A Year of Growth

2019 ANNUAL REPORT
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**MISSION**
The Center for Election Science advances smarter electoral systems to improve social good in the public and private sectors by providing scholarship, election-related resources, and informed advocacy.

**VISION**
Our vision is to replace problematic voting methods across all government and civic elections with methods that produce greater social benefit.
Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

You’ve kept the momentum following the landslide approval voting win in Fargo, ND. Since that victory, we’ve collaborated with STL Approves to empower voters in St. Louis with approval voting—the ultimate tool to keep their elected officials accountable. This fits with our plan of demonstrating that approval voting can be implemented in a U.S. city and then spread across larger populations. You’ll see that plan continue into the 2020 campaign.

This year you helped us launch a program to set up chapters thanks to our new hire, Chris Raleigh, Director of Campaigns and Advocacy. We started our first chapter in the Bay Area because of all our supporters there, and you’ll see more chapters spring up across the US. This is what happens when your reach increases two-fold since the previous year.

Of course, we couldn’t have managed all this without the renewed grant from Open Philanthropy Project. Still, beyond that support, you, our supporters, gave over $150,000 in 2019. That’s three times the amount we raised before our first grant. We’re excited about moving on to larger cities and states, but our current level of funding limits what we’re able to do. We’ve addressed this discrepancy by acting at a furious pace and using superior strategy. We also use best practices for hiring which includes blind candidate review and skill-based assessment.

We felt some staffing limitations with our polling projects. While we were able to share great data, the need for a dedicated Director of Research became more obvious in the time it took for us to share the analysis.

Still, it’s because of you that we stand where we are. Because of you, 150k Fargoans now have access to fairer, more representative elections. Because of you, another 318k in St. Louis, Missouri are just months away from a stronger democracy. And it will be because of you when we eventually reach millions of more voters in cities and states across this country.

Thank you for continuing to fight alongside us for a fairer, more representative democracy.

With Great Devotion,

AARON HAMLIN
Executive Director
The Center for Election Science
2019: Year of Growth

If 2018 was a year of transformation for The Center for Election Science, 2019 was a year of growth. We built on the momentum of our historic win in Fargo to lay the foundation for future victories. This growth is all thanks to you—our donors and supporters.

Because of your generous support, we took a huge step forward by hiring our Director of Campaigns & Advocacy, Chris Raleigh. Chris is an experienced campaign professional and he has already shown himself to be an indispensable addition to our team.

One of Chris’s top priorities has been working with our partners at STL Approves on their initiative to bring approval voting to the city of St. Louis. With your help, we launched our campaign partnership with STL Approves in May, just over 6 months after our win in Fargo.

Voters in St. Louis have seen dozens of elections with severe vote-splitting, leading to candidates winning with mere fractions of the vote. Feeling that their voices weren’t being heard, citizens formed STL Approves and reached out to us for support.

In 2019, we provided STL Approves with a grant to help fund their signature gathering campaign to get the approval voting initiative on the ballot in 2020. Once the initiative makes the ballot, we’ll launch an education campaign to make sure voters understand the benefits of approval voting. You can help make history when you make a contribution to help us reach every St. Louis voter.

This year it also became clear that in order to grow the movement for approval voting, we need to plant and nurture seeds that can later grow into formal campaigns or advocacy movements. With this idea in mind, Chris launched a new chapter program to empower approval voting supporters to advocate for better voting methods in their local communities. The first chapter launched in the San Francisco Bay Area this fall, with plans for more chapter kickoffs in 2020.

On top of all of that, you can now learn about our campaigns and chapters, plus read the latest blog posts about voting methods, on our new website that launched in January of 2019. Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, we now have a polished and professional website with lots of ways for you to start advocating for approval voting.
Revitalizing Democracy in America’s Heartland

St. Louis, Missouri holds a special place in the hearts of many Americans. It’s home to the beautiful Gateway Arch—the gateway to the west. It’s a Cardinal-crazed baseball city and home to world famous BBQ. It’s home to Anheuser-Busch, which brews the quintessentially American beers we enjoy with friends during celebrations and on holidays like the 4th of July.

It’s at the core of America’s heartland.

But there’s something seriously wrong with America’s heart.

