



Agenda Report



TO:	Honorable Mayor, City Council & Members of the Public	FROM:	Nikki Fortunato Bas Council President Councilmember, District 2
			Nicolas Heidorn Executive Director Public Ethics Commission
SUBJECT:	Accepting, Appropriating, And Allocating Grant To Public Ethics Commission For Democracy Dollars	DATE:	December 7, 2023

RECOMMENDATION

To ensure development of the Public Ethics Commission’s community engagement infrastructure and comprehensive outreach plan for educating Oakland voters in the lead up to the launch of the Democracy Dollars Program in 2026, Council President Bas and the Public Ethics Commission recommend that the City Council adopt a resolution:

1. Accepting and appropriating a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund in an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) for the period of January 15, 2024, to July 15, 2025; and
2. Authorizing the City Administrator to take all steps necessary for the city to receive the grant; and
3. Allocating grant funds in an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to hire 1 FTE Grant Funded Limited Duration Employee to prepare the Democracy Dollars program outreach and education plan with the Public Ethics Commission for the period of at least April 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, with any remaining funds used for program-related non-salary outreach expenses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Ethics Commission (PEC or Commission) has been awarded a grant by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund (Haas, Jr. Fund) to fund a Democracy Dollars community engagement and outreach specialist position at the PEC for one year. This position, if funded, will enable the PEC to build a robust outreach and education plan well before the distribution of Democracy Dollar vouchers and begin building relationships with community organizations and leaders that can help educate the public and diverse communities about the Program. The outreach specialist would be a City employee or contractor reporting to the Democracy Dollars Program Manager; the Haas, Jr. Fund would have no role in directing or supervising the outreach specialist's or the PEC's outreach activities.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In November 2022, voters passed Measure W, to replace Oakland's existing, reimbursement-based public financing system with a voucher-based public financing system, modeled off of Seattle's system, called the Democracy Dollars Program. Under the Program, eligible Oakland residents will receive four, \$25 vouchers which they may contribute to any eligible candidate running for a City or Oakland School District office. Measure W required that the City provide a specified minimum budget and at least four staff positions to the PEC to administer the Program, which was intended to be implemented in the 2024 election cycle.

However, in light of the significant budget deficit the City was facing, the Mayor proposed and the City Council voted to eliminate funding for Democracy Dollars in the 2023-2025 Budget, effectively postponing the Program to 2026, and provided the PEC with one staff position to begin Program implementation, instead of the four required under Measure W. The soonest the PEC could be budgeted the three additional positions would be in July of 2025. If it takes several months to hire for these positions, which has been the PEC's experience in the past, these positions may not be filled until a few months before vouchers are mailed out to Oakland residents.

A core need of the Democracy Dollars Program will be preparing a robust outreach and education program to let the approximately 245,000 Oakland registered voters know about the Program, and how to use their vouchers. As part of its commitment to equitable outreach, and in keeping with the goals of Measure W to "expand public participation in the local democratic process and empower all Oakland residents with an opportunity to engage meaningfully in the campaign process," it is particularly important that this outreach and education encompass all of Oakland's diverse communities and emphasize communities that have traditionally been underserved or that have lower levels of political engagement.

The PEC successfully applied to the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund's Democracy program for grant funding to enable earlier hiring of a contractor or staff who can assist the PEC in preparing for Democracy Dollars implementation, with outreach and education being one crucial area that will require early planning and preparation. Measure W expressly provides that the City may accept voluntary donations to the Democracy Dollars Fund, which is the fund the voucher contributions are paid out of.

(OMC 3.15.060.) The City of Oakland, although not the PEC, also routinely applies for grant funding to support specific programs or operations.

Approval of the proposed resolution, which is recommended by Council President Bas and the PEC, will authorize the City Administrator to take all steps necessary for the city to accept and receive the Haas, Jr. Fund grant and allocate the grant to hire 1 FTE Grant Funded Limited Duration Employee to prepare the Democracy Dollars program outreach and education plan for the Public Ethics Commission for the period of at least April 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The Haas, Jr. Fund grant will be used to contract for or bring on a community engagement and outreach specialist for one year, likely from April 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, to assist with the development and implementation of an equity-centered Democracy Dollars engagement plan to build awareness of, and encourage broad participation in, the Program, including in traditionally underserved areas of Oakland. The community engagement specialist will assist with developing the PEC's community engagement infrastructure in the lead up to the launch of the Democracy Dollars Program and will assist in developing a communication strategy and comprehensive outreach plan for educating voters on the Program. Any remaining funds not used for salary will be used for program-related non-salary outreach expenses, such as marketing materials and events.

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of this resolution will authorize the City Administrator to accept and appropriate a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund for \$200,000 for the term of January 15, 2024, to July 15, 2025. The Haas grant will be appropriated into Fund (To-be-determined), Org (To-be-determined), Project (To-be-determined), and Program (To-be-determined).

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

A staff recommendation to pursue grant funding to support development of the Democracy Dollars Program outreach plan was discussed and approved at the Commission's October 25, 2023, public meeting. No public outreach was deemed necessary for this resolution beyond the standard Public Ethics Commission and City Council agenda noticing procedures.

COORDINATION

This resolution and agenda report were developed by PEC staff in coordination with the Council President's Office and City Attorney's Office.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: The acceptance of the \$200,000 grant described in this proposed legislation increases the City's revenue and allows the Public Ethics Commission to hire 1 FTE Grant Funded Limited Duration Employee to prepare the Democracy Dollars program outreach and education plan.

Environmental: There are no direct environmental impacts associated with this proposed legislation.

Race & Equity: Increasing civic participation among residents historically ignored in the campaign process because they lack the social and economic resources to contribute to candidate campaigns is an explicit goal of the program aligned with improving outcomes for voter participation, an Oakland Neighborhood and Civic Life equity indicator. In addition, as the PEC documented in its 2020 report, “Race for Power: How Money in Oakland Politics Creates and Perpetuates Disparities Across Income and Race,” local campaign contributions in Oakland elections come disproportionately from residents of Oakland’s whiter and wealthier areas. Adding a community engagement and outreach specialist for one year to assist with the development of an equity-centered Democracy Dollars engagement plan to build awareness of, and encourage broad participation in, the Program will increase racial equity by expanding opportunities for public participation in the local democratic process in communities that have been underserved due to present or historical racial discrimination and that are less likely to be wealthy or connected to networks of wealth.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL


Council President Bas and Director Heidorn respectfully request that the City Council: **Adopt a Resolution Accepting And Appropriating A Grant From The Evelyn And Walter Haas, Jr., Fund to hire 1 FTE Grant Funded Limited Duration Employee** as attached to this report.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Nicolas Heidorn, Executive Director of the Public Ethics Commission at nheidorn@oaklandca.gov or Cinthya Munoz-Ramos, Chief of Staff to Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas, District 2 at cmunozramos@oaklandca.gov.

Respectfully submitted,



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Executive Director, Public Ethics Commission

Prepared by:
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Attachments:

- Resolution
- Grant Agreement