Acknowledgements

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The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgements and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Goldman School of Public Policy, by the University of California or by any other agency.
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Towards Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In 2016, the award of a capacity-building grant from the county probation department provided the opportunity for the League of Women Voters of Oakland (LWVO) to develop a strategic plan that will help guide us in these times of great challenges to America’s democratic principles and processes.

The plan sets forth four primary goals, all revealing aspirations for “engaging, including, and serving a broader and more diverse cross-section of the community.” This report is presented in response to Goal #1: Broaden and deepen the Oakland League’s understanding of the diversity of our community and the factors and issues that influence civic participation within diverse Oakland communities.

To move beyond our own experiences and observations of our diverse city, and to form a common understanding of our own membership as well as of the many and various communities that comprise Oakland, we commissioned a consultant researcher, Julie Lo, to take a factual look at both. Thus, this report.

It must be noted that LWVO has embraced the call by the national League (LWVUS) to pursue “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in all we do. More members and other individuals are volunteering to contribute their efforts to the work of the League, and we are expanding our efforts to reach and educate residents, and give them the confidence to vote, and to encourage others to vote informed.

This report will inform our work. We must take its findings to heart and keep building on them to make LWVO a leader, and a partner with other organizations and community leaders to help strengthen the diversity, equity, and inclusion that Oakland has long been known for.

- Strategic Plan Stewardship and Research Committee, July 2019
Executive Summary

The League of Women Voters of Oakland (LWVO) aspires to incorporate the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of its work. Many view the League’s election activities such as the Easy Voter Guides and the Pros and Cons presentations as its central contribution towards promoting voting and civic engagement. However, the League’s goal to better understand itself in order to improve how it works with more diverse audiences and partners across Oakland is what led to the commission of this report.

The information presented in this document reveals that the LWVO is demographically different from Oakland as a whole. Consequently, it has work to do to close gaps in its membership and of greater importance, to strengthen its efforts to promote civic and political power for all Oaklanders. This report contains striking evidence that for many people across Oakland, voting behavior is socially determined.

This document provides one aspect of many steps the LWVO is taking to identify, interpret, and act upon steps it can take to move in the right direction. Notably, the LWVO has an active slate of projects and initiatives that are not included in this document including its partnerships with community-based organizations to provide Train-the-Trainer model of voter engagement among the formerly incarcerated and advocacy for strengthening services to Latinx students, an effort lead through the LWVO’s Education committee. The League will continue to build on the work identified in this report as well as that of other committees.

Change must come at a pace that the League can sustain. The LWVO is a volunteer-run organization that depends on its members to carry out its goals. Change does not come from the top down and individual members’ buy-in will lead to change. Efforts such as the commission of this project build capacity to fully understand and digest where the League is and where it should be headed. This document provides confirmation of the work the LWVO has in front of it, a necessary step in its pursuit the work Leagues across the country were founded to do nearly 100 years ago, to promote an active democracy.
The League of Women Voters of Oakland

The League of Women Voters of Oakland (LWVO) aspires to promote active participation in democracy across Oakland. In the century since Leagues formed across the US to finish the work of first-wave feminists, Oakland has evolved with its diverse immigrant, racial, cultural, and multi-language populations.

In 2018, the LWVO Board of Directors approved a strategic plan that stated a problem that this report seeks to address: The League of Women Voters of Oakland does not sufficiently understand the diversity of Oakland, and subsequently, the factors that influence civic participation among people across Oakland. The research presented in this document aims to understand the potential LWVO members and constituents from low-income and racial/ethnic minority groups that the League would like to better engage with. These efforts to increase inclusion and engagement with a broader constituency relies the bold efforts described in the League’s current Strategic Plan.

The League of Women Voters of Oakland is aware that while its heritage brand as one of the oldest democracy-building groups in the country is an asset, it must transform to assure that its work to strengthen democracy for all Oakland residents can be effective in the current social and political climate. Leagues across the country are confronting this issue. The national League of Women Voters recently published their Transformation Roadmap to tackle challenges common to Leagues broadly: membership that is not reflective the communities they serve, a lack of tools and strategies to carry out the mission of the organization, and an inability to identify and demonstrate the collective impact of its work. The League of Women Voters of Oakland echoes this challenge and in addition, is aware that Oakland has its own uniquely rich heritage of being a diverse center for activism, social change, and equitable inclusion. The LWVO aspires to serve and connect with all the diverse communities across Oakland.
I. Strategic Plan & Research Goals

The League of Women Voters of Oakland developed a five-year strategic plan so that it may “act with increasing confidence and focus as one of our city’s most successful democracy-building organizations, supporting and fortifying the strengths and vitality of our communities.” The development of the plan was in part, a result of the LWVO’s activities as a grantee of the Alameda County Probation Department’s Capacity Building Grant. The grant is focused on engaging and strengthening community groups to “serve as an empowering civic engagement resource for members of the re-entry community as they re-integrate with their neighborhoods and again become part of our vibrant city.”

