



## **REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTENT Media and Technology to Fight the Impact of Big Money on Politics**

### **Background**

The undue influence of money on American democracy is one of the most critical issues of our time. The Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling in 2010 opened the floodgates for untold waves of money to covertly and effectively purchase political interests, putting in peril the notion of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people". Big donors, Super PACs, and corporations threaten progressive advancement on a myriad of issues, such as voter disenfranchisement, climate change, and immigration reform. Fair elections and state judicial systems are also falling prey to moneyed interests.

This battle does not start and end with overturning Citizens United and achieving campaign finance reform. Ultimately, this is about the empowerment of the American people in the face of a widening economic divide. Voqal is entering the fight against the influence of money on politics to achieve significant victories by supporting progressive issue and legislative campaigns, expanding citizen engagement, and increasing activism. We want to advance key policies for progressive social change by building a united movement for equality that amplifies citizen voices and mobilizes an activist base focused on money and politics.

The information revolution holds promise to counter inequality and the effect of big money on politics. New synchronicities have developed between the tech and organizing worlds. A new generation of organizers is effectively integrating social media and online campaigns with on-the-street efforts. New developments in data-driven media and investigative journalism are motivating citizens to act and provide new opportunities for public pressure via exposés, infographics and information design that create critical emotional context for everyday people--context that can drive individuals to action or give activists critical evidence to advance their cause.

The landscape for people-powered change is a fertile ground. Voqal's objective with this request for letters of intent is to intervene and reduce the influence of moneyed interests on America's civic arenas, including fair governance, courts, and electoral politics. We know that there is no one solution to completely separate money and politics. This open call is part of a multi-year strategy designed to provide strategic support to the many efforts underway to mobilize citizens in the fight for equality and to mitigate the influence of the wealthy and special interests on the American democratic process.

### **What We Will Support**

Voqal seeks letters of intent for projects from information providers, technologists and digital strategists working to mitigate the influence of corporate cash on American democracy. Voqal seeks to achieve policy objectives including, but not limited to, campaign finance reform, voter registration modernization, and the broader fight against the influence of money on politics. We seek to inform everyday citizens with accurate, actionable stories and facts. We

aim to spur action and support transformational, technology-driven community organizing. We encourage collaboration, especially if that collaboration will result in increased engagement of the citizenry. We anticipate funding projects that can be replicated in many communities and/or initiatives that demonstrate the effective use of smart technology.

Please submit a letter of intent for this initiative if your organization is an:

- **Information Source:** Producers of savvy reportage, ground-breaking multimedia, compelling data visualizations, and data-driven investigative journalism dedicated to informing the public about fiscal malfeasance in terms that can drive change. Watchdog media organizations provide critical reporting that can fuel populist movements, hold elected officials accountable, and create intense public scrutiny of shadowy donors.
- **Provider of Progressive Technology and/or Digital Strategy:** Organizations that mobilize individuals online or via social media around key progressive reform issues and ballot initiatives in regions where the greatest opportunity for victory exists. Voqal is especially interested in projects focused on overturning Citizens United, addressing voter disenfranchisement, or reducing the influence of moneyed interests (i.e. corporate targets).

## Eligibility

Non-profit organizations exempt from taxation under either Section 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) or 527 of the Internal Revenue Code.

## Funding Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate letters of intent. Voqal will place priority on projects and initiatives that:

- Present a compelling, succinct and well-conceived theory of change. (I.e., How will the proposed initiative accomplish significant and measurable gains for the money in politics movement?)
- Clearly demonstrate how the effort fits into the broader money and politics field and the potential to improve the effectiveness of others.
- Are timely. Is this initiative responsive to a ballot initiative or immediate opportunity?
- Include an effective strategy for community engagement.
- Demonstrate potential to scale or be replicated in other communities, states, and regions.
- Include a realistic model for revenue generation, if applicable.

Consideration will be given to nonprofit organizations that demonstrate alignment with the above criteria. Organizations submitting letters of intent will possess the following:

- Ability to think outside the box and leverage all available resources.
- Track record of success with similar initiatives and ability to build on existing money-and-politics-focused work.
- Demonstrated organizational capacity and efficacy to successfully execute the project. If your project will require significant restructuring of staff or workflow, this may not be the initiative for you.

## About Voqal

Voqal is the collaboration of five non-profit organizations that got their start transmitting educational video programs to schools in the mid-80s using frequencies regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In 2013, these five companies adopted the single brand Voqal to better convey what they do and believe.

This open call is an initiative of one of these 501(c)4 companies, Voqal USA (formerly known as Instructional Telecommunications Foundation, Inc.). Voqal has been a frequent and steady supporter of progressive media, educators and nonprofits. It has recently turned its attention to social issues including street harassment, Internet freedom and the influence of big money on the democratic process in the United States. For more information about Voqal, visit [www.voqal.org](http://www.voqal.org).

Voqal is committing \$300,000 in this funding round and intends to award several grants ranging from \$25,000-\$100,000.

## How to Apply

Organizations interested in being considered for this funding opportunity should visit [bit.ly/VoqalMP](http://bit.ly/VoqalMP), create a user account, and fill in the letter of intent form by 11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, June 21, 2013. A select group of applicants will be invited to submit full proposals based on the strength of the submission and the project's alignment with our funding criteria.

No unsolicited phone calls or emails, please. For more information, an online version of this document, updates on this initiative, or to sign up for an invitation to an informational webinar, visit [www.voqal.org/money-politics](http://www.voqal.org/money-politics).