Run for Office CA Proposal
DRAFT - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Problem - Nearly 40 percent of state legislature seats go uncontested. Young Americans are running *away from* office at record rates, with 90 percent saying they would never want to serve in any of the nation's more than 500,000 elected offices. A study of Los Angeles County found that over the last decade, 28 cities have cancelled elections for mayor or city council "because no one bothered making a challenge." And a recent Pew survey shows that those who do run for office remain disproportionately male, white, and well-educated; only 20% of elected offices are held by women. *Our democracy is facing a crisis of leadership that can only be solved when a larger, more diverse group of Americans runs for office.*

At a time when most of the world's information is only a click away, it is nearly impossible to find a clear and complete list of offices one is eligible to run for. This lack of basic information about how to run for office is a bottleneck in our leadership pipeline, especially for young people and other underrepresented groups. *But unlike the major structural and cultural barriers to running for office, the problem of data access is one we can solve in the next two to three years.*

Proposal - We will help California develop the most accessible and inclusive process of running for office anywhere in the nation. With support and guidance from the CA Secretary of State's office, our team at the University of Southern California will coordinate with all 58 California counties to transition their election office data into a streamlined and open platform. The database would allow users to see not only all available elected offices based on their address, but also crucial details like filing windows, salaries, application requirements, and who else is running – if anyone is running at all.

Primary users of this public database and API will include nonprofits like She Should Run and Veterans Campaign, which encourage and support first-time candidates. The database could also be used by technology companies like Nationbuilder, which is already designing solutions that make it easier for their users to run for office. Our USC team will research, develop, test, and hand off the platform to the CA Secretary of State through a multistage process taking place over 24-36 months:

- **Phase I** *(Research)* - Convene stakeholders from nonprofits, government, tech and academia to identify key challenges and develop an approach to tackle them. This exploratory phase will produce a more comprehensive budget and timeline.
- **Phase II** *(Design)* - Design an open platform for tracking and managing election office data while soliciting regular feedback from partners and users.
- **Phase III** *(Pilot)* - Work closely with a small group of county clerks across the state to reformat and transition their election office data into the new platform.
- **Phase IV** *(Implement)* - Soft launch the platform and accompanying API for implementation in all 58 counties. Regular testing and refining over 6-12 months.
- **Phase V** *(Hand off)* - Donate version 1.0 of the platform to the CA Secretary of State's office, along with best practices and training for management and upkeep.
- **Phase VI** *(Measure)* - Track and analyze data on how many and what kinds of people are running for office in CA to measure impact and inform future work.

Partners - We will draw on strong working relationships with a range of contributors and potential users of an open elections data platform. Stakeholders, collaborators and advisers may include, but are not limited to:

- **Government** - California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, Los Angeles Chief Data Officer Lilian Coral, LA County Clerk Dean Logan, and the California State Association of Counties.
- **Nonprofits** - She Should Run, Veterans Campaign, Grow Elect, New American Leaders Project, VoteRunLead, Latino Leadership & Policy Forum, Running Start, League of Women Voters, and the Center for American Women and Politics.
- **Technology** - RunForOffice.org (Nationbuilder), TurboVote, Facebook, Change.org, Snapchat, Brigade, Compiler LA, and the Department of Better Technology.
- **Academia** - USC entities including the Price School of Public Policy, Annenberg Innovation Lab, and Unruh Institute of Politics; Pepperdine's Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership, Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles, Rutgers' Center for American Women and Politics, and New York University's GovLab.

About - The USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy (CCLP) is a leading academic research center that pursues high-impact scholarship and connects it to policy change. Civic Tech USC is a new CCLP initiative working at the intersection of technology, citizenship, and government. We study and develop new technologies that promote civic responsibility, transparency, fairness, and participation. For more information and to read our 2015 report, "Empowering the Public Through Open Data," visit http://civictechusc.org/.

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