Through analyzing its own internal capacity and efficacy in promoting democracy across Oakland, the League entered a new era of reflection about its work. The League learned that people across the city hold contradictory sentiments about the LWVO. On one hand, the League’s reputation as a trustworthy nonpartisan group remains as strong as ever. On the other hand, the League learned about another reputation it has, as “being part of the establishment, insensitive to issues that impact parts of the city, or naïve about the ability of individuals to effect change – particularly for historically disenfranchised individuals and groups.”

The Strategic Plan charts a course for the LWVO to promote greater diversity. This report provides answers to the questions set forth (Table 1) along with recommendations to the LWVO drawn from the information learned in the course of responding to each question.

Table 1 below describes the structure of this report, as well as the broader goals of this research, as drawn from the Strategic Plan. This document is organized in response to the questions recommended by Goal #1 of LWVO’s current Strategic Plan. Sections II-IV of this report directly address the focal research questions commissioned by the LWVO. Section V provides recommendations for next steps.
Table 1. Demographic Research Goals & Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Strategic Plan &amp; Research Goals</td>
<td>A brief summary of the Strategic Plan recommendations and the goals of this project and research goal #1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Organizational Characteristics (Internal Factors)</td>
<td>What is the demographic composition of the League’s current membership, leadership and partnerships?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| III. Community Characteristics (External Factors) | What Oakland communities have the highest/lowest voter registration and turnout rates and what are the factors that influence voter participation in these communities?  
Why citizens of Oakland do not register to vote and why many who register to vote do not vote?  
What does “civic engagement” mean to diverse Oakland communities? What issues are important to them? |
| IV. Partnerships (External & Internal Factors) | Do diverse Oakland community groups view the League of Women Voters as a resource to them? If yes, why and if not, why not? |
| V. Recommendations | How does the information collected during Goal #1 inform the next steps recommended in the Strategic Plan? What additional steps should the League of Women Voters of Oakland consider towards its vision, mission, and core values?  
What are areas for further research? |

LWVO Strategic Plan Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Objectives for Goal</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal #1</td>
<td>Broaden and deepen the Oakland League’s understanding of the diversity of our community and the factors and issues that influence civic participation within diverse Oakland communities.</td>
<td>Get a better understanding of what civic participation means to diverse Oakland communities; what issues are important to them; whether they see the League as a resource to them; and how they feel that the League can help meet the needs of their organization.</td>
<td>To be addressed in future research projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal #2</td>
<td>Engage underserved Oakland communities to increase their understanding of the political system, their political power, and how their use of political power can influence change.</td>
<td>To be addressed in future research projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal #3</td>
<td>Increase participation of Oakland community members in League decision-making activities by diversifying the membership, leadership, partnerships and public face of LWVO</td>
<td>To be addressed in future research projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal #4</td>
<td>Increase community awareness of the LWVO as a year-round resource for relevant programs, services and information about how civic participation can create change.</td>
<td>To be addressed in future research projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
League members shape every aspect of the organization. LWVO is a volunteer run organization in which its members are in leadership roles, make decisions about what it chooses to focus on, and represent the organization in the community. The League of Women Voters of Oakland is one of the largest Leagues in the U.S. with 389 members. Though the LWVO aspires to be diverse, it is more likely to represent the views of only a small minority of Oakland. Sixty-nine percent of members (Figure 2) live in just five Zip codes: 94611 (18%), 94610 (15%), 94602 (15%), 94618 (13%), and 94619 (8%).

The LWVO conducted a member survey between February and March 2019 to collect additional demographic information about its members. A total of 129 members (33%) responded to the online survey (Figure 3). Based on this sample, a majority of LWVO members are women (91%), retired (69%), White, (76%), speak English as their primary home language (98%) and have earned at least a 4-year degree or higher (93%).
## Figure 2. Demographic Summary of League Members

### Age / Gender

- 25-44 yrs: 7%
- 45-64 yrs: 18%
- 65+ yrs: 75%

91% of respondents are female.

