smaller research/planning grants, with a minimum of \$5,000, to larger program grants, with a maximum of \$100,000.

Project Period: We prefer proposals based on a timeline of 2-6 months, to begin by the middle of 2015, though we are open to other proposals.

Application Process

Proposals will be accepted in two phases. The deadline for the first phase is March 9; the deadline for the second phase is May 15. Please submit proposals to Brenda Carter, Reflective Democracy Campaign Director, at rdcampaign@womendonors.org.

We encourage potential applicants to contact us with questions about eligibility and proposal concepts prior to application submission. Please send inquiries to RD-Outreach@womendonors.org.

Proposal Materials:

1. A one-page cover sheet with the following information:
 - Name and brief description of the proposing organization/entity
 - The structure of the applicant (501(c)(3) organization or independent contractor).
 - A brief statement of the reflective democracy barrier the project proposes to address
 - A brief statement of the project's goals
 - Amount of funding requested
 - Location(s) of the project
 - Contact information

2. A narrative proposal, not to exceed 5 pages, that includes:
 - An overall description of the project
 - An explanation of the ways the project takes a new and innovative approach, or fills gaps in existing work
 - Explanation of the specific goals and objectives of the project
 - The projects' target audience or constituency
 - Project activities and timeline
 - Key staff (with attached resumes)
 - A plan for measuring the results and effectiveness of the project.
 - A description of initial plans for longer-term, post-pilot phase work, including any potential funding opportunities.

3. A project budget.

4. Organizational and administrative documents.
 - For proposals from 501(c)(3) organizations:

- IRS determination letter.
 - List of officers and Board of Directors.
 - Brief explanation of how pilot project will interact/relate to other organizational work.
 - Organizational budget overview.
 - Any consultant/subcontractor commitment letters related to pilot plan.
- For proposals from individuals/team working as independent contractors:
 - Copy of W-9 form(s).
 - Brief description of any organizational affiliations the individual applicants may have that are related to the proposed work.
 - Any consultant/subcontractor commitment letters related to pilot plan.

Visit WhoLeads.Us for more information about our work, media coverage of the campaign, a 4-page summary of our innovative messaging research, and to download our full Reflective Democracy database of elected office holders.

To learn more about the Women Donors Network, visit www.womendonors.org.