



*We have  
a plan.*

*-J*



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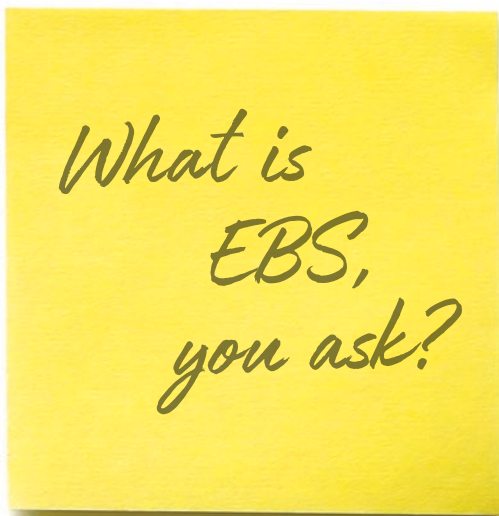
**VISION: A SOCIALLY  
EQUITABLE AND JUST WORLD.**

## 2017: VOQAL HAS A PLAN

Voqal is a national collaboration of EBS (Educational Broadband Service) licensees that work to advance social equity by creating an educated and informed public. Our efforts center around using media and technology to increase access, community and knowledge.

As a collective of EBS licensees, Voqal is committed to using the airwaves to benefit the public. With resources afforded by spectrum use agreements, Voqal's programs include education ventures, affordable internet service for schools and nonprofits, philanthropic grants, EBS spectrum advocacy, fellowships for social entrepreneurs and more.

Voqal's programs and initiatives are all grounded in education and are often aimed at the root causes that bar access to knowledge both in and out of traditional brick and mortar institutions.



*EBS (Educational Broadband Service)*

*The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) showed great foresight about the role technology would play in education when, in 1963, it reserved a spectrum band (now called EBS) exclusively to support educational institutions and nonprofit entities whose missions are educational.*

*Spectrum, a finite natural resource, is extremely valuable – it is what fuels our wireless services and our increasingly connected lives – and it has become a crucial part of education.*

**MISSION: ADVANCING SOCIAL EQUITY  
BY BUILDING AN EDUCATED, EMPOWERED  
AND ENGAGED PUBLIC.**

I have  
pl

I HAVE A PLAN.  
PLEASE SEE ME. — J.

## LETTER FROM ADAM MILLER: CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

It can start with the most innocent looking sticky note left on one's chair –  
*"I have a plan. Please see me. – J."*

I've received numerous such stickies over the years from our president John Schwartz. More often than not these plans deal with implementing an idea that allows Voqal to open a new front in the fight for social equity.

Like the proverbial boiling the ocean or eating the elephant, the issues at the root of social inequity are daunting. But as the saying goes, the best way to eat an elephant is bite by bite. In other words, you need a plan.

In last year's annual report, our first, we told you how some of those plans, like our efforts to purchase public TV stations, don't always work out. Others, like the plan to address the digital divide and close opportunity gaps using Educational Broadband Spectrum (EBS) have been very successful.

Among the many amazing stories in the following pages, you will learn of an organic farm that is using mobile hotspots to expand school field trips and educational workshops. You will also learn about an amazing project from one of the six Voqal Fellows, who in her own small way is lighting fires to boil that ocean. You'll hear about the Education Venture Fund, which in its second year continued to make calculated bets on early technology startups with a goal of reducing opportunity gaps in education. Finally, you'll read about a Voqal Fund supported initiative in Seattle that has the potential to change the game when it comes to voter participation in elections.

And buried deep in this report towards the back, you'll even see a few new names on both the board of directors and staff pages. It takes a passionate set of leaders at the board level and dedicated staff to execute these plans; plans that can sometimes take years to produce the desired results.

While not all those sticky notes lead to the major impacts we hope they will, Voqal remains dedicated to exploring these types of innovative ideas in our quest to fulfill the promise of a more socially equitable world.

At least that's the **plan** anyways.

Adam



**\$250,000=** INVESTMENT  
MADE IN FY 2017

“ENABLING PERSONALS  
THAT’S WHY PAIRIN  
CALLS THEM “ESSENTIAL SKILLS.”  
EFFECTIVE...”

