



## SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Developing thriving, safe and vibrant communities  
**THROUGH SIGN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION.**



## RESEARCH



## EDUCATION



## SCHOLARSHIP



**The Sign Research Foundation serves the greater economy through research focused on the unique commercial and societal value of signs.**

SRF is the *only* research organization advancing the science, technology, design, placement and regulation of vibrant and effective sign strategies, systems and codes. A proven resource for education, research and philanthropy, our work contributes to more navigable cities, thriving businesses and strong urban identities.

We facilitate dialogue with architects, planners, developers, designers, academics, students and other constituents to build a stronger understanding of the value of signage.

SRF is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all donations are tax-deductible, to the extent allowable by law.

“As a planner, SRF opened my eyes to the future potential of signs and introduced me to some of the amazing professionals who work with signs every day.”

**DEBORAH BACHELDER**  
Senior Planner  
Town of Erie

“Learning alongside developers, architects, planners and other sign industry professionals has opened my eyes further and reminded me how critically important it is to do this during the creation and modification of new codes, in order to make regulations actually work.”

**DUSTIN DOWNEY**  
City Planner  
City of El Reno

# EFFECTING CHANGE

Dear SRF Supporter,

Several years ago, we realized that there were two cornerstones to our success in building a world-class sign research and education organization. First, we had to understand and engage the planning community across the country – the individuals responsible for crafting and regulating sign ordinances. Second, we had to partner with universities, specifically graduate schools of planning, design, engineering, law and architecture, to produce unimpeachable research and educate the next generation of sign influencers.

**As you read through the Sign Research Foundation's 2017 Annual Report, you'll see how SRF, working with supporters like you, has:**

**Partnered** with 18 universities on sign research and education within their curricula.

**Published** over 70 reports on the value of signage, best practices, design, illumination, regulatory issues, placemaking, safety, sign codes and wayfinding.

**Educated** almost 11,000 planners and architects on the value of signage within their practice.

**Tripled** attendance at our annual conference, NSREC, by co-locating with ISA International Sign Expo and providing scholarships to planners, architects and designers.

**Inspired** graduate students in construction, landscape architecture, design and planning at our first sign workshop at Michigan State University.

We have effected change in hundreds of communities, across multiple professional practice areas and in thousands of individual minds. We crossed a tipping point in 2017 when we realized we were no longer merely informing or educating, we were creating **sign champions** in planning and zoning departments all over the country!

With a clear, strong vision, our impact in 2018 will reach even greater heights. But nothing we do would be possible without YOU! It is clear that we would not be where we are without friends like you who provide financial and personal support.

On behalf of the Sign Research Foundation's Board of Trustees, thank you!

Sincerely,



**JOHN YARGER**  
Chairman of the Board



**SAPNA BUDEV**  
Executive Director

# EVENTS



## NATIONAL SIGN RESEARCH & EDUCATION CONFERENCE (NSREC) 2017

The National Sign Research & Education Conference (NSREC) brings top-tier academics, graduate students and professionals in urban planning, architecture and design, and sign company professionals together to delve into the science of sign design, conspicuity and placement.

NSREC 2017 was held April 19 in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was co-located with ISA International Sign Expo. For the first time, NSREC attendees were able to experience NSREC and ISA Sign Expo in one location.

The conference sold out at 168 attendees. The conference theme was the “Future of Signage,” with leading speakers discussing how to create excellent sign systems within the public process, how to develop or rewrite a sign code, the impact of wayfinding on communities and neighborhoods, and future technologies within the industry. The cutting-edge theories and technologies presented and discussed could change the face of signage.

“NSREC opened my eyes to the size and scope of the industry, and the type of research being done is really fascinating. I now have a great resource in the Sign Research Foundation when I have questions or need guidance in this area.”