In the last five years alone, there have been eight city elections in St. Louis where the winner earned less than 37% of the vote. Of those eight elections, five had winners who earned less than 30% of the vote. The vote-splitting issue in St. Louis is out of control, and it’s often communities of color who are penalized for having multiple candidates from their community run in the same election.

Something had to change to revitalize democracy in America’s heartland.

The team of grassroots organizers at St. Louis Approves recognized that and asked The Center for Election Science for support in advancing an important democracy strengthening initiative. In May of 2019, thanks to your support, we awarded a grant of $75,000 to STL Approves to bring approval voting to the city.

Over the summer and fall, STL Approves collected petitions, built up a stellar team of staff and volunteers, and garnered the support of local leaders. They felt like their fellow St. Louisans were starting to believe there was a way to heal their community. But they couldn’t be sure without more information.
To see how much progress STL Approves had made and how much work remained, The Center for Election Science commissioned a poll in October 2019.

And the results were, well, heart-warming.

About half the city had heard about this opportunity to bring fairer, more representative elections to St. Louis. And after just reading the initiative, nearly three out of every four people said they felt so confident it would do so that they’d vote for it! Even better, this support was from people of all races, ages, educational levels, and political backgrounds.

With proof that their movement was gaining steam, the STL Approves team headed into the new year on a high note. Major endorsers have since joined the cause to heal America’s heartland. This includes Open Primaries and the local chapters of League of Women Voters and RepresentUs.

We’re so proud of all the hard work and dedication of STL Approves, but none of this would have been possible without the generous support of people like you. We can’t wait to celebrate with you in November!
Gearing Up for 2020: Democratic Primary Polling

Your support has allowed for our polling research this past year. And it’s only because of your support that we know the potential impact of approval voting in the current presidential election.

Our November poll took an early picture of the Democratic primary using three voting methods: our choose-one method, ranked-choice voting (RCV), and approval voting. What did we see?

Our choose-one method showed us a closer three-way race. But approval voting and RCV placed Warren solidly in the lead.

Changing the voting method revealed more than just a different winner. Approval voting—unlike both RCV and our choose-one method—differentiated the rest of the candidates and revealed their actual support. Many candidates like Yang, Klobuchar, Booker, and Castro showed support under approval voting that otherwise went unnoticed.

This is a lesson from what we’ve seen in the literature and with previous polling that we’ve done. Sometimes approval voting will change the winner—typically favoring the candidate who maximizes voter satisfaction. But regardless of whether the winner changes, approval voting reveals support that is otherwise invisible. Both our choose-one method and RCV regularly fail here. Plus, approval voting shows you this clearer picture without demanding the complexity of RCV.

It’s because of your support that we got to see the comparison between approval voting, our choose-one method, and RCV. This type of polling is a salient way for us to familiarize the public with approval voting and how it could create more representative elections. Thanks to you, we were able to gather the data to make that happen.

Would you like to see us conduct more research like this throughout the election in 2020? Consider making a contribution to help us fund more polling projects.
There’s a point in every movement where an idea becomes reality—where things once debated in small circles begin to be discussed at dinner tables.

In 2018, you helped make that moment happen for approval voting.

Since being initially reviewed in academia in the 1970’s, voters in Fargo, North Dakota decided to try it out and see if approval voting would solve the problems with their municipal elections.

Now that the first, major barrier had been crossed, it was time to truly take it to the people. In 2019, your support helped fuel the process of building that reality from the ground up. We developed a strategy to develop a grassroots advocacy organization to bring approval voting to the rest of the country.

Our goal: to bring together hundreds of approval voting and CES supporters in major metros to build a community focused on sparking change.

With so many board members and online supporters based in the Bay Area, we knew this was the best place to start. We kicked off this initiative in San Francisco in November of 2019. Supporters from across the Bay Area gathered to learn more about how to advocate for approval voting. More importantly, attendees saw that they were not alone. There were others, right in their backyard, ready to do the hard work of bringing approval voting to the people.

In that moment, we realized what the secret ingredient was to empowering voters with fairer, more representative elections. You.

Your support is the key to victory and because of that, we plan to greatly expand our chapter program in 2020.