## EDUCATION VENTURE FUND: MAKING EDUCATION RELEVANT FOR LIFELONG STUDENT SUCCESS

NUMBER OF ONLINE  
MICRO-LESSONS: **300**

PAIRIN CEO and co-founder, Michael Simpson, is not your stereotypical CEO. Yes, like many hard-working entrepreneurs, Simpson has been working from a young age. Unlike many others, however, Simpson came from a background and environment that didn't easily enable a future for him. As a child, his parents experienced multiple bankruptcies and having the power turned off wasn't an uncommon occurrence. Rising from poverty, Simpson eventually became an executive at a \$2.5 billion corporation and now runs his own company – PAIRIN.

Simpson attributes his success partially to people in his life that saw potential in him. Potential that many others didn't see simply because of where he came from. Simpson recognized that this outside encouragement to develop his soft skills and strive for success made a significant difference in his life. *And this recognition, combined with a lot of hard work and meeting PAIRIN's other co-founder at just the right moment, became the nexus of the plan for PAIRIN.*

Simpson and his fellow employees at PAIRIN believe that no one should be left behind because of where they came from. The PAIRIN Readiness Management System™ takes incredibly complex science and makes it accessible for everyone with an internet connection.

With 300 online micro-lessons, 54 soft skills classroom modules and more than 400 combined exercises, handouts and rubrics, PAIRIN's curriculum offers personalized learning based on identified gaps in non-cognitive skills (also known as soft skills). PAIRIN also gives teachers and counselors the tools and expertise to integrate the teaching of soft skills into any curriculum without impeding on time spent teaching content.

There is a deep and growing body of literature pointing to the identification and development of non-cognitive skills as critical for giving individuals the tools to contribute meaningfully to society and succeed in educational contexts, workplaces and public lives. In fact, studies predict anywhere from 70-85 percent of long-term success in life can be attributed to non-cognitive skills. That's why PAIRIN calls them "Essential Skills."

*PAIRIN intentionally targets at-risk and underserved populations with its tool, as these are the populations that most benefit from the mapping and development of non-cognitive skills.* PAIRIN's tools allow schools to meet the real-world achievement needs of every student, accelerate college and career readiness and increase graduation rates, thereby helping measurably close opportunity gaps in education, the key goal of the Voqal Education Venture Fund. According to Simpson, ultimately PAIRIN "enables professionals to be more effective in the development of the people in their care."

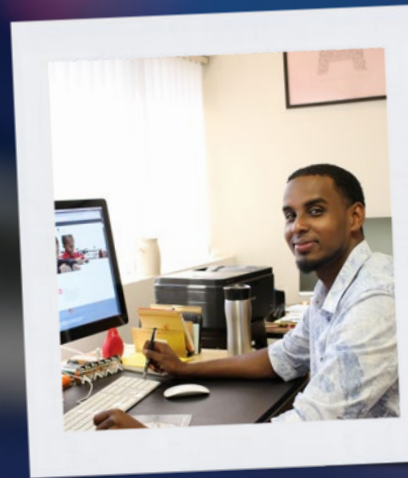
Simpson says PAIRIN's largest success has been building the first system to not just measure career readiness, but to also provide tools and resources to bridge each individual's skill gaps. This is where an early stage investment from Voqal has proved most helpful.

It's not the creation of the tool, however, but its impact that gets Simpson up every morning. The opportunity to help underserved populations – people with barriers to employment, people kicked out of school, people just out of prison – is what motivates him and his staff.

As Simpson says, "There are easier ways to make a living, but they all seem to be less meaningful."



**\$8.2 MILLION** = ESTIMATED VALUE OF  
SUBSIDIZED MC SERVICE



**PATHWAYS FOR  
SIGNIFICANT  
FAMILIES,**  
“...WE’RE HELPING  
THEM IMPROVE THEIR LIVES.”

## MOBILE CITIZEN: EXPANDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

A Plus Kids Organization is quite small, but for African immigrants living in Phillips, a small Minneapolis neighborhood, its impact is big. By connecting these constituents with tutoring, training and the internet, A Plus Kids is helping them overcome common challenges related to education and workforce development, and putting them on a path to success.