### Years as LWVO Member

- 1st yr: 21%
- 2-5 yrs: 28%
- 6-10 yrs: 22%
- 11-15 yrs: 11%
- 16+ yrs: 18%

### Education

- HS/GED: 3%
- AA: 4%
- BA: 25%
- Master's: 62%
- PhD: 6%

### Racial / Ethnic Background

- White: 76%
- Black: 13%
- Asian: 4%
- Hisp/Lat: 3%
- Other: 3%

### Employment Status

- Retired: 69%
- Full-time: 21%
- Part-time: 10%
- Student: 1%

### Annual Income

- 200k+: 7%
- 150k-199k: 9%
- 100k-149k: 23%
- 50k-99k: 29%
- <50k: 10%
- Decline: 22%

Sources: League of Women Voters of Oakland Membership Records, April 2019. Note: Only zip codes that are within or overlap with Oakland City boundaries is included in this figure; a total of 17 Zip codes representing 18 members is excluded from this map but included in the accompanying table; 2019 League of Women Voters of Oakland Member Survey, N=129.
III. Community Characteristics

The League’s work is especially important at this moment as Oakland grapples with tremendous community shifts brought on by the Bay Area’s economic boom. Economic inequality continues to drive displacement of Oakland’s residents. Racial minority groups and low-income neighborhoods are the most vulnerable to these changes and they are at a disadvantage due in part, to a lack of political power and representation. For example, Council Districts 5, 6, and 7 (the eastern and southern parts of the city) are home to the highest concentration of voting age African American, Latinx, and to a lesser extent, Asian residents (see Appendix, page 29 for a map of council districts). The citywide voter turnout during the 2018 Statewide Elections was roughly 72%, but a closer look reveals that District 1, home to the highest number of middle- and upper-income white residents, had an 80% voter turnout rate, while other districts had voter turnout between 57% - 76%.

Many factors may drive this issue and LWVO seeks information that will clearly identify their role to address voter engagement gaps across Oakland. The LWVO requested detailed information about the demographic composition and voting history for two purposes:

- **Organizational Development:** LWVO will use the demographic information it learns about people across Oakland to inform its own internal assessment. The League’s goal is to have a membership body similar to the socio-economic composition of the City. The League seeks clarity about the attitudes, beliefs, and values across the city towards civic engagement extending from its underlying belief that their organization, as it currently stands, lacks a comprehensive view of how people view civic engagement.

- **Tactical Planning:** LWVO is interested in refining its programming and outreach efforts to meet the needs of the diverse communities it seeks to serve. It seeks information about why some citizens of Oakland do not register to vote and drivers to why those who are registered to vote do not turn out.
Voter Turnout

Figure 4 depicts voter turnout across Oakland for the last four statewide (2014, 2018) and Presidential (2012, 2016) elections. The League’s two questions – 1) why citizens of Oakland do not register to vote and 2) why many who register to vote do not vote – do not have simple answers. The rate of people registered to vote among eligible voters in California was 78% at during the most recent 2018 statewide elections; Oakland’s rate was 77%. Voter turnout for the last three of four elections was higher on average than the state as whole (Figure 4).

A closer look among different areas across the city reveal turnout gaps based on geography. Voting patterns divide the city into two distinct geographic regions on each side of the 580 freeway. Figure 5 depicts the count of registered voters (5.A), the percentage who voted in the November 2018 election (5.B), as well as the last 4 Presidential (2016, 2012) and Statewide (2014, 2018) elections (5.C). Table 2 compares voting pattern by Council Districts. The highest turnout rates are in Districts 1 and 4. Nearly three-quarters (71%) voted through absentee ballots. More than half of all eligible voters in Oakland are between the ages of 18 – 44 years old.

Figure 3. Oakland Voter Turnout by City Council District Compared to Statewide Total

Note: The horizontal axis represents the statewide total; each bar represents the difference from the statewide turnout.
Sources: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Multi-purpose Voter File restricted to Oakland, obtained February 2019; California Secretary of State Statewide Election Results (2012-2018).
Figure 4. Voter Registration, Turnout, and Voting History for Last 4 Elections.

A. Count of Registered Voters (Nov 2018)  B. Voter Turnout % (Nov 2018)  C. Voted in the Last Four Elections %

Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Multi-purpose Voter File restricted to Oakland, obtained February 2019.
Note: The scale for Figure 5.b is between 39%-89% to show turnout gaps; a standard scale between 0-100% would show more moderate voting turnout gaps; the proportion of voters who voted in the last four elections is drawn from voter records of people who were registered during the last four elections in Alameda County.

Table 2. Oakland Voting Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Registered</th>
<th>Voter Turnout</th>
<th>Est. Voting Population</th>
<th>Eligible % Registered</th>
<th>Voted Last 4</th>
<th>% of Voters</th>
<th>Estimated % Absentee</th>
<th>Estimated % 18-44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>18,245,970</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>23,803,577</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD1</td>
<td>44,681</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>52,748</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15,384</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD2</td>
<td>33,649</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>51,655</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>9,405</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD3</td>
<td>38,839</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>53,681</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>7,649</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4</td>
<td>36,985</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>44,535</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>14,933</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD5</td>
<td>23,815</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>43,737</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5,804</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD6</td>
<td>30,750</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>45,639</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>8,793</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD7</td>
<td>27,657</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>44,628</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>6,993</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Multi-purpose Voter File restricted to Oakland, obtained February 2019; California Secretary of State, 2018.