**HEATHER URWILLER**  
Director of Planning & Zoning  
City of Tarpon Springs

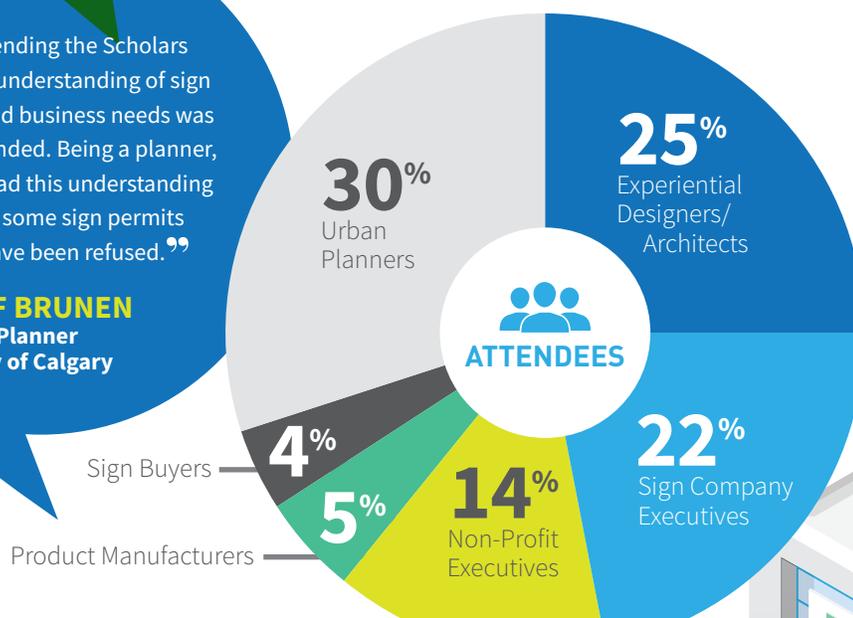
**NSREC 2018, once again being held in conjunction with ISA International Sign Expo, occurs on March 21, 2018, in Orlando, Florida. This year’s theme is “SmartCities and Wayfinding the Future.”**



**LEARN MORE AT [WWW.NSREC.ORG](http://WWW.NSREC.ORG)**

“After attending the Scholars Program, my understanding of sign technology and business needs was certainly expanded. Being a planner, I felt that if I had this understanding previously, some sign permits wouldn’t have been refused.”

**JEFF BRUNEN**  
Planner  
City of Calgary



# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## SRF SIGN WORKSHOP AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

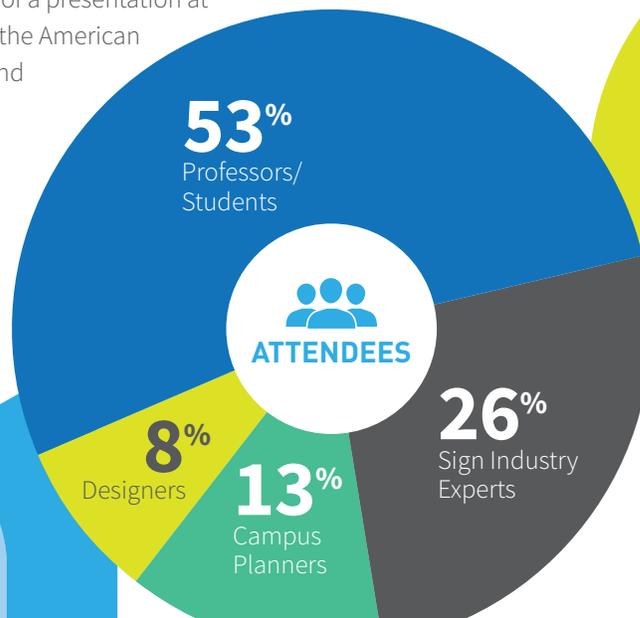
On October 6, 2017, SRF hosted its first full-day Sign Workshop at Michigan State University in collaboration with the School of Planning, Design and Construction. The workshop hosted 42 professors and students of landscape architecture, planning, and design; campus and facilities planners, as well as local sign companies, design firms, suppliers and distributors.

Incorporating classroom learning from sign company and design experts with experiential learning, students took what they learned throughout the day, and each team (a mix of students, professors and sign industry professionals) selected a part of campus that could be enhanced by environmental graphics — a gateway sign, wayfinding signage or other elements — and devised a solution. Each group presented its solutions and recommendations, which ranged from incorporating wayfinding into already existing structures to creating a completely new interactive gateway sign in an empty but frequently visited spot on campus. The completed projects from all of the groups are showcased in a video on [signresearch.org/university-workshops/](http://signresearch.org/university-workshops/).