A Plus Kids provides education for adult- and school-age students spanning computer basics to high-level programming, along with cloud and infrastructure management using Microsoft technologies. Program resources include access to online learning content, official Microsoft Academic Courses and classroom curriculum.

The organization was built on the belief that a higher percentage of people find a job if they have access to the internet and all of the additional resources the internet provides. Such was the case for one A Plus Kids adult who registered for a Python course via Udemy, an online course provider, in order to learn the basics of creating applications and games. This individual now has a freelance job and is generating income.

A Plus Kids has a **plan** to further expand its training offerings to include a certification program.

Many jobs require a 4-year degree, which poses a variety of challenges for the demographic A Plus Kids serves. However, according to Yusuf Waged, A Plus Kids' program director, an increasing number of organizations are now respecting certification programs. *"Being able to offer an online certification-based program will translate into greater social equity for our constituents," said Waged. "They will not be dismissed or overlooked due to education."*

A Plus Kids also provides after school tutoring and classes for students in grades K-12. These classes and tutoring sessions have helped students (between 20 and 30 per day) to advance their academic skills, as well as prepare for college. Having internet access means tutors can use new innovations such as Raspberry Pi, to excite youth to engage in the program and to learn.

Having internet access also means having access to a wealth of online curriculum; it means finding educational opportunities at the click of a mouse. A Plus Kids is using Mobile Citizen's mobile internet as a platform for delivering critical teaching, information and resource-sharing. *Its constituents are benefiting by staying engaged, and ahead of our ever-changing information world.* Waged offered a common scenario where a job seeker lacking internet access at home may see a job posted online one day, only to find it gone by the time they were able get access a second time to apply, putting them at a significant disadvantage. A Plus Kids solves this problem by making Mobile Citizen's affordable broadband internet available to these families.

With all of A Plus Kids' success in preparing youth for 21st century workforce skills and helping un- or under-employed constituents with job placement, Waged considers the organization's greatest success to be the way it does business. Through strategic partnerships with Mobile Citizen, Osiris Organization, Microsoft Imagine Academy and the local cultural community center, A Plus Kids has lowered its overhead costs allowing it to reach more families.

"We are paving pathways for success for our immigrant families," says Waged. "By giving them the training, tutoring and access they need to obtain and share knowledge, as well as attain financial freedom, we're helping them improve their lives."



NUMBER OF KIDS  
TUTORED PER DAY: **20+**

OVER \$4.2 MILLION = TOTAL AMOUNT  
OF GRANTS



# LEADING THE CHARGE

TO GET THIS INITIATIVE PASSED.

FOUR VOUCHERS  
PER INDIVIDUAL: **\$25** DEMOCRACY  
VOUCHERS

## VOQAL FUND: SUPPORTING HONEST ELECTIONS IN SEATTLE



Getting money out of politics is something that an increasing number of Americans are getting behind. The problem is, the issue seems so monumental at times that many people don't think it can be done. Rather than flinch at such a challenge, the Voqal Fund actively set out to find and support organizations addressing the issue. *Honest Elections Seattle, a coalition of individuals and community organizations working together to ensure everyone has the opportunity to have his or her voice heard, not just the wealthy and political elite, had a plan.*

Honest Elections or Initiative I-122 limits the influence of money on Seattle policymakers by providing normal citizen the means to donate to local campaigns. It does this by allowing the Seattle Ethics and Election Commission to distribute "Democracy Vouchers" to eligible Seattle residents. Individuals receive four \$25 vouchers they can use to support candidates of their choice for city races in Seattle. This revolutionary idea has the potential to change the game when it comes to campaign financing in Seattle.

