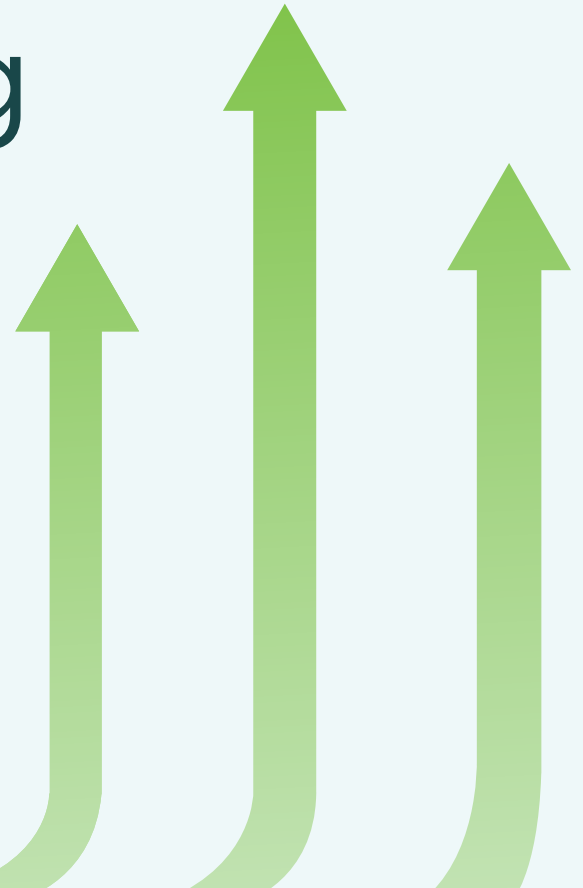




THE CENTER FOR  
**Election**Science

# The Turning **Point**

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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## MISSION

The Center for Election Science is dedicated to empowering people with voting methods that strengthen democracy.

## VISION

Our vision is a world where democracies thrive because voters' voices are heard.

# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

There was a time, a mere few years ago, when approval voting wasn't used anywhere in government. Approval voting has since passed in two cities by over 60% where over 420,000 people now collectively benefit. Over 300,000 of those people were empowered with approval voting this past year. And the reason why these people now benefit is because of your support.

Approval voting is an idea—a simple one—that just needed a push. It isn't radical. It isn't expensive. But it is effective. You know this. Approval voting says competition is good. It says more voices are good. And it says that your opinion about all of the candidates is valued.

We're standing here together at a pivotal moment—for CES and the US alike. We have chapter requests in over 80 cities. Some of those requests are for statewide initiatives. And we are ready to move forward with a strategic and data-oriented approach. The only question is how fast we can move.

Voters are ready for reform. Our biggest obstacle is that people don't know that approval voting is an option. They don't know that it's the simplest way to improve their elections or that it actually works. Right now, people learn about approval voting in two main ways. One way is that they're getting to vote using approval voting.

The other way people learn about approval voting is when you tell them about it. That's how the message spreads. You. You're driving this movement, this upgrade to our democracy. You are an essential member of this team. And we are grateful to have you among us. We look forward to working together with you as we spread this movement across the country. Let's dedicate this year to the millions of people we'll be helping next.

With Great Devotion,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron Hamlin".

**AARON HAMLIN**  
Executive Director  
The Center for Election Science

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# 2020: The Turning Point

No one could ever imagine a year like 2020. It was a year defined by a worldwide pandemic, unprecedented political division, and an erosion of faith in our institutions at home. Despite all this adversity, The Center for Election Science has reached the turning point. We have gone from a small, research-oriented nonprofit to a rapidly growing organization at the forefront of a movement to change American elections through approval voting.



In November, voters in St. Louis overwhelmingly passed Proposition D, joining Fargo, ND and becoming the second city to adopt approval voting. But as we continue to celebrate this victory and prepare for its defense, the real excitement lies in what's to come.

**Our chapter program** has grown far beyond our expectations, and efforts to put approval voting on the ballot have begun in cities from Chula Vista, CA to Denver, CO to Philadelphia, PA. In previous years, our efforts to advance approval voting occurred one campaign at a time. Now—thanks to your help—we are laying the groundwork for campaigns from coast to coast.

Last fall, we released a **request for proposals** from activists looking to fund their local chapters. Through this initiative, we provide subgrants to emerging chapters for polling and legal research to test the viability of a potential campaign. In all, we received six strong proposals from organizers in cities like Austin, TX, Broomfield, CO, Seattle, WA, and more. In the coming year, these subgrants will be available on a rolling basis. At present, we have more than 80 requests for information about our chapter program.