### Planner Workshops & Trainings

In 2017, the Sign Research Foundation worked with International Sign Association (ISA) to produce ISA's Planning for Sign Code Success™ workshops, which educated more than 200 planners in the course of the year. SRF's research on *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* was the basis of a presentation at the April conference of the American Planning Association and was distributed to 300+ session attendees.



“The foundation offered our professors and students the opportunity to study urban planning and design from the critical perspective of signage. These students are gaining vital employable skills outside of traditional classrooms. In return, the team is building new knowledge for planners, designers and manufacturers to use best practices in developing a form-based code and ideal placemaking.”

**ROBERT DALTON, PH.D.**  
Assistant Professor  
Michigan State University  
School of Planning, Design and Construction

“My majors are urban planning and landscape architecture, and my study is mostly focused on the design side of signage. Thanks to SRF, I learned more about the scientific perspective of signage and wayfinding, and the way people perceive these elements in the urban environment.”

**HANBIANG LIANG**  
Ph.D. Student  
Michigan State University



# SRF SCHOLARS PROGRAM

SRF created the Scholars Program and partnered with ISA's XDP (Experiential Design Program) to sponsor 85 architects, designers and urban planners to attend SRF's National Sign Research & Education Conference (NSREC) and ISA Sign Expo 2017, where they learned about effective signage alongside 83 professionals from the sign industry.

**Seven of the SRF Scholars were so energized by the experience that they are now volunteer leaders for SRF and serving on Committees and the Board of Trustees.**

“Start to finish, one of the best conferences I have attended. Super well-organized, with a broad reach of professionals bringing a wealth of experience to the discussions. A great chance to think and learn about some of the things that have the most impact on the functionality and look of every urban place.”

**LEE ELLMAN**  
Planning Director  
City of Yonkers

“The SRF Scholars Program was a wonderful and enlightening experience. It provided valuable opportunities to network with leadership and professionals in the sign industry, along with education on current and future industry trends in sign design, construction and regulation. It was a very valuable experience that I would highly recommend.”

**SHEA FARRAR**  
Landscape Associate  
Town of Hilton Head Island

“I loved the sessions! I also really enjoyed how multi-disciplinary the conference was. It was great to get to talk to people who are passionate about the same things I am, but have a completely different perspective on them.”

**CAITLIN TESKA**  
Graduate Student, Exhibition Design  
Fashion Institute of Technology

“This was one of the most fun, informative and well-organized conferences I've ever attended. Great presentations, venue and networking . . . also, the food was amazing!”

**EMILY HYMNAS**  
Proposal Specialist  
Jacobsen Construction



“The NSREC sessions were energizing, relevant and inspiring. I found immediate and practical solutions for numerous signage concerns that my organization has been struggling with for years. Moreover, I left the conference feeling excited and prepared to look forward to the future of signage.”

**CRYSTAL GARRETT**  
Director of Communications & Marketing  
Downtown Dartmouth Business  
Commission

“The SRF Scholars Program provided a great foundation to grasp the current events, trends and practices within the signage industry. The quality speakers backed up real research, and deliverables supported an interactive, educational and fun environment. The ability to network and hang out with similar folks and discuss how things are done in different environments generally can't be done in a classroom environment, and a program like the Scholars Program sets the stage for this activity to occur.”

**SCOTT GOODWIN**  
Assistant Director, Airport Operations  
Greater Orlando Aviation Authority

“Participating in the NSREC was a great experience! It was a wonderful opportunity to meet and learn from a wide variety of other professionals working in the sign industry. SRF had curated a really interesting group of professionals, vendors and end-users working in the sign industry.”

**CANDACE TOTH**  
Capital Signage Specialist  
Sound Transit Seattle

“This whole experience broadened my work scope and certainly opened my eyes to how complex the sign industry is. The program broadened my perception of the sign industry and really energized me about the impact of signs in my community.”