We want to continue to build from the grassroots level a movement of people advocating for change everywhere. Our goal is to have these chapters be self-sustaining groups of people dedicated to research, outreach, and eventually, a future campaign in these metro areas.

As we saw in Fargo, the hardest part of turning a goal into reality is the first step. With that great victory behind us, we are seeing people from across the country ready to take the first step in their own cities. Want to be a trailblazer in your community?

Contact Chris to let him know you want to lead the effort to launch a chapter in your area. And, don’t forget to tell your friends to sign up for our newsletter! The more supporters we see in an area, the faster we can bring a chapter to your area!
Donor Spotlight: Reclaiming Our Power

Powerless.

It's not a word you’d think someone would use to describe themselves when they have a Ph.D. in Neuroscience from UCLA and have spent their career creating the software powering the cutting-edge electric cars produced by Tesla.

But it's a feeling longtime CES donor Dylan Hirsch-Shell uses to describe a couple of areas in his life—politics and our environment. And it's a feeling that has driven him to discover the power he has to effect change through his profession and philanthropy.

Dylan grew up in smog-filled Los Angeles tinkering with computers alongside his grandfather, reading about philosophy and government, and watching third party candidates like Ross Perot expose the weaknesses in our elections. “In middle school, I drew a cartoon of a three-headed dragon that had the faces of the three candidates at the time—Clinton, Perot, and H.W. Bush. I think the message centered around having to vote for the lesser of the evils,” Dylan recalled.

Then, in 2000—the first presidential election he could vote in—he saw the system fail him.

“I really became disillusioned with our voting system in the U.S.,” Dylan shared. “I couldn’t believe that we would have a system where it was possible for a candidate to win without the popular vote, so it made me get even more involved in politics.”

Frustrated, Dylan set out to find answers. He soon discovered several online groups discussing voting methods and tried to absorb as much as he could. But as a busy college student pursuing dual degrees in electrical engineering/computer science and brain/cognitive sciences, he didn’t have time to do much more.

Then, he discovered The Center for Election Science.

“When I found CES, I realized there was a group that was actually trying to move us forward on this issue. It wasn’t just a bunch of people arguing on the internet anymore,” Dylan explained.

So he made a small, monthly commitment to fight for better elections. And he set off to use his own skills to tackle the other issue that left him feeling powerless—the state of our environment.

“When I saw the job opening at Tesla, I jumped at the opportunity to work on something that would make a difference in the air quality in my hometown,” he explained. “I had an opportunity to make a difference every day.”

Now, nearly a decade later, Dylan feels like his career and philanthropy have given him the power to make things happen.

“It’s an uphill battle to fight to get politicians on board with championing causes that take risks,” Dylan said. But he feels that if we simply keep pushing, we can accomplish our mission.

“I believe that implementing better voting methods will result in leadership that provides policies that are better for the people,” Dylan said.

And that, we believe, is a pretty powerful thing.
Corporate Donors

AmazonSmile
Apple
Facebook
Genentech
Google
The House of Shields
Intel Foundation
LinkedIn
MediaMath
Microsoft

Thank you to our many corporate donors for supporting our donors’ philanthropy this year! During 2019, these companies provided $6,000 in matching gifts. Interested in making your gift go twice as far? Contact Kirsten, Director of Philanthropy, for more information on employer matching gift programs.

Donor List

$1,000,000+
Open Philanthropy Project

$10,000+
Joseph Gordon-Levitt
Jeff Justice
Robert Norman

$2,500-$9,999
Todor Markov
Timothy Morton
Nathanael Nerode
Jon Roberts
Jonathan Summers
Tim Swast

$1,000-$2,499
Anonymous
Daniel Allison
Brancomb Family Foundation
Brian Hegarty
Dylan Hirsch-Shell
The House of Shields
Kerry Keys
Anna Kin
Steve Kommrusch
Neal McBurnett
Cullen O’Keefe
Sara Ponzi

Michael Ruvinsky
Felix Sargent
Will Sargent
Matthew Schnaider
Scott Siskind
Kevin Ulug
Greg Wolfe

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Brian Hauer
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Steve Levin
Mike Osenar
Helen and Dan Quinn
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David Schnurr
Leon Smith
Mr. Wahl

