

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN ALASKA

Philanthropy's success depends on a thriving democracy. When democracy does not work for everyone, funders' impacts shrink – no matter the issue area their organization focuses on. Any funder can work toward a more inclusive and accountable democracy.

How can philanthropy strengthen democracy in Alaska?

Philanthropy Northwest produces the Democracy Lens, a set of resources to demonstrate how democracy issues have impacted your state. The Democracy Lens includes case studies known as [Bright Spots](#) which show how funders invest in democracy and where they can do more, and Democracy Charts, which highlight key statistics. In this resource, you will find the Democracy Charts for Alaska.



Philanthropy Northwest's discussions with our members and our own research illuminate concerning trends affecting the health of democracy throughout our region, including:

- Democracy-related grants make up a small amount of funding in Alaska and from only a few funders, indicating room to grow in this space. We see this trend in other states in the region as well.
- Elected officials across the region are much less diverse than the populations they serve. People of color are 39% of Alaska's population but only 13% of elected officials. The disparity may reflect missing community perspectives in political representation, especially among the Alaska Native population.
- In recent decades, the number of Alaskan newspapers declined 20%, an even greater decline than in other Northwest states. A decline in local journalism in a highly rural state can make it harder for communities to stay informed and have their issues gain awareness.
- A large portion of eligible voters in the Northwest do not vote, including in Alaska, where turnout has grown but remains roughly the national average.

See the data on democracy funding, equity in representation, support for local journalism, voter engagement and election effectiveness in Alaska below.

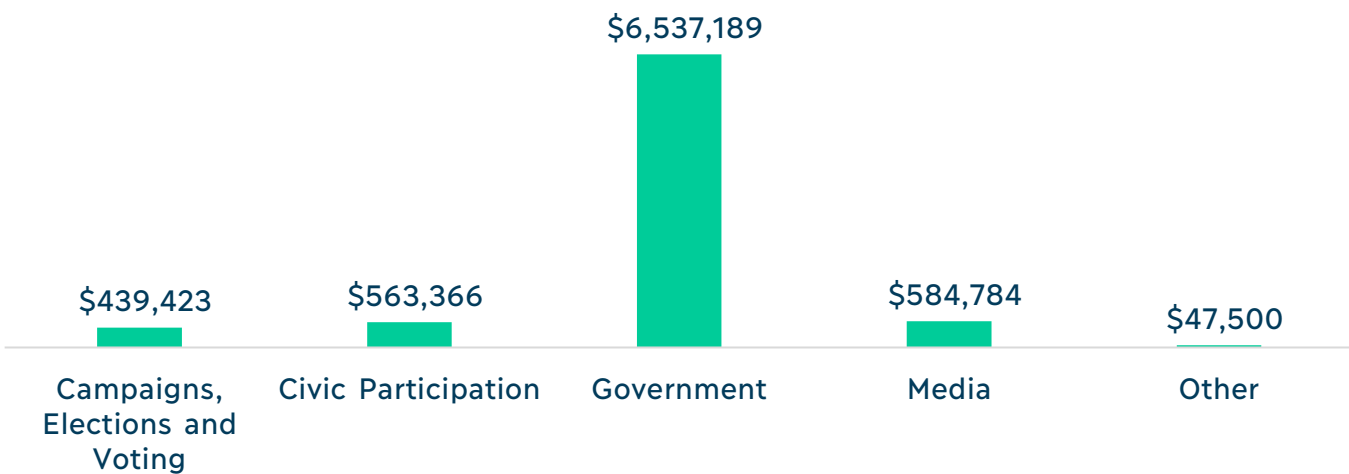
Democracy Funding to Grantees in Alaska

The data below suggests that most funders are not engaged in democracy activities in Alaska, but those that do make a significant impact in the state.

27 Funders
gave democracy-related grants to Alaska in 2019 (5.8% of all funders giving to Alaska)

\$7.6M in Grants
went to democracy-related causes in Alaska in 2019 (6.7% of all grantmaking to Alaska)

Alaska Democracy Funding by Category - 2019 (Grants can be in Multiple Categories)