Demographic Characteristics

Social and economic factors determine the resources that people have to devote towards civic engagement. Skills and resources acquired outside of the political sphere – time, money and abilities that can be applied to advocacy – are adapted for civic functions (e.g., discretionary time and ability to write effectively to persuade an audience about an issue). According to the measures presented below, Oakland’s voting gaps appear to be socially determined. Though one must be careful not to assign a causal link between these characteristics which are not fully researched, it is clear that areas in Oakland with the most engaged voters, also have the highest income, higher levels of education, and the highest concentration of white voters. The sections that follow provide a snapshot of each of these demographic characteristics.
Income

Figure 6 depicts income inequality in Oakland. The median income of the city on whole is just over $63,251 annually. In some districts, the average median income is as low as $56,000 per year, and as high as $110,000 per year or more, however.

Median\textsuperscript{viii} incomes are highest in the same areas where voter participation is at its highest. Figure 7 is a comparison of the areas in Oakland where income is above the median (7.A) with the places where voter turnout is higher than the citywide average (7.B).

Figure 5. Median Income

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{median_income_map.png}
\caption{Median Income}
\end{figure}

Figure 6. Areas Above the Median Income & Voter Turnout Above the Citywide Average

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B19001); Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Multi-purpose Voter File restricted to Oakland, obtained February 2019.

Racial / Ethnic Composition

The racial/ethnic composition of Oakland is more diverse than the state overall. Compared to California on a whole where the combined estimated population of Black, Latinx, Asian, and other racial ethnic minorities\textsuperscript{viii} is about 62% of the state, Oakland’s racial ethnic minority groups are closer to three-quarters (73%) of the city (Figure 8).

Figure 9 shows the geographic concentration of racial/ethnic communities across Oakland. Latinx people make up about 27% of the city’s population among the areas where there are lower voter turnout rates. In contrast, high voter turnout areas coincide with areas with a higher concentration of white residents.

Figure 7. Composition of Racial/Ethnic Minority Population (California, Oakland)

Figure 8. Estimated Population of Racial/Ethnic Groups

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B03002)
Education

About four in ten adults (41%), ages 25 years and older, have a bachelor’s degree or higher in Oakland, on par with the statewide rate (41%). Figure 10 below shows nearly all adults over the age of 25 years across Oakland have attended some college or have earned post-secondary degrees.

Figure 9. Estimated Population Over 25 Years-old by Educational Attainment

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B15002)
Age

Just over half (54%) the people across Oakland are under the age of 45 years. District 3 which includes most of West Oakland has a slightly higher (+9%) population of people between the ages of 25 and 44 years compared to the city as a whole. Conversely, District 4 (Montclair) has a higher proportion of older residents, with 58% of its residents being 45 years or older.

Figure 10. Estimated Population by Age Group

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B01001).
Citywide, only an estimated 15% of people either don’t speak English very well or not at all. However, Districts 2 and 5 have rates as high as nearly one-quarter of adults over 18 years being unable to speak English (Figure 12). These areas coincide with the regions where the LWVO has the fewest number of members.

Figure 13 highlights the geographic areas where the highest number of non-English speakers reside, by language spoken at home. Spanish speakers primarily live in Districts 5, 6, and 7. People who speak Asian and Pacific Island languages are in Districts 2, 4, and 5.

**Figure 12. Estimated Population of Non-English Speakers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Speaker</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Island Languages</th>
<th>Spanish &amp; API Languages Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B16004)
Note: The estimates above for adults age 18 + years old who reported they "Speak English not well" or "Speak English not at all."
Individual Factors of Civic Participation
(Also referred to as Civic Empowerment, Civic Participation)

While polls and voting history tend to dominate discussion about an individual’s voting behavior, I draw from academic literature to address the League’s inquiry into factors that influence the degree to which persons are likely to be engaged civically, and more likely to vote. This information is presented to provide a foundation to the LWVO’s question: What does “civic engagement” mean to diverse Oakland communities? What issues are important to them?

In addition to the academic literature, direct accounts will provide more clarity about what the literature suggests might influence civic engagement; this step is already included in the forthcoming goals of the Strategic Plan.

Resource Model
(Schlozman, Brady, Verba, 2018)*

Adults accrue and build resources to act upon their beliefs in a variety of settings. Adults who are accustomed to being involved in, