

# Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund

San Francisco, CA

<http://www.haasjr.org/>

evelyn & walter  
HAAS JR. fund

ADVANCING RIGHTS.  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES.

**NCRP: The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund was founded in 1953 with core values of fairness, equality and opportunity. How has the foundation changed over time?**

**Haas, Jr.:** For many years, the fund's focus was on direct services in the Bay Area. The founders loved their local community and wanted to use their philanthropy to increase access and opportunity there. While the foundation continues to support direct services and local initiatives, the Haas family increasingly came to see how the issues they cared about in the local community were connected to bigger issues facing California and the country. As the appetite for transformative change increased, the foundation began investing in state and national policy advocacy efforts to advance rights and opportunities for all people, with a focus on immigrants and gay and lesbian people. The fund also supports education equity in San Francisco schools and is a major investor in nonprofit and social movement leadership development. The throughline remains the same, however: a deep commitment to our founders' vision of a more just and caring society and a desire to level the playing field.

**NCRP: The Haas, Jr. Fund is part of California Civic Participation Funders, which works to strengthen long-term civic infrastructure in historically underserved regions. Why is this strategy important?**

**Haas, Jr.:** The Haas, Jr. Fund and our nine funding partners believe in increasing civic participation to give people voice and agency so they can advocate more power-



Photo courtesy of Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

fully for their own families. Our country is growing more and more diverse every day. Because of this, it's critically important that our policies and government reflect everyone's concerns and priorities. We focus on increasing civic participation in parts of the state that are rapidly growing and facing profound demographic changes. And we focus on bringing Latinos, Asians and African Americans together on issues of common concern. We've witnessed firsthand how communities can make change happen and how our state and country are stronger when everyone has a voice.<sup>1</sup>

**NCRP: The Haas, Jr. Fund helped form the Civil Marriage Collaborative, a key player in the Supreme Court victory for marriage equality in June 2015. How did your role in the movement evolve, and how will it continue post-Obergefell?**

**Haas, Jr.:** The movement for marriage equality was successful because of hundreds of thousands of people across the country. In private conversations and public actions, people spoke up and said it was time for change. Our role – and the role of the Civil Marriage Collaborative –

was really about supporting the process of changing hearts and minds on this issue. It included support for research to identify those messages that could bring people together and move the conversation forward. It also included support for a state-by-state strategy that eventually took the issue to the Supreme Court. A new video and case study highlight lessons for funders from this work, starting with the importance of taking risks on bold and visionary ideas.<sup>2</sup> Now the challenge for the movement is to use the momentum from the marriage win to target other forms of discrimination against gay and lesbian people. ■

## Notes

1. For more information on the work of California Civic Participation Funders and a list of all 10 members, read the case study on the project: "Bolder Together," Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, April 2012, <http://www.haasjr.org/resources/bolder-together>.
2. "Hearts and Minds," Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, November 2014, <http://www.haasjr.org/resources/changing-hearts-and-minds>.