**HEATHER URWILLER**  
Director of Planning & Zoning  
City of Tarpon Springs

“My experience was exciting and overwhelming, stepping beyond my regulatory perspective, creating new possibilities. NSREC hit a home run in welcoming everyone to explore, connect and find the perfect experience. I stayed longer and visited ISA Sign Expo twice.”

**DAVID WHITE**  
Principal Planner  
Salt Lake County



# SUPPORT

## SRF DOES THE RESEARCH SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

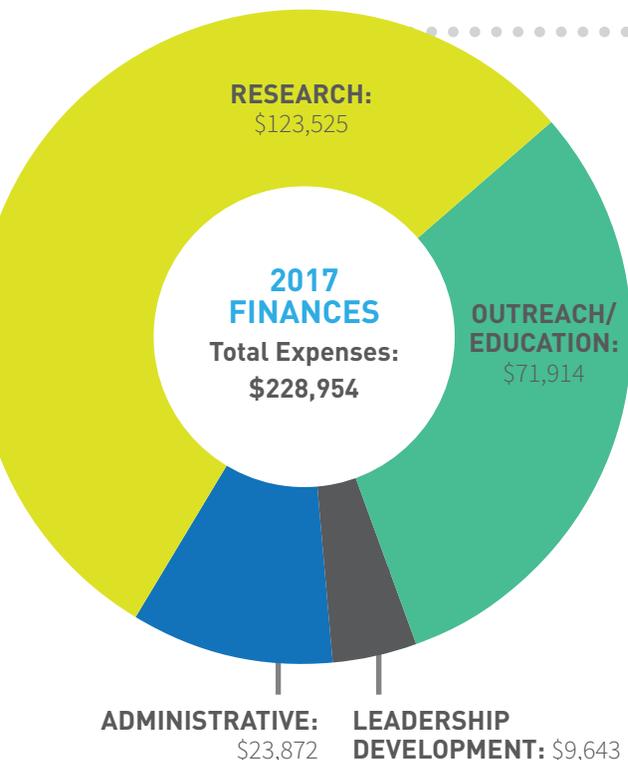
Donors to SRF understand that **86% of every dollar they donate goes to developing essential research and education on signage**. Even more so, they know that because SRF works directly with those who influence the success of a sign project — namely architects, designers, planners and retailers — they can rest easy. Now that's worth supporting!

**DONATE**

Help SRF empower communities. Donate today at [givetoSRF.org](http://givetoSRF.org).

### WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT THE SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION:

- 1 Communities are thriving because they have sign codes that support better navigation, strong local businesses and useful wayfinding. In 2018, SRF will allocate nearly \$130,000 to fund unbiased, evidence-based research on effective sign strategies and systems.
- 2 Effective sign codes and regulations that help business growth are created by educated planners and urban developers. In 2018, SRF will allocate \$125,000 to outreach that shifts the mindset of top planners and developers — over 3,000 were educated in 2017 alone!
- 3 Graduate students need to better understand the impact of signs within their field of study — whether it be architecture, design or urban planning. We provide full-day workshops within universities, along with 50 scholarships every year, proactively educating students on the importance of signage.



### BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SIGN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION. SUPPORT SRF TODAY:

**CORPORATE DONATIONS** — Help double or triple your donation: ask your employer if they will match your gift or consider being the one to make a match.

**MATCHING GRANT DONATIONS** — Sponsor a matching grant and drive others to give, or even increase their giving, knowing their donation will make a greater impact.

**MONTHLY DONATIONS** — Give SRF a solid baseline income for funding research and hosting events.

**IN MEMORIA DONATIONS** — Honor a loved one or industry leader with a gift that will span generations.

**PLANNED GIVING DONATIONS** — Remember SRF in your will or as a beneficiary of investments/insurance. Why give the money to the IRS when you can leave a gift to SRF?

**SPONSORSHIPS** — Support specific SRF events through sponsorships.

# 2017 SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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**Sapna Budev**  
Executive Director,  
Sign Research Foundation

## WELCOME

SRF would like to welcome two new individuals who will be joining the Sign Research Foundation's Board of Trustees in 2018.



**Matthew Shad**, Zoning Administrator, City of Cincinnati

"I find the work of SRF to be valuable in my daily regulatory practice. I feel the practitioners in urban planning and zoning are often ill-equipped to evaluate modern sign practice and to develop rational models for implementing sign regulations. I believe SRF provides a balanced insight into the medium and can be an effective agent for better sign regulation."



