

Since its earliest years, Rose Community Foundation has invested grant dollars in efforts to help craft and implement local and statewide public policies that help advance its program priorities. Each grant related to public policy is unique to a particular situation. Most often, such grants are to support advocacy, public education, research and staffing. Rationale for supporting these grants usually falls into two categories:

- creating, improving or implementing public policies that reflect the Foundation's programmatic priorities, and/or
- leveraging the Foundation's dollars to expand resources available to support its programmatic priorities.

Less often, Rose Community Foundation has made grants to support electoral issues. Some of these grants have helped support organizing efforts that culminate in placing a measure on the ballot, after which the Foundation's involvement may end. A smaller number of these grants have been made to issue-oriented political campaigns, which is permissible within Internal Revenue Service guidelines for public charities, including community foundations. All grants related to political campaign activities, regardless of amount, must be approved by the Foundation's Board of Trustees.

This brief history summarizes selected ballot initiatives in which Rose Community Foundation was involved as a funder prior to an issue being placed on the ballot, as a funder for an issue campaign, or both.

2000 Denver Question 1A, Great Futures for Denver Kids (Denver Kids Tax I)

Background and Rationale

In early 1999, Rose Community Foundation convened more than a dozen organizations interested in securing stable, consistent public support for programs serving children and youth. Led by the Foundation's Child and Family Development program area, and supported by both the Education and Health programs, the project took shape as the "Child Public Awareness Campaign." The Foundation made small grants for meetings and consulting support. Early in the process, the shootings at Littleton's Columbine High School became a rallying point for youth and child advocates to fund effective prevention and early intervention programs.

Grant Support

The Foundation granted \$16,500 to support travel expenses for early childhood advocates and public officials to visit a Kansas City program funded with public dollars as a pre-campaign research activity. In July 2000, Mayor Wellington Webb announced he would champion the "Great Futures for Denver Kids" initiative, and Denver City Council voted to place the measure before voters. It proposed a .2% increase in Denver's sales tax to generate about \$30 million annually for early childhood, before- and after-school programs, and children's health.

Result and Implication

Denver voters rejected "Great Futures" by a 13-point spread. Soon afterward, Mayor Webb vowed to try again with a different strategy.

2001 Denver Question 100, Denver Children's Task Force (Denver Kids Tax II)

Background and Rationale

Mayor Webb committed to another try for a "kids tax." In 2001, the Foundation supported Mayor Webb's Denver Children's Task Force, an effort that brought together a broadly representative group of community leaders and advocates to identify needs of children and youth that the voting public would be most likely to support. The Task Force's recommendations later took shape as a Denver ballot measure, which also sought a .2% sales-tax increase to raise about \$30 million annually.

Grant Support

The Foundation granted \$5,000 for a consultant to do grassroots research and organizing, and \$48,730 for pre-campaign political consultation.

Result and Implication

Voters rejected the 2001 "kids tax" proposal by a wider margin the second time, 62%-38%.

2006 Denver Referendum 1A, Denver Preschool Program (Denver Kids Tax III)

Background and Rationale

Early in his tenure, Mayor John Hickenlooper agreed to champion a new version of the "kids tax" with the narrower focus on preschool for four-year-olds. The subsequent Y-E-S campaign, championed by Mayor Hickenlooper, proposed raising Denver sales tax by .12% to yield about \$12 million annually for the Denver Preschool Program for 10 years.

Grant Support

In 2006, the Foundation made a \$50,000 grant to The Denver Foundation as fiscal sponsor for the Preschool Denver Awareness Campaign, a public education effort.

Result and Implication

The 2006 measure passed with a 52% vote in favor, creating a 10-year annual revenue stream of more than \$12 million to support the Denver Preschool Program. Voters will be asked to renew the measure in 2016.

2004 Colorado Amendment 35, Tobacco Tax Increase for Health-Related Purposes

Background and Rationale

The use of tobacco products greatly increases the cost of health care for everyone due to the higher cost of treating tobacco-related diseases. To help mitigate the public expenses caused by smoking, health care advocates and other stakeholder groups sought a tax increase on tobacco products to fund expansion of publicly sponsored health insurance, primary care for the medically indigent, prevention and early detection of diseases associated with tobacco use, and tobacco cessation programs.

Grant Support

The Foundation did not provide direct grant support. Rather, it served as a convener of stakeholders and covered the costs and in-kind expenses for a series of meetings that led to placing the measure on the ballot.

Result and Implication

Voters passed Amendment 35 by a margin of more than 61% to 39%. On average, the tax contributes nearly \$150 million annually to the health programs it was established to fund.

2005 Denver Ballot Question 3A, Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp)

Background and Rationale

Since the late 1990s, the Foundation had invested nearly \$4 million in grants to support research, organizing and advocacy to revise Denver Public Schools' (DPS) teacher-compensation system to reward teachers based on performance and quality teaching. The Foundation was directly involved in efforts to develop the system and get agreement from both DPS and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association on ProComp's structure. The plan would require an additional \$25 million in annual revenue, necessitating a public vote on a mill-levy increase.