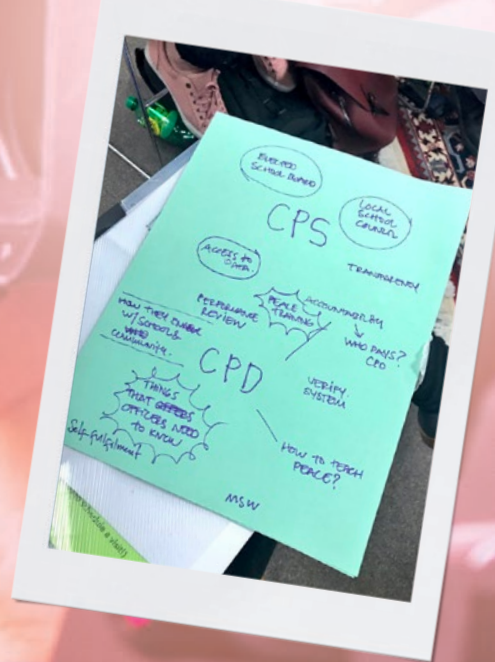
Big successes like this don't happen by accident. After suffering several setbacks at passing more traditional campaign finance reform, a coalition including Fair Elections Seattle developed around an innovative, but mostly theoretical, campaign finance law that would include Democracy Vouchers. "We wanted to add a new tool to the campaign finance reform toolbox," said Fair Elections Seattle Chair Estevan Munoz-Howard. More traditional efforts at addressing campaign finance reform, while important, only give a voice to those with the financial means to donate to campaigns. *"The Democracy Voucher approach was an opportunity to give people without financial resources an opportunity to directly participate in the funding of campaigns," said Munoz-Howard.*

One thing vital to the successful passing and implementation of this bill was the training of organizers. Along with other key organizations, Voqal Fund supported the Demos Inclusive Democracy project creating a new generation of money in politics "Movement Makers," consisting of members of communities of color. Many of these Movement Makers were integral in making voting more accessible for low-income and people of color in Seattle. These voters were vital to the successful work of the Honest Elections Seattle coalition.

Organizations working directly in these communities to help educate and mobilize the public around the initiative were also an integral component of the plan. By directly supporting the Win/Win Network and the Washington Community Action Network (WCAN), Voqal Fund assisted the local groups who were leading the charge to get this initiative passed. "The legal and institutional support provided by Win/Win and WCAN was vital to the successful passage of the Honest Elections Initiative," noted Munoz-Howard. This field work coupled with a coordinated, integrated media campaign conducted by Every Voice (another organization supported by Voqal Fund) was key to not only the successful passage of the law, but also the continued implementation of its most innovative component — the Democracy Voucher program.

NUMBER OF GRANTS  
IN FY 2017: **82**

6 MONTHS = LENGTH OF FELLOWSHIP



EXEMPLIFY THE  
**ADVANCING SOCIAL**  
EQUITY THROUGH A MORE EDUCATED  
AND EMPOWERED SOCIETY.  
BIG IDEAS

## VOQAL FELLOWSHIP: ANDREA HART LOOKS TO CHANGE THE MEDIA GAME IN CHICAGO

The Voqal Fellowship invests in unproven entrepreneurs, change-makers and thought leaders who have a **plan** to remedy a social inequity.

One of those change-makers is Andrea Hart. Her frustration with Chicago's current media ecosystem and its focus on leveraging crises for a sensational headline, inspired her to create a media organization more reflective of the community it served. "We created City Bureau because we believe that journalism does not have to be a profession for privileged elites and that the public benefits when newsrooms reflect the communities they serve," said Hart, a multimedia journalist and educator.

*Hart and the other founders of City Bureau, believe in "a local media ecosystem that is open to all, capable of holding official power accountable, and can strengthen the bonds within communities."*

To accomplish this goal, City Bureau recruits journalists at all skill levels to mentor one another in a collaborative learning process, with community input every step of the way. It investigates issues with wide-ranging impact on people living in the south and west sides of Chicago.

Along with the hard work of Hart and the other founders of City Bureau, the Voqal Fellowship helped bring this innovative media model to life. "The Voqal Fellowship gave me the freedom to work on City Bureau full time for six months," said Hart. "Considering our nonprofit is less than a year old, this was an incredible opportunity" she added, "It allowed me to better manage our community partnerships and design our mentorship experiences."

