



New Haven Democracy Fund

"To ensure that all the citizens of New Haven have a fair and meaningful opportunity to participate in the election of mayor."
New Haven Code of General Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article XI, §2-821 • Established in 2007 • democracyfund@newhavenct.net



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

To: Mayor Justin Elicker and the New Haven Board of Alders

Date: January 31, 2024

Pursuant to Section 2-823(a) of the Democracy Fund Ordinance and Section 2 of the Democracy Fund Board Bylaws, the New Haven Democracy Fund Board issues an annual report to the Mayor and the Board of Alders, containing a statement of the financial condition and expenditures of the Fund, a summary of the Board's activities for the preceding year, and a request for appropriations for the upcoming fiscal year.

Budget Request:

The Democracy Fund Board requests an infusion of \$250,000 in appropriations from the Board of Alders and Office of the Mayor to replenish the Fund's account following a very active 2023 Mayoral Election and begin planning for the proposed expansion of the Fund as proposed in ordinance changes before the Board of Alders.

Prepared by Alyson Heimer, Administrator of the New Haven Democracy Fund

Approved by the New Haven Democracy Fund Board on DRAFT.

Sergio Rodriguez, Chair

I. Statement of Financial Condition and Expenditures

The Democracy Fund began calendar year 2023 with	\$378,508.09
Of which \$55,000 was held in Certificates of Deposit The remainder was in the TD checking account	
Total income to the Fund in 2023:	
Overage returned from Justin Elicker for Mayor	+\$ 7,757.66
Capital infusion from the City of New Haven	+ \$ 150,000.00
TD Ameritrade	
Checking Account Interest:	+ \$
CD Interest (Maturing July 2023)	+ \$
Subtotal	\$ 157,757.66
Total expenditures made by the fund in 2023:	(\$ 184,062.23)
Program Costs:	(\$149,893.58)
Liam for New Haven	
Primary Grants	(\$23,000.00)
Primary Matching funds	(\$13,465.58)
Elicker 2023	
Primary Grants	(\$23,000.00)
Primary Matching funds	(\$39,260.00)
General Grants	(\$23,000.00)
General Matching funds	(\$13,410.00)
Shafiq Abdussabur for Mayor	
Matching funds	(\$9,758.00)
Mayoral Debate at Shubert Theater	(\$5,000.00)
Administrator Costs:	(\$25,000.00)
Remaining Encumbrances	(\$ 5000.00)
	(see section I.B.1 for details)
Other Staffing :	(\$1,200.00)
Zoe Becker for data analysis	(\$1,200.00)

Board Expenses:	(\$ 3,208.65)
Conference Related Travel and Expenses	
COGEL	
Airfare	(\$976.72)
Hotel Accommodations	(\$ 1,031.93)
Conference Fees	(\$ 700.00)
Per diem	(\$ 240.00)
American Democracy Summit 2023	
Conference fees (to Aaron Goode)	(\$260.00)
 Holiday Event	 (\$0.00)

Total remaining value of Fund (December 31, 2023) **\$ 366,624.84**

All monies presently held in the TD Bank checking account.

Existing Encumbrances*	
Administrator contract 2022-2023 unpaid	(\$ 5,000.00)
Administrator contract 2023-2024	(\$ 32,500.00)
Board reserve budget for 2023	(\$ 10,000.00)
Reserve for Summer Internship	(\$ 5,000.00)
 Total unencumbered Fund Value:	 \$314,5124.84

*All encumbered funds are held along with cash funds in a fluid form in the same account.

A. Income

1. Interest

Total Interest earned on the TD Bank CD (closed as of July 1, 2023) was -

Checking account interest for 2023 totalled .

B. Administrator Costs

Alyson C. Heimer served as the Administrator of The Fund for the entire term covered by this report. Her contract was renewed by the Board in a unanimous vote in June 2020 for the following fiscal year (see June 2020 Minutes for more information.)

In January 2021 a RFQ was released through the Purchasing Department's bidding system in search of calls for proposals for an administrator for the Fund.