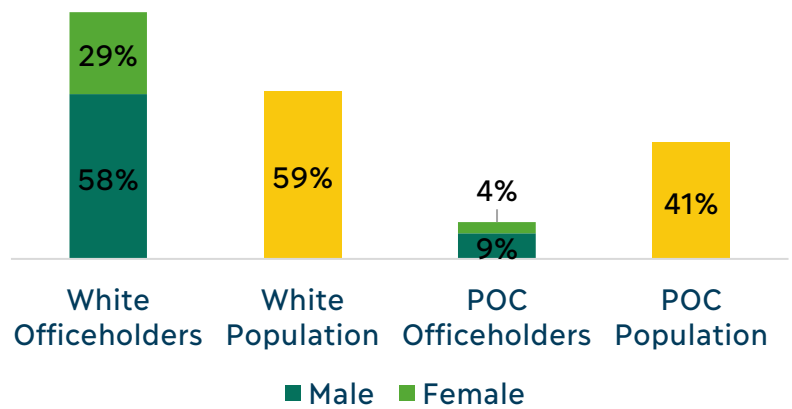


Public Participation in Democracy

Equity in Representation

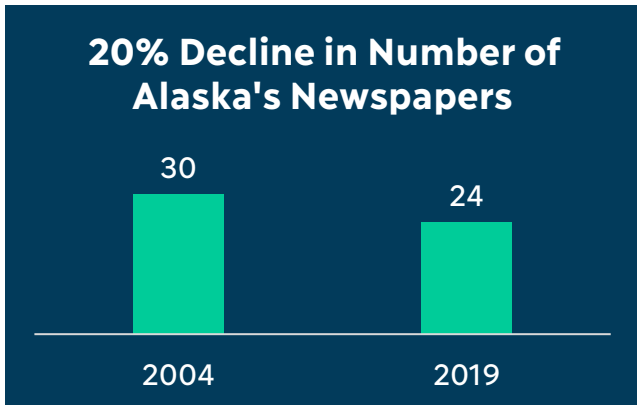
Political candidacy is a way to ensure that democracy is reflective of the public good, but not all demographic groups are equally likely to run for office in Alaska. People of color are 39% of the population but only 13% of elected officials. The disparity may reflect missing community perspectives in political representation, which can limit the government's accountability to address the full range of community needs. Funders can address this problem with policy advocacy for systems change, reducing economic barriers to run for office, supporting diverse leadership development and more.

Alaska Elected Official Demographics - 2021



Support for Local Journalism

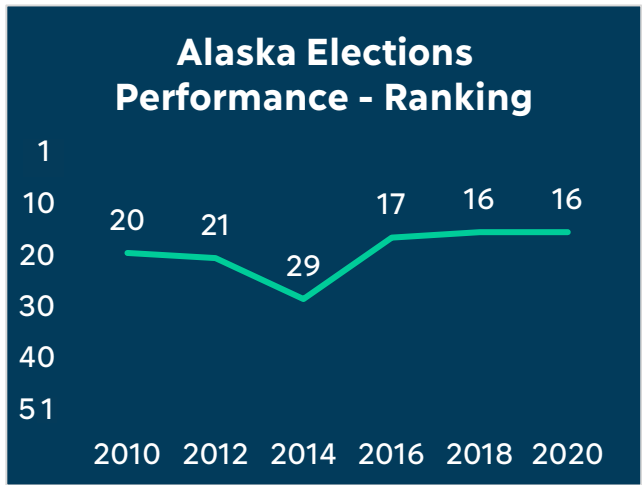
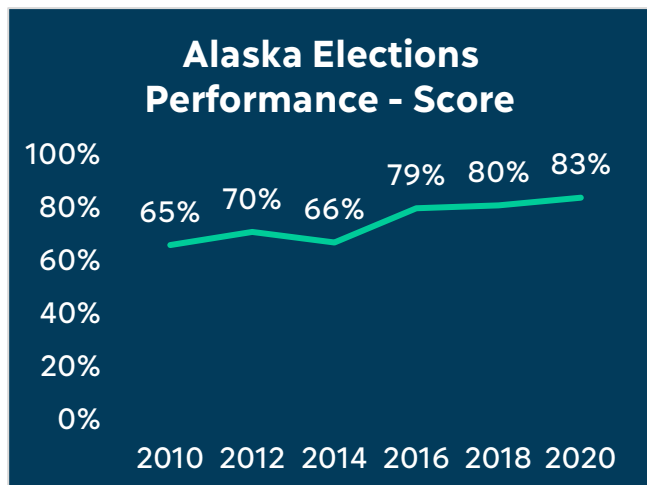
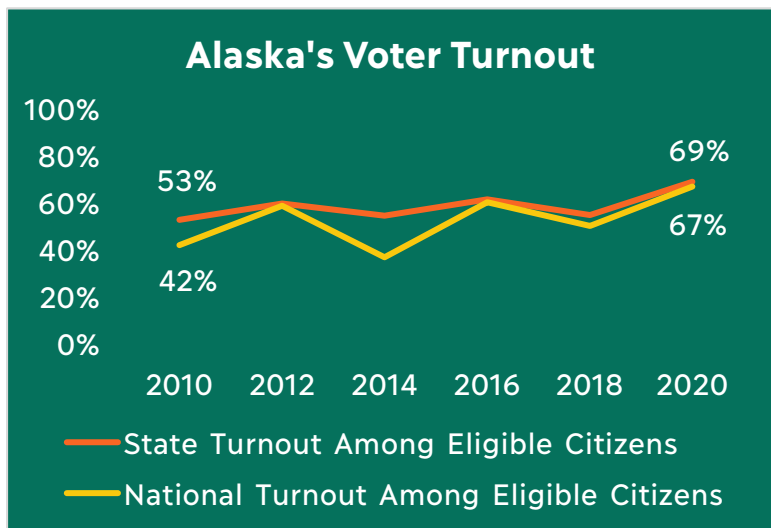
In recent decades, the number of Alaskan newspapers declined 20%, highlighting a concerning decline in local journalism that provides crucial information to the rural state's residents. Philanthropies can collaborate with and fund diverse local news outlets so that all residents have access to quality news on events that impact them.



Voter Turnout and Election Effectiveness

Voting provides another snapshot of the public's involvement in civil society. Alaska's turnout has grown but remains around the national average, highlighting room for funders to foster more civic engagement so more Alaskans are included in the democratic process.

Limited voter turnout may also highlight a need for funders to advocate for improvements to the electoral system. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology scores elections performance based on election participation rates, voting accessibility measures and data accuracy protocols. Below is Alaska's aggregate score on a percent scale (100% being the highest) and ranking (one being the highest out 50 states plus Washington D.C.). The state has improved but still struggles with access issues like rejected registration and unreturned mail ballots.



To see the real-world impact, check out the [Alaska Bright Spots](#), which showcase examples of how funders have had success in improving democracy. The case studies feature efforts around voter registration and navigating the state's budget crisis to preserve essential programs. To see Democracy Charts and Bright Spots for other states in our region, please visit our [Democracy Lens webpage](#).