

Philosophy

We believe in authentic democracy – where ordinary people come together on an equal footing to make decisions and take actions that benefit all involved. We’re not talking about the bought and sold electoral politics that masquerade as democracy in the United States these days, and not the friendly-to-U.S.-business interests democracy U.S. leaders use military might to install in sovereign nations.

We view democracy as an essential basis for building sustainable, effective organizations and communities. Better ideas always emerge in communities where more voices are engaged in debating problems and solutions. And those ideas are more likely to come to life in actual practice when the people who are most affected have collectively studied and decided on a course of action.



By engaging more people and more kinds of people in decision-making and action, democratic organizations are able to nurture a constantly replenishing pool of leaders and thinkers.

We think authentic democracy can take on many forms, so we would never prescribe “one right way” to build or sustain it. But we do have some ideas about what it looks like when it’s happening: meaningful collective involvement of people in analysis, planning, and decision-making about their future development and the problems that confront them along the way. This means that people work together to address their own problems, rather than simply seeking outside agencies to solve problems for them. Learning - both learning for public purpose and learning for personal growth - is key to the success of this approach.

We also make reference to the idea of making communities better places to live. These days, this is often conceived by politicians as “good jobs, good schools, safe streets.” Of course these are important, but we’re grasping for something broader and deeper: we support community-based initiatives that enhance long life, meaningful engagement, connectedness, and happiness for all members of the community.



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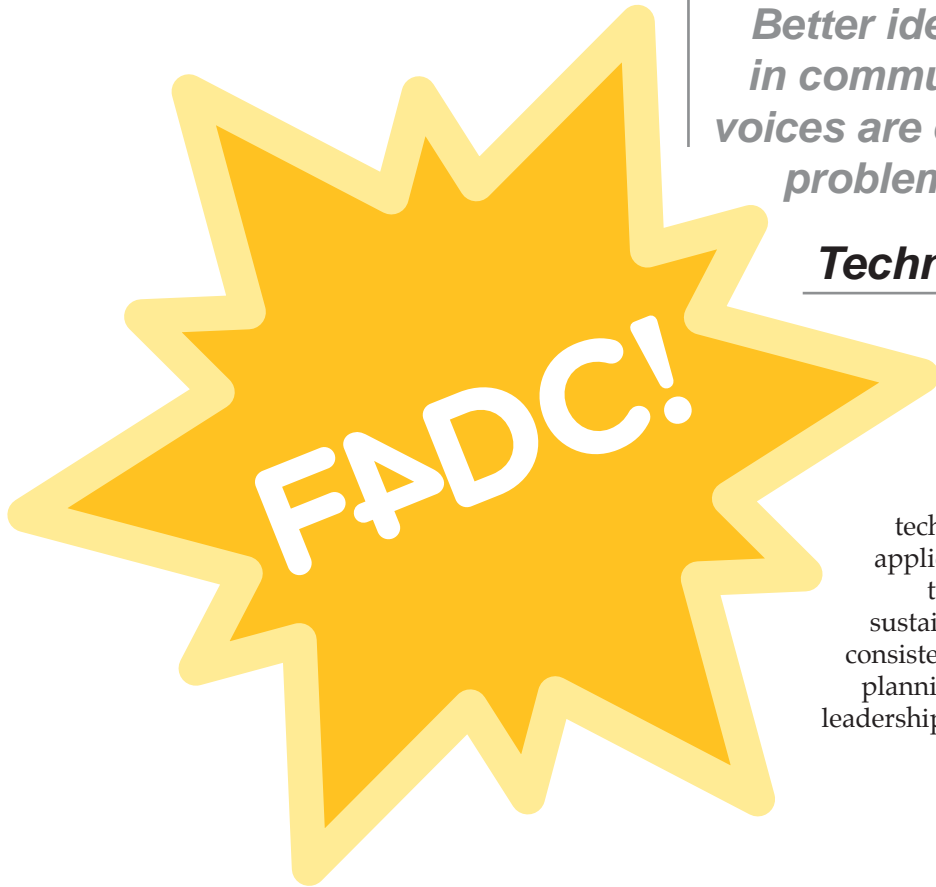
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The Fund for Democratic Communities

F4DC is a private operating foundation based in Greensboro, North Carolina, at a collective community space called The HIVE (History. Information. Vision. Exchange.).

Our mission is to support community-based initiatives and institutions that foster authentic democracy to make communities better places to live. F4DC makes grants, provides direct technical assistance, conducts research, and produces materials to facilitate this agenda.

We are governed by a diverse board of community activists, artists, labor leaders, researchers and educators. Our staff is led by executive director and co-founder Ed Whitfield.



Grants

F4DC makes grants with a focus on issues of education, recreation, arts, housing, community health and safety, justice, humans' relationship with the natural environment, relationships between different communities, and sustainable economic development.

We make two kinds of grants: 1) Grants to community-based organizations that seek to make their communities better places to live through grassroots democratic organizing and action, and 2) Grants to individuals for the purpose of study, travel, and interaction with people and groups doing similar community-based/democracy work.

Grants usually range in size from a few hundred dollars up to \$10,000, although larger grants may be considered.

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Technical assistance

Because we want to support a wide range of groups and individuals with good, democratic ideas, we provide assistance in preparing proposals for F4DC grants. We also provide technical assistance to successful grant applicants and other community groups to help them achieve organizational sustainability, define their goals to create consistency of purpose, engage in strategic planning, and develop effective tools and leadership for implementing their programs.



Research and learning

We attempt to make knowledge serve the common good and the community's needs through research, primarily participatory action research that empowers members of marginalized communities to themselves formulate, organize and investigate social issues for the purpose of informed democratic decision-making that in turn leads to effective action.

Much of our focus is on creating and sustaining authentic learning communities, and in finding ways including producing materials to preserve, disseminate, and build on knowledge created within communities. Because of this emphasis, we expect and support our grantees to participate in ongoing sharing and learning sessions with other grantees of the Fund and interested community partners.

