Guidelines and Process for Public Policy Advocacy
Approved June 11, 2013

Silicon Valley Community Foundation has a unique and essential role to play in the policy process. Advocacy allows the community foundation to serve its constituencies and promote its causes through educating the public and policymakers, conducting research, supporting litigation, organizing, lobbying, and more. As permitted by the Internal Revenue Service, the community foundation has elected to engage in lobbying, fund lobbying activities and undertake other forms of advocacy to further its mission, vision and values. The extent of lobbying that the foundation can undertake is subject to the limits imposed by the IRS election.

Process and Criteria
The CEO will bring recommended public policy positions forward to the Board for discussion related to support or opposition for legislation, ballot measures, initiatives or other public policy efforts. The following criteria will be used to determine whether to engage in the policy issue:

- The proposed policy meets the stated mission, which is to “strengthen the common good, improve quality of life and address the most challenging problems.”
- The policy directly relates to current grant program initiatives or other broad strategy areas identified by the Board of Directors.
- Significant portions of the community foundation’s constituencies/partners would be impacted by the resulting policy.
- The proposed policy support/opposition is requested by a governmental body or partner organization to the community foundation.
- The foundation’s voice, credibility and/or resources will make a difference on the issue.

Written Communication
When a proposed position recommendation is brought to the Board for consideration, the CEO will submit a written report for discussion, feedback and approval that includes:

- Background and current information on any recommended position (e.g., how the recommendation relates to the criteria listed above; list of supporters and opponents; identification of any upsides/downsides to the foundation’s involvement, etc.)
- Explanation of recommended level of involvement by the foundation including how final position will be communicated to the foundation’s constituencies/partners.

Time Sensitive Actions
See CEO Policy Engagement below

Level of Involvement
Tier 1: This would be a basic level of involvement, which would include sending a letter to the legislation’s author or initiative campaign(s); being listed as a supporter/opponent; linking to a relevant web site on the community foundation’s web site; and receiving email alerts as to activities of interest. This level of involvement would also include notifying constituencies/partners of its position through the foundation’s web site, but not including any “call to action.”
Tier 2: This would be a middle ground approach, including all of the above plus possibly low-level participation in conference calls and meetings to talk strategy with supporters/opponents. It might include small contributions to any campaign(s); encouraging donors to give to relevant campaigns; encouraging community members to become involved through writing Letters to the Editor or submitting Opinion Editorials to their local newspapers; and a higher level presence on the community foundation web site encouraging constituencies/partners to either contact their legislators or vote Yes/No on the measure (a “call to action.”)

Tier 3: This would be the highest level of involvement, including all of the above, but also a larger financial contribution from the community foundation; getting a “seat at the table” among those guiding the legislation’s/campaign’s efforts; CEO or Board member involvement writing Opinion Editorials; having meetings with newspaper Editorial Boards; and raising big dollars for any relevant campaign(s).

Legal Reporting
There are IRS, California, county and local legal rules and requirements that govern all policy-related activities in which the foundation engages. A separate guideline (“Lobbying Policy”) has been developed/adopted with review from legal counsel. Any action the Board takes to support/oppose legislation, ballot measures, initiatives or other policy issues will result in the need for timely tracking and reporting of staff time, grantmaking and other foundation expenses associated with taking action on the issue.

CEO Policy Engagement
In order to be effective in public policy engagement at all levels of government, the community foundation needs to be nimble and pro-active. Under certain circumstances, the CEO has the discretion to take action in a timely manner on legislative and regulatory matters, without requiring Board of Director input or approval.

The CEO may initiate community foundation support or opposition of city/county/state/federal legislation or regulatory matters that:

- Directly relate to current grant program initiatives;
- Fall under the broad strategy areas identified annually (or through the Strategic Plan) by the Board of Directors;
- Have local relevance and impact; and/or
- Are time-sensitive and require urgent action.

When the CEO initiates a public policy action in a new area that has not been previously approved, the Board of Directors will be informed in the next business day to any positions taken. If an urgent response is needed on a potentially sensitive policy issue, and it falls outside of the normal Board meeting process, the CEO may review a proposed action with the Executive Committee or at least two (2) Board members, or ask for a response from the full Board within 24 hours.

The CEO will have the authority to act consistently with previously approved public policy directives from the board and report on those actions to the full board at the next regularly scheduled meeting.
Flagging an Issue
The CEO may elect to “flag” a community, regional, statewide or federal issue (e.g., a ballot measure campaign, statewide legislation that could trump local laws or regulations, federal policy with local impact, etc.) that could be at odds with the community foundation’s fundamental values or troubling to the broader community. In these situations, the CEO would raise the issue for Board of Directors’ examination and potential action.