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Steve Brams
Bart Ingles
Jordon Kalilich
Jan Kok
Bob and Susan Kresek
Joseph Kutkoski
Rob Lanphier
Adam Moore
Miguel Moreno
Grey Nearing
Dominic Paris
Jay Quigley
Jonathan Reiss
Girish Sastry
Lou Templeton
Robert and Michelle Waldner

$100-$249
Ossama Alami
Alex Altair
Eric Arthen
Frank Atwood
Derrick Bass
Simon Batistoni
Linda Bell
Denis Bider
Bill Bridgman
Derek Britz
Michael Carmody
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Tara Lundstrom
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Siim Schults
John Seibel
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Melie Skarupke
Jim Snow
Bradley Svee
Jacob Trefethen
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$50-$99
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CJ Cabourne
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Neil Castine
Kevin Cheng
Steven Davis
Marina Franco
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George Melcer
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Michael Morris
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Brandy Smith
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Andrew Trusty
Katie Von Till
Teresa W. Zhang
Jamie Walker
Evan Ward
Thomas Waters
Kennita Watson
James Wax
Sally Zebrick
Sharon Zens

Board members’ names appear in italics.

The foundation of our fundraising is a strong internal commitment to our programs—demonstrated by the fact that 100% of our board financially supports our work to implement fairer, more representative voting methods.

Recurring donors’ names appear in bold.

We owe our success to all of our donors, but especially those who have made a monthly commitment to empowering voters with a better voting method. Thank you for being a part of the CES family.

FINANCIALS

TOTAL REVENUE
$1,943,809.69

INDIVIDUAL PUBLIC SUPPORT
$61,710.11

BOARD SUPPORT
$26,481.71

CORPORATE SUPPORT
$1,191.45

DIRECT PUBLIC GRANTS
$1,826,791.59

INTEREST
$27,532.23

MISCELLANEOUS REVENUE
$10.13

SALES OF PRODUCT INCOME
$92.47

TOTAL EXPENDITURES
$666,692.08

RESEARCH ADVANCEMENT
$2,500.00

PUBLIC OUTREACH
$147,966.32

VOTING METHOD ADVANCEMENT
$129,219.86

ADMINISTRATIVE
$32,901.01

FUNDRAISING
$53,883.81

STAFFING AND RELATED COSTS*
$300,221.08

*Includes staff time appropriated to programs
Board Spotlight: Anna Kin

CES board member Anna Kin spent most of her career in big tech where she wore a number of hats—technical writer, software engineer, software prototyper, and manager.

But in 2019, she decided to take a leap and transition out of the corporate tech world. Why? So that she could move into the nonprofit sphere and focus on issues she really cares about, like climate change and improving our elections.

“I wanted to take time off to reflect and see where I could use my skills in an effective way,” Anna noted.

Reflecting on the lead-up to her decision to transition out of big tech, Anna said that the state of both democracy and the environment were weighing on her. Although she enjoyed her work in technology, she really wanted to have a direct impact on the world.

After meeting representatives from The Center for Election Science at a Board Match event, Anna felt that becoming a board member with CES would be the perfect opportunity for her to fulfill her desire to work toward strengthening democracy.

The idea that we could change the way we vote to create better outcomes and more representative governments just seemed intuitive to her. “Approval voting is so easy to understand and to talk about. It’s so clear to see how it can benefit us today.”

Like many of us, Anna has felt overwhelmed by the current state of politics and the world, and she’s had a difficult time identifying where she can make an impact.

The fact that CES focuses on one specific and achievable solution was a relief for Anna.

“I’m excited to help amplify the approval voting solution. It’s a reform that has such potential for widespread, tangible good and can lay the groundwork to change other problems facing our country.”

In addition to her role as board member with CES, Anna is also leveraging her technical writing chops by serving as a volunteer grant writer for 350 Bay Area—a nonprofit addressing the climate crisis.

We’re so glad that Anna decided to make a commitment to improving the world she lives in! We’re proud to have her on our board, working to bring approval voting to cities and states across the country.

Would you like to make a commitment to creating more representative elections? We’re still recruiting board members, and we need a diverse coalition to help improve our democracy. Send us an email at contact@electionscience.org to express your interest! We’d love to learn more about you.