Thanks to your support, we've been able to bring on talented new team members to respond to the high level of interest in this program. Andrea Denault, who led the 2018 education campaign in Fargo, is spearheading the effort to bring approval voting to Denver and supporting other nascent campaigns across the country in her capacity as National Campaigns and Advocacy Coordinator. Likewise, Allison Sardinias, another National Campaigns and Advocacy Coordinator, is working alongside local activists as they establish their new chapters. Given the scale of engagement, we anticipate multiple active campaigns in support of approval voting in 2021.

We could not have reached this turning point without the continued support of contributors like you. Your financial support and your help spreading the word about our work are responsible for this growing movement. We thrived during a challenging year, and the future is promising.



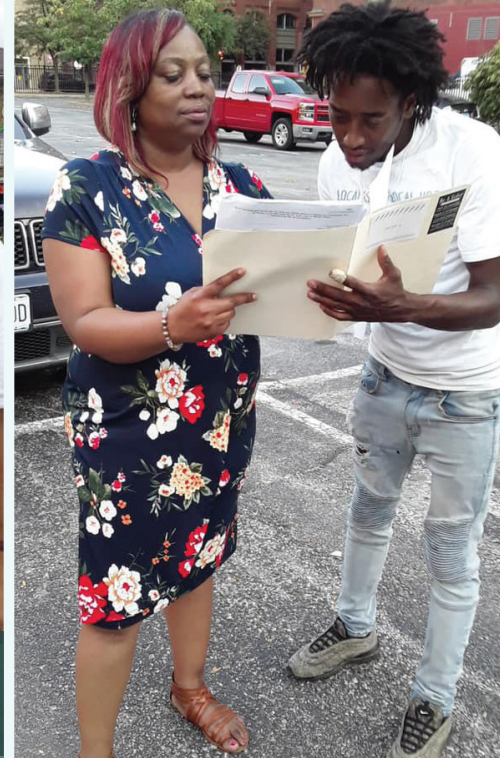
## No Ordinary Campaign: Empowering Voters During the Pandemic

On election night, as we huddled around our laptops, there was no escaping the weight of the moment. When **Proposition D passed with 68 percent of the vote**, to the casual observer, it may have seemed like a foregone conclusion. But in reality, it was the culmination of months of work to build a campaign amid the biggest crisis in a generation. This was a victory like no other.

Well before the pandemic turned society on its head, we knew that passing voting reform was essential for the people of St. Louis. When we first ran a poll in October 2019 to measure support for voting reform, one number stood out—62 percent. That’s the percentage of voters in St. Louis who felt unrepresented by their local leaders. That’s an environment in desperate need of change, and thanks to your support, our coalition was ready.

As with any campaign seeking to change the status quo, our coalition began its work with a steep hill to climb. Though the vast majority of voters were unsatisfied with their representation, even fewer voters—just 18 percent—had ever heard of approval voting. For Benjamin Singer, Executive Director of Show Me Integrity, it was this lack of broad awareness that would make passing Proposition D such a challenge—let alone getting the measure on the ballot.

According to Singer, “We had no large-scale campaign operation capable of even gathering the required signatures.”



Supporters collect signatures for Prop D in the summer of 2019

That's when—thanks to your support—The Center for Election Science got involved, working with campaign leaders like Tyler Schlichemeyer, fellow Steering Committee Vice-Chair Rasheen Aldridge, Jr., the St. Louis chapter of the League of Women Voters, and numerous local residents to help meet the challenge. Thanks to your contributions, we worked together to create a campaign operation that could propel Proposition D to victory.

CES made an impact across the campaign by:

- Funding key campaign activities, including signature drives and voter education ads
- Providing professional, strategic advice and access to the latest campaign technology
- Conducting polling that was key to building their strategy and the broad coalition of leaders they needed to win

More than any specific task, our timely financial support helped the coalition withstand the adversity brought on by the pandemic. By March of 2020, coronavirus was raging across Missouri and there was a real possibility that Proposition D would lack the signatures to make the ballot. Our funding helped the coalition gather the last 6,000 signatures by the deadline, preventing the derailment of years of work.

Day-to-day, the pandemic forced us to adapt since all campaign activity now had to be virtual—a campaign environment that had never been contemplated. But together, we worked tirelessly to adapt on the fly to keep making progress even when the traditional playbook simply didn't apply.

In support of the campaign, CES launched a digital ad blitz on social media to bolster voter awareness. During the final two months of the campaign, our Facebook ads alone generated more than a million impressions, driving public awareness and support of Prop D. As well, your support enabled us to send a mailer to 66,000 households, ensuring that all voters were comfortable with approval voting.

But the impact of your support is perhaps told through the words of an ally. According to Singer, “We simply couldn't have run the campaign without CES.”

Our work in St. Louis continues, as we will fight to defend our victory in 2021.

# Chapter Program: Launching a Movement

When you set out to establish a national movement, there's no way to know how long it will take or ultimately how successful you will be.