Grant Support

In 2005, the Foundation granted \$250,000 to support the implementation of ProComp. Of this, \$100,000 was

for Citizens for Denver Public Schools, the campaign organization. The Foundation retained the remainder in a fund to conduct its own efforts to support ProComp.

Result and Implication

ProComp passed by a 58%-42% margin, providing \$25 million annually to Denver Public Schools for teacher compensation and related efforts to improve teacher quality. External evaluations of ProComp have demonstrated that over the first four years of implementation DPS improved its ability to compete with other districts when recruiting experienced teachers and that ProComp was successful in rewarding effective teachers.

2005 Colorado Referenda C & D, Economic Recovery Act

Background and Rationale

In 1992, voters passed Colorado's Amendment 1, known as the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights (TABOR). It requires voter approval of all state and local tax increases, and it requires refunding "excess" tax dollars based on a formula embedded in the constitution. By 2005, an economic downturn had resulted in significant reductions in state revenue. A bipartisan coalition of the governor and state legislators referred to voters a pair of constitutional amendments to temporarily repeal portions of TABOR that would allow the state to retain revenues and redirect them to specified fiscal needs.

Grant Support

Rose Community Foundation granted \$50,000 for public education efforts: \$47,500 to the Colorado Nonprofit Association's Nonprofit Voices Project and \$2,500 for its own outreach efforts, which included communications to other Colorado community foundations.

Result and Implication

Referendum C, which had the most significant fiscal impact, passed by a slight margin; Referendum D failed. As a result, Colorado was able to direct hundreds of millions of dollars in state tax revenue to health care, education, infrastructure and other priorities.

2008 Amendment 46, Anti-Affirmative Action Constitutional Amendment

Background and Rationale

In 2007, a California organization that had succeeded in overturning affirmative action in other states through citizen initiatives began organizing in Colorado. In anticipation of a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment that would eliminate or impair anti-discrimination programs in Colorado, a number of social justice organizations went into action to educate Coloradans about the real intent and potential impact of such an amendment.

Grant Support

Based on its core value of nondiscrimination, the Foundation granted \$25,000 to Public Interest Projects (PIP) in 2007. An organization that works nationally on social justice issues, PIP served as a fiscal sponsor for local efforts to raise public awareness about the value of affirmative action and other diversity programs.

Result and Implication

Amendment 46, with the misleading name "Colorado Civil Rights Initiative," appeared on the November 2008 ballot. It was defeated by a 50.8%-49.2% margin, leaving Colorado's affirmative action programs intact.

2008 Colorado Amendment 59, Savings Accounts For Education (SAFE)

Background and Rationale

SAFE was an effort to boost state educational funding by passing a constitutional amendment that would resolve complex conflicts between TABOR, Referendum C and Amendment 23. The measure would replace Amendment 23, which calls for constitutional mandates for education spending. SAFE would also create a “rainy day fund” in the state’s treasury.

Grant Support

The Foundation supported SAFE with a \$50,000 grant for two purposes: \$25,000 for the Colorado Nonprofit Association to educate the statewide nonprofit community about the benefits of SAFE, and \$25,000 to support the Colorado SAFE campaign.

Result and Implication

Amendment 59 failed by a vote of 54.3%-45.7%. Subsequently, advocates for fiscal reform have continued to seek remedies for fiscal challenges due to earlier constitutional amendments.

2008 Referendum O, Changing the Constitutional Amendment Process

Background and Rationale

Referendum O was an effort to raise the requirements for citizen-initiated constitutional amendments while reducing requirements for citizen-initiated statutory changes. It grew out of recommendations from the University of Denver’s Colorado Economic Futures Panel, which determined that the state’s fiscal policies were handicapped by a “Gordian knot” of voter-passed constitutional mandates related to taxation and spending. (The Foundation had supported the Panel’s work with a \$30,000 grant in 2005.) Referendum O would discourage future citizen initiatives to amend Colorado’s constitution.

Grant Support

The Foundation made a \$5,000 grant to support Citizens for Constitutional Common Sense, the campaign organization to pass Referendum O.

Result and Implication

Amendment O failed 52.5%-47.5%. Colorado remains one of the easiest states in the nation for citizen-initiated constitutional amendments to qualify for the ballot.

2013 Amendment 66, State Income Tax Increase to Fund Education

Background and Rationale

During the 2013 legislative session, the Colorado Senate passed SB-213, an amendment to Colorado’s Public School Finance Act that proposes a number of specific provisions intended to improve P-12 education. Amendment 66 was a related ballot initiative to fund the reforms outlined in SB-213 through a two-tier graduated income tax. The tax increase would initially have raised an additional \$950 million annually. Many of the specific features of SB-213 are consistent with Rose Community Foundation’s funding priorities in Child and Family Development and Education as well as its core values.

Grant Support

The Foundation granted \$200,000 to Colorado Commits to Kids, the campaign to pass Amendment 66. It also approved up to \$50,000 to the Colorado Nonprofit Association and other nonprofit groups to educate constituencies about the benefits of Amendment 66.

Result and Implication

Voters defeated Amendment 66 by a margin of 66%-34%. Elected officials and education advocates are seeking alternative ways to implement the reforms specified in SB-213.

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