1. Stipend

Expenditures from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023 for the services of New Haven Democracy Fund Administrator Alyson C. Heimer were as follows:

Monthly payment of \$2,500.00 for term of contract ending December 31, 2022

Total budgeted contractual services:	= \$30,000.00
Paid contractual services:	= \$25,000.00

2. Administrator Contract

The Administrator’s contract was renewed with Alyson C. Heimer for a ninth time in January 2024 for one year at a rate of \$32,500.00.

Heimer began the 2022 RFQ at the rate of \$30,000 with an optional extension for two additional years with cost of living increases possible as determined by a board vote. This RFQ covers the period starting January 2023. The Finance Department is expected to renew the *insurance waiver* for Ms. Heimer, continuing the practice that has been used since the first Administrator, Robert Wechsler, requested a waiver in 2009.

II. Board Composition

A. Current Board

Sergio Rodriguez (Chair), William Wynn (First Vice Chair), and James O’Connell (Second Vice Chair), continue to serve the Board as executive members. Aaron Goode, James Bhandary Alexander, Sarah Ficca, and Lesley Heffel-McGuirk served as general members.

Currently, one board seat is open. Seats can be filled by members from any political affiliation up to a total of 3 seats per political party. The maximum number of Democrats have been appointed to the board.

As of December 31, 2023, Fund Board Members were:

- Chair Sergio Rodriguez (Democrat - term expiration 8/1/2024)
- William Wynn (Republican - term expired 8/1/2022; serving until replaced)
- James O’Connell (Republican - term expiration 3/1/2025)
- Aaron Goode (Democrat - term expiration 5/1/2025)
- Sarah Ficca (Unaffiliated - term expiration 4/1/2026)
- Lesley Heffel-McGuirk (Unaffiliated - term expiration 4/1/2026)

Board member James Bhandary-Alexander (Democrat - term expiration 4/1/2024) resigned from the board in October 2023 due to other personal commitments. His seat remains vacant for a community member from any political party. We thank him for his service and commitment to

the Board, and his pivotal role in drafting the ordinance revisions and pilot program proposals presently awaiting Legislation Committee Review.

The board thanks the Mayor, the Board of Alders and City Administration who worked to expedite the renewal of our board member's terms and helped to seat two new board members in 2023. We ask that any persons interested in replacing Member Wynn or Member Bhandary-Alexander and reviewed and processed in a timely manner.

III. Summary of Board Activities

The Fund and the Board are dedicated to transparent government operations. Here are some of our substantive contributions to the New Haven community and beyond over the past year.

A. Hybrid meetings

Virtual Meetings were maintained as an option for the year with in-person meetings held in the Autumn months of 2021 and throughout 2022 and 2023. This was accomplished using a purchased Zoom account and then transitioned to the city-paid account in September 2023. The board wanted to ensure that maximum public participation could be had throughout the year, which is why the virtual option continued despite in-person meetings becoming normalized. The virtual attendance option also was utilized by members occasionally during periods of illness or travel.

B. Data Analysis Project and Report

The Board hired a data analyst for the summer of 2023 to review SEEC filings and relevant documents from 2011-2023 and analyze the Democracy Fund's impact on the New Haven mayoral elections climate. The report was issued in September 2023 and presented to the public in November 2023. The total cost of this contract was \$1,200.00, which covered the first aim on the proposed exploration into financial data. Three additional aims remain to be completed and another opportunity may be advertised for in 2024.

The report is available here:

C. Ordinance Revision

The major focus of the Fund during the 2022 off-cycle year was to reopen the governing ordinance and make edits to be presented for approval by the Board of Alders. The Board created a sub-committee chaired by Bhandary-Alexander to examine the Ordinance in detail and work with key community partners in improving the program language.

The scope of this work extends through the entire body of Ordinance text and addresses multiple issues. Both Republican and Democratic candidates used the fund in 2021. This was the first

time the program was used by a Republican candidate during the General Election and was a huge success for the Board. The widespread usage of the program highlighted some needed changes to enhance the program, remove roadblocks to usage, and clarify candidate compliance expectations.

The subcommittee welcomed input from the city, elected officials and all residents of the city. To this end the Administrator presented a draft version to the Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Board of Alders in July and then to the entire Legislative Committee at City Hall in November 2022 to gauge response and support. The latter presentation was attended by Chair Rodriguez and Board Member Goode, who helped add substantive explanations for the rationale of changes and contextually place the changes within both national and our statewide CEP models.