In 2019, when we first decided to build a chapter program, we were taking a risk. But we were betting on the dedication of supporters like you and the idea that Americans deserve freer and fairer elections. We were betting on approval voting.

Now, as we look at the map of 123 chapter requests stretching from Seattle, WA to Philadelphia, PA, we see the power of that idea. We see a member-driven movement to empower voters taking shape and the enduring commitment of you—our donors and advocates.

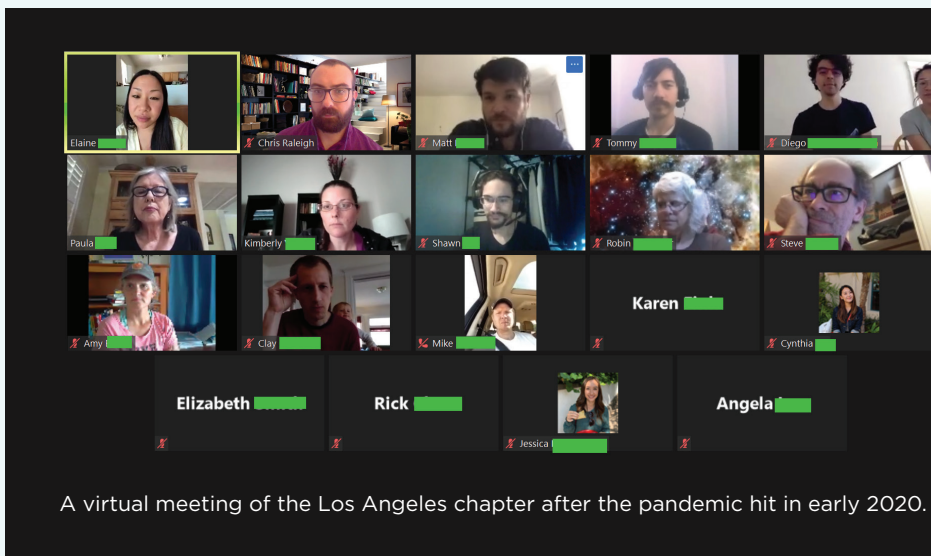
The chapter program was started based on the realization that reforming our elections couldn't be achieved one city at a time. Thanks to your help, work to advance approval voting is taking place in communities across America.

On any given day, supporters publish letters to the editor in Salt Lake City papers in favor of approval voting, organizers in Texas hold a virtual event, and advocates in Utah lobby their legislature to include approval voting in a statewide bill. Your actions remind us of how far we have come in just over a year.

Combined, our growing number of chapters will be more than their independent activities. Our campaign staff is working to create a self-sustaining community of activists who work together and share best practices in pursuit of our shared goal.

We already see the beginning of collaboration across chapters on a variety of efforts, ranging from help creating branded materials, strategies for recruitment, and more. This collaboration will only grow with time.

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 where you live.



Email Chris at [chris@electionscience.org](mailto:chris@electionscience.org).



Sign up to join a chapter at [electionscience.org/join-an-approval-voting-chapter](https://electionscience.org/join-an-approval-voting-chapter).

# Fargo's First Approval Voting Election

In June 2020, Fargo, ND held the nation's first-ever approval voting election!

## THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT:



45K

EDUCATIONAL MAILERS WERE SENT TO VOTER HOUSEHOLDS



200K+

PEOPLE SAW OUR VOTER EDUCATION VIDEO

## AND THE PRE-ELECTION VOTER EDUCATION PAID OFF...



55%

SUPPORT FOR WINNER #1



53%

SUPPORT FOR WINNER #2



2.3

AVERAGE CANDIDATES SELECTED BY VOTERS PER BALLOT

## FARGO VOTERS ALSO HAD A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH APPROVAL VOTING:



71%

SAID THAT APPROVAL VOTING WAS EASY



62%

SAID THAT OVERALL, THEY LIKED APPROVAL VOTING



69%

SAID THEY FELT THEY COULD VOTE FOR THEIR FAVORITE CANDIDATE WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT ELECTABILITY

“It tells me I don’t just represent a fraction of Fargo. I represent the whole city. And that means when I go into the commission chambers, I’m able to serve them with confidence.”

JOHN STRAND,  
WINNING CITY  
COMMISSION CANDIDATE

Your support made this happen. Thanks for empowering Fargo voters with fairer, more representative elections!



# Donor Spotlight:

## Christine Morshedi

To some, caring about voting methods and electoral reform could be seen as the “cool thing to do” given recent events and increased public awareness. But Christine Morshedi could be considered an early adopter. A mathematician by trade and a seasoned political activist, Christine has been passionate about approval voting and voting reform since 2003.