Furthermore, Hart credited the mentorship she received from Voqal Fellowship mentor and board member, Dan X. O'Neil as vital in helping her better understand City Bureau's existing use of data and tools as ways to enhance its civic processes and reporting. This collaboration led to the creation of City Bureau's Task Force Tracker, which took the over 200 police reform recommendations produced for the city of Chicago and turned it into an interactive website that walks readers through the history and major obstacles of these potential reforms.

"We hope that longstanding media outlets in Chicago will take on the spirit of City Bureau and its practices to make this kind of better coverage more common," said Hart. "I think we are touching on some layered, intersectional needs with a perfect storm of timing and I believe that City Bureau can exist in other cities."

"One of our greatest impacts so far has been organizing and networking a community of people through our programming and storytelling that is authentically empowering, as well as genuinely intersectional," said Hart. *"It has been incredible to watch folks build social capital and have access to professional opportunities that were previously non-inclusive."*

Fellows like Hart and her project, City Bureau, exemplify the innovative thinkers and big ideas that define the Voqal Fellowship program. Supporting early-stage projects focused on game-changing ideas are a key element of the program. By allowing change-agents like Hart the space and time to pursue their plans, Voqal is able to continue its efforts at advancing social equity through a more educated and empowered society.





NUMBER OF  
CALL SIGNS: **39**



# REVENUE FROM **FARMING AND EDUCATION** CAN BE HARMONIOUS COMPANIONS SWEETWATER

## INDEPENDENT SPECTRUM: PUTTING THE “COMMUNITY” IN COMMUNITY FARMING

In the heart of Florida’s Gulf Coast, not too far from Tampa Bay, you’ll find a lush, green example of how technology, community involvement and agriculture can blend harmoniously. Sweetwater Organic Community Farm, an Independent Spectrum customer in Tampa, Florida, is nestled right in an exurban neighborhood, its fertile fields backed up against a charter school and a church.

Sweetwater hosts school field trips and educational workshops, runs a farmers market, feeds the public through Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions, educates apprentice farmers and works to make fresh, organic produce accessible to everyone.

Executive Director Yvette Rouse says that Sweetwater’s missions outside of the harvest are food accessibility and education. *Given these missions, Rouse needed a plan to stay connected with the community — taking on the challenges of food scarcity and educating citizens about farming requires access to the wider world.* Mobile broadband access facilitated by Independent Spectrum makes that possible for Sweetwater. At the Sunday Market, cooking demonstrations can be streamed, customers can get information from the farm’s website and anyone who’s hungry for more can sign up on the spot to get a CSA box of fresh vegetables and herbs delivered to a pick-up point in their area.

One of Sweetwater’s most popular programs is its year-round field trip program for community members and students from kindergarten to college. Participants tour the farm, learn about plant identification, pollination, germination, spores and mushroom propagation, the life cycle of plants and animals, and composting and recycling of organic matter. They can even visit the farm’s own “sweet water” tap — its precious access to the Florida Aquifer, after which the farm is named.

According to Rouse, when kids ask the inevitable torrent of questions, part of their education involves doing a quick bit of research right in the field with a networked tablet.

Independent Spectrum provides 15 hotspots and broadband network access through Sprint to enable Sweetwater visitors to research and get information right out in the field. *It’s the ultimate in “fieldwork” — logging in to identify weeds or pests while standing in the dirt looking at them.* Rouse emphasizes that the integration of this technology helps fuel the excitement that students feel out among the plants and animals. And it allows them to have their questions answered immediately; with a networked tablet in hand, a student group can follow up on whatever is interesting to them. It’s a dynamic, modern way to learn — one that Educational Broadband Service access makes possible at this small community-based, nonprofit farm.

The financial benefits of the Independent Spectrum partnership also allow Sweetwater to subsidize many of these field trips for kids at Title I schools.

The benefits of mobile internet extend to Sweetwater’s Future Farmer Training program. Apprentice farmers are trained in organic farming and pest remediation techniques, they learn how CSA share programs work, they participate in community outreach and they educate themselves on the radically different business model that a modern-day community farm needs to follow.