**Sarah Wexler**, Manager, Global Store Design, Under Armour

"Throughout my career, I've learned the incredible importance of signage and the integral part it plays for brand recognition, consistency and identity. It is a wonderful opportunity to be able to be involved in the research and development of findings from the data."

# RESEARCH GRANT SELECTION PROCESS

## DRIVERS OF THE SELECTION PROCESS

The SRF Research Committee has 12 volunteer leaders ensuring representation from sign suppliers, sign companies, design firms, engineering consultancies, chain stores, airports and city planning departments. The process of selecting projects for funding is designed to best serve the immediate needs of our stakeholders.

Each request for funding is presented to the Research Committee for review, evaluation, discussion and prioritization. The goal is to select six to eight projects that will move forward to the next step of the research process.

## STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH FOR TOPICS AND FOCUS

SRF examines all potential research projects using data collected from stakeholder surveys, and evaluates them within the macro-environment of regulatory changes, safety issues, and urban and retail trends.

**SRF surveyed 350 sign industry professionals to prioritize the research and education they need to succeed.**

- 1 Educate sign code officials on effective regulations
- 2 Encourage collaboration with architects and designers
- 3 Educate/onboard new employees
- 4 Educate customers on the ROI of signage
- 5 Educate city managers about wayfinding and urban identity
- 6 Understand future trends in technology and materials

**Understanding that educating sign code officials is a top priority, SRF then surveyed 478 urban planners and sign code officials to find out what sign-related issues are their most challenging.**

- 1 Incorporating digital signage into an existing regulation
- 2 Balancing the needs of businesses with community aesthetics
- 3 Effective use of digital wayfinding systems
- 4 Creating wayfinding plans, including pedestrian, government, directional, vehicular and trails
- 5 Understanding legal issues for sign codes
- 6 Writing better and simpler sign codes
- 7 Incentivizing creative designs within the code approval process
- 8 Allowing flexibility for new sign materials and technology within sign codes
- 9 Learning about trends and standards in brightness and illumination
- 10 Financing new signage and wayfinding





**A NEW REPOSITORY FOR SRF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION:**

SRF launched a new website in January 2017. Along with the re-brand, the navigation was updated to effectively guide the user through a plethora of information and research easily and effectively. The new site has become a bookmarked destination for government officials, city planners, architects, designers, sign companies and product manufacturers.

**The top research downloads in 2017 covered the topics of sign design, regulation, visibility, placement and economic benefit of signage.**



**VISIT THE NEW SITE AT [SIGNRESEARCH.ORG](http://SIGNRESEARCH.ORG).**



# RESEARCH

Research is at the heart of the mission of the Sign Research Foundation. SRF has worked hard to forge relationships with top-tier universities and credentialed professors who understand the importance of signage to the vibrancy of communities. These partnerships have resulted in peer-reviewed research that is being used every day to educate planners, urban developers and sign companies. In addition, the International Sign Association uses SRF research consistently in its work to ensure reasonable sign codes and regulations.

## IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE 2017, WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF:



9 Academic Research Reports



4 Executive Summaries of Key Research

“SRF is a great resource. We reviewed the comprehensive report titled “Retail Signage: Practices to Increase Return on Investment” and go back to their extensive research time and again. This report provides in-depth information that can be used for our customers here in Orange County.”

**MIKE REILLY**  
President  
Starfish Signs

**Average number of years for which most communities haven't done a major sign code revision.**

*Sign Code Development Process: Best Practices and Review*

**20 YEARS**

**Percentage of cities that say enforcement is the biggest temporary sign issue.**

*Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs*

**50%**

**Percentage of communities that regulate temporary signs for business promotion.**

*Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs*

**82%**

**Percentage of consumers who say they have been unable to find a business because of a small sign.**

*BrandSpark/Better Homes and Gardens American Shopper Study™*

**61%**

**Average time to complete small- and medium-sized code amendments.**

*Sign Code Development Process: Best Practices and Review*

**4-6 MONTHS**

# CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS 2017–2018

## ENERGY USAGE AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY ANALYSIS OF MODEL ILLUMINATED SIGNS

Lighting scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) are developing metrics to characterize the visual effectiveness and energy efficiency of illuminated, backlit signs.