Back then, as an activist for a progressive party living in Houston, TX, she was involved in a precursor of the debates to come. The national party had endorsed ranked-choice voting (RCV) as its reform of choice, but her local chapter wasn't sure. Bucking the national leadership, her local party's chapter preferred approval voting. This early advocacy set her on a path to become one of our most ardent supporters.

As a mathematician, Christine has always been attracted to approval voting's statistical logic—particularly its ability to force consensus even in the most divided bodies. Having left Texas for San Diego, CA, she quickly got involved with her new state's environmental movement.

Since 2015, she has been an active member of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, an organization advocating for legislative solutions to climate change such as a carbon fee and dividend plan (a revenue-neutral fee on carbon emissions to be returned to American households). During her lobbying, she has met with legislators from across the aisle and witnessed a growing willingness to consider bold solutions were it not for the political consequences of plurality elections.

According to Christine, “There are many members who would support our initiatives if the extreme base didn't have so much power in a primary. Approval voting would help these members and help us make strides against climate change.”

That's not to say that Christine has given up on her radical ideas. She recognizes how approval voting gives all perspectives more oxygen because we can measure public support through elections. “There's so much information that we miss about where voters stand on issues because of the way we cast our ballots,” she says.

Like many other people, Christine can't help but think of the recent presidential primaries as another reason to support approval voting. “Do we know who the voters really wanted? It's happened on both sides.”

She's excited about our growing chapter program and eagerly awaits the formation of a San Diego chapter for approval voting.



**“There’s  
so much  
information  
that we miss  
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because  
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ballots.”**

# Donor List

## \$100,000+

**Dylan Hirsch-Shell**

## \$10,000-\$99,999

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Robert Norman  
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Malte Skarupke  
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**David C. Sokal**  
Shawn Stephenson  
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Keith Taylor  
Brandon Tikalsky  
~~██████████~~  
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Thank you to our many corporate donors for supporting our donors' philanthropy this year! During 2020, these companies helped our individual donors double their donations through matching gifts. Interested in making your gift go twice as far? **Contact Mike Piel**, Director of Philanthropy, for more information on employer matching gift programs.

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*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

\$710,759.97

#### INDIVIDUAL PUBLIC SUPPORT

\$483,991.23

#### BOARD SUPPORT

\$72,612.86

#### CORPORATE SUPPORT

\$418.23

#### DIRECT PUBLIC GRANTS

\$94,000

#### FEDERAL GRANTS

\$50,241

#### INVESTMENTS

\$9,198.59

#### MISCELLANEOUS REVENUE

\$298.06

### TOTAL EXPENDITURES

\$959,383.94

#### RESEARCH ADVANCEMENT

\$15,500.00

#### PUBLIC OUTREACH

\$162,211.38

#### VOTING METHOD ADVANCEMENT

\$219,448.05

#### FUNDRAISING

\$142,824.37

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

\$39,437.42

#### STAFFING AND RELATED COSTS\*

\$379,962.72

\*Includes staff time appropriated to programs

# Board Spotlight: Hilary Krase

Meaningful representation. That's what drives Hilary Krase, one of our newest board members.

As someone with an educational background in political science and sociology, plus a law degree from Berkeley, the interaction between laws, policy, and representation has always intrigued her.

"People now have the right to vote despite their skin color or property ownership," Hilary said. "But we need better voting methods in place so that votes aren't split and people's views are truly represented."

From Hilary's perspective, voting methods are an important aspect of the voting rights discussion. The way we vote can quite literally marginalize an individual's (or an entire community's) voice through the scourge of vote-splitting.

With approval voting, it doesn't have to be that way. Every voter's voice can be fully heard.

"A lot of people see approval voting and think it's just another voting method, but it leads to something larger—getting diverse representation of opinions in office."

Hilary's strong sense of fairness and civic engagement was instilled in her from a young age by her father who also practiced law. Throughout her law career, Hilary has had opportunities to channel her passion for social justice and representation.

After a federal clerkship, Hilary joined the litigation department of a San Francisco law firm, where she currently practices.

Hilary discovered The Center for Election Science through her husband, a voting methods enthusiast (he's even creating a voting-methods-themed board game). Having a passion for voting rights and better voting methods, board service with CES seemed like the perfect opportunity for her.

"It's really intellectually stimulating and a good nexus for all of my interests," she said.

When she's not working or advocating for approval voting, Hilary might be found hiking with her dog Nino and playing board games and puzzles with her husband. Some of their favorites, unsurprisingly, are politically-themed: Coup and MapMaker.

The rest of the board and staff at CES are so happy to have Hilary as part of our team. Her background, passions, and talents bring a unique perspective to the movement for better elections! You can be like Hilary! We're always accepting applications for new board members. **[Click here to learn more and apply.](#)**



**"We need better voting methods in place so that votes aren't split and people's views are truly represented."**