Modern educators, like modern farmers, depend on up-to-date information, and Sweetwater shows that farming and education can be harmonious companions in the field with a little help from mobile broadband access provided by Independent Spectrum.

15 = FREE HOTSPOTS  
AT THE FARM



**AN EDUCATED,  
BUILDING AN EDUCATED,  
EMPOWERED AND ENGAGED PUBLIC.  
PUBLIC.**

## SAMPLING OF GRANTEES IN FY 2017:

Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon

BYP100

Chicago Votes Action Fund

Common Cause

Colorado c4 Latino Roundtable

Colorado Families for a Fair Wage

Domestic Workers Legacy Fund

Fair Vote Minnesota

Free Speech TV

Great Education Colorado Fund

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Illinois Humanities

Mijente

Our Oregon

PrograssNow Colorado

Proteus Action Fund — *Piper Action League*

Silicon Valley Rising Action

South Asian Americans Leading Together

WIN Minnesota

WIN WIN Action and Washington CAN — *Honest Elections Seattle*





TOGETHER WE ARE  
VOQAL: THE CALL FOR CHANGE.

## VOQAL STAFF

Scott Adams	<i>Mobile Citizen Operations Manager</i>
Cassie Allen	<i>EBS Bookkeeper</i>
Linda Arts	<i>Mobile Citizen Bookkeeper</i>
Vinny Badolato	<i>Education Program Director</i>
Cassie Bair	<i>Mobile Citizen Chief Business Development Executive</i>
Hazel Bolsover	<i>Corporate Controller Nonprofits</i>
Robert Bush	<i>Mobile Citizen Account Representative</i>
Tricia Castillo	<i>Mobile Citizen Assistant Database Administrator</i>
Michele Christiansen	<i>Grants Program Manager</i>
Meredith Dougherty	<i>Mobile Citizen Account Representative</i>
Jenna Ebersole	<i>Voqal Accountant</i>
Melissa Edmonds	<i>Mobile Citizen Senior Business Analyst</i>
Kathy Engel	<i>Office Manager</i>
Nate Felker	<i>Mobile Citizen Client Success Manager</i>
Thomas Finnigan	<i>Mobile Citizen Account Representative</i>
Molly Fohn	<i>Mobile Citizen Anchor Institutions Program Manager</i>
Barbara Hunter	<i>Chief Financial Officer</i>
Jonette Jager	<i>Mobile Citizen Technical Support</i>
John Kennedy	<i>Mobile Citizen Sales Manager</i>
Zoncharne "Zon" Lee	<i>Mobile Citizen Account Representative</i>
Chris Marceca	<i>Executive Assistant to the COO</i>
Adam Miller	<i>Chief Operations Officer</i>
Logan Monaco	<i>Mobile Citizen Assistant Controller</i>
Doug Munson	<i>Mobile Citizen Technical Support</i>
Kathy Partridge	<i>Voqal Fund Senior Program Officer</i>
Kristen Perry	<i>Communications Director</i>
Leah Pryor-Lease	<i>Voqal Fund Program Officer</i>
Amanda Rash	<i>Payroll Specialist</i>
Lisa Reed	<i>Mobile Citizen Controller</i>
Julie Reinders	<i>Human Resources Director</i>
Becky Schott	<i>Director of Business Administration</i>
John Schwartz	<i>Voqal President</i>
Mardelle Thompson	<i>Mobile Citizen Shipping and Receiving Manager</i>
Erika Verplanck	<i>Mobile Citizen Account Representative</i>
Mike Walker	<i>Voqal Assistant Controller</i>
Jered Weber	<i>Communications Associate</i>



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**TOGETHER WE ARE  
VOQAL: THE CALL FOR CHANGE.**

## STAY CONNECTED WITH VOQAL

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*Twitter:* <https://twitter.com/voqal>

*LinkedIn:* <https://www.linkedin.com/company/voqal>

*Voqal blog:* <http://voqal.org/news/makingairwaves-blog/>

*Voqal Fellowship mailing list:* <http://voqal.org/initiatives/voqal-fellowship/>

### **Voqal**

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*The call  
for  
change.*

*-Vogal*