## ILLUMINATED SIGN CONSPICUITY

The Lighting Research Center (LRC) at RPI is investigating factors impacting the conspicuity of illuminated signs and the legibility of visual information displayed on such signs. The LRC will provide tools and guidelines that can be used by community planners and code officials to specify and verify the performance of signs designed to be readily seen and interpreted by the public.

## REVISED MODEL SIGN CODE

The 2009 SRF Model Sign Code is one of our most widely used and referenced research papers. This update expands the methodology of the original work to include new research on EMC brightness levels and updated language regarding temporary signs.

## SIGN CODE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

Drs. Dawn Jourdan and Eric Strauss investigated the way the planning process is crafted to derive rules regulating signs, including who is invited to participate in the development of sign code regulations. The research team interviewed city planners across the U.S. to learn about their experiences, both positive and negative, in the development of sign regulations.

## BUSINESS SIGNAGE AND STREETScape DESIGN IN PLACEMAKING

Dr. Pat Crawford and her team at Michigan State University seek to find the balance between streetscape elements and on-premise sign visibility. Findings will be translated to inform placemaking design standards in sign code development.

## WAYFINDING MANAGEMENT: MODELS AND METHODS IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS

This report investigates the people, processes and tools that some of the leading large medical facilities have put into place to manage their wayfinding systems, from static signage to interactive kiosks. Seven case studies provide the basis for best practices and checklists that wayfinding managers may employ as they establish or improve their own wayfinding systems and operations.

## DIGITAL WAYFINDING TRENDS: A HEURISTIC EVALUATION OF MUSEUMS, HEALTHCARE AND TRANSPORTATION

This research study by Leslie Wolke of MapWell Studio will consist of three in-depth case studies researching: (1) the path from idea to implementation, (2) how digital wayfinding interacts with physical signage systems, (3) the perceived usability and user experience of the digital tools, along with any usage data/patterns the owner is able to share, and (4) overall heuristic evaluation of the digital components and future plans. A concluding section will distill the research into current and future trends in digital wayfinding.

**Percentage of consumers who say the sign is one of the first things they notice about a new or unfamiliar business.**

*BrandSpark/Better Homes and Gardens American Shopper Study™*

75%

**Break-even point for installation of a new EMC.**

*The Economic Impact of Exterior Electronic Message Boards*

3–15 MONTHS

36%

**Increase in weekly sales for a business that made one major and two minor changes to exterior signs.**

*Economic Value of On-Premise Signage (1997)*

16%

**Decrease in occupancy rates when a hotel was forced to move its sign to a less prominent location.**

*Economic Value of On-Premise Signage (2012)*

# FORGING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Workshops with hundreds of planners. Co-sponsored research. Scholarships for emerging professionals. These are just some of the positive outcomes of partnering with organizations that represent planners, architects, designers, sign companies, developers and academics.

SRF, in collaboration with organizations such as the ones below, is making a measurable impact on the perception of how sign codes affect small businesses and the vitality of local communities.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF OUR KEY PARTNERS IN ADVANCING THE SIGN INDUSTRY.



Academic Advisory Council for Signage Research and Education (AACSRE)



American Institute of Architects (AIA)



Association for Retail Environments (ARE)



International Downtown Association (IDA)



International Sign Association (ISA) and Its Affiliated Associations



Society for Experiential Graphic Design (SEG D)

“The city council of Pocatello, ID, was going to enact very stringent codes on billboards and lighting. Due to SRF’s lighting standards research, we had a huge victory. I can’t emphasize enough how this kind of research sustains the work we’re all doing in the field.”

**JEFF YOUNG**  
Sr. Vice President  
YESCO



# THANK YOU

## 2017 MATCHING GRANT SPONSORS AND DONORS

SRF raised \$52,500 in 2017 through matching grants sponsored by:



## SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION DONORS:

SRF would like to thank the following companies, organizations and individuals for their generous support.

- |                                |                           |                        |
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