The Board approved and submitted a final version of the Ordinance Revision document as well as a one-page explainer to the Board of Alders and Mayor's office in December 2022. The proposed legislation was referred to the Legislative Committee and currently awaits a public hearing in the new year.

D. Conference on Governmental Ethics and Law (COGEL)

Administrator Heimer traveled to the national conference in Kansas City, MO in December 2023 to present on a panel entitled "Public Campaign Finance Programs: Progress and Pitfalls" and to launch the report completed over the summer by data analyst Zoe Becker. The panel consisted of program directors for the public campaign finance programs from New Haven, CT, Albuquerque, NM, the state of Arizona, the State of Maine and the City of Seattle, WA. The audience consisted of program directors, elected officials, legal staff, and ethics staff from cities and states in the US and Canada.

This opportunity was a direct result of the Public Campaign Finance Administrator's conference attended by Administrator Heimer and Member Goode in Albuquerque, NM in 2022. A second version of the Administrator's Conference has been floated to take place in New Haven in 2024 or 2025.

E. Legislation and Statewide Relationships

The Fund works closely with State groups to ensure lawful execution of the ordinance in advance of the new election year in 2023. COVID precautions caused mass cancellation of in-person events, conferences, training meetings, and restricted access to public buildings worldwide.

The Fund continues its positive and professional relationship with many employees of the SEEC on both the Compliance and Enforcement sides of the Department.

F. City-Wide Relationships

Local groups in the New Haven community continue to be allies, and the Board maintains active memberships or representative seats on the League of Women Voters, New Haven Votes Coalition, Republican and Democratic Town Committees, and all known advocacy groups committed to increased voter participation in the city. If members of the community have other suggestions for groups and movements with voter participation, education, and advocacy, please inform any Board member or the Board administrator as the New Haven Democracy Fund would always seek new mutually-beneficial relationships.

The Board will work with the finance department to again move a portion of unencumbered funds to a higher yield financial vehicle to bear interest into the account at a prevailing rate.

IV. Future Goals of The Board

Expansion of the Program - The Fund crafted a method of participation for those running for other offices in the City of New Haven, which includes a “Democracy Fund Pledge” and code of conduct, and/or financial support. The exact details were submitted as a draft to the Legislation Committee in November 2022 and again in January 2023.

Regulations Rewrite - Following the 2024 campaign season and a variety of filed complaints, the Board has determined that reorganizing and rewriting the NHDF Regulations document is important before the next campaign cycle. The goal is to clarify some confusing passages of the ordinance, solidify directives and information provided by the State and legal opinions that differ from the original language of the ordinance, and make it easier for candidates, treasurers, and the public to understand how the complaint process works for the Fund.

Community Engagement - The Administrator will continue to attend CMT meetings, with the main purpose of raising awareness of the fund and recruiting two new board members. This is part of the public relations work with the community that is outlined in the Administrator contract. This includes routinely updating the city’s website throughout the campaign cycle with necessary documentation and updates on participation and fund usage.

Reporting on Success Metrics - In 2023 we hired a summer position to create a report analyzing the efficacy of the Democracy Fund. In 2024, more effort may be dedicated to researching the program’s key success as compared to neighboring towns.

V. Request for Appropriations

With the success of the past election cycle, the Democracy Fund Board requests an infusion of \$250,000 in appropriations from the Office of the Mayor and Board of Alders between now and Summer of 2025.

The Fund last received a replenishment this year (2023) of \$150,000, which was integral to the program's success, and covered only a portion of the expenditures made in 2021 and 2022. A continued investment in the New Haven Democracy Fund renews the city's commitment to remove the appearance of corruption in our local elections, and provides a vehicle to multiply the value of small dollar local contributions to campaigns. Such measures ensure that candidates for office in New Haven spend more time communicating with each resident, no matter how much they can contribute financially to their election.

Alyson Heimer
New Haven Democracy Fund Administrator

Sergio Rodriguez
New Haven Democracy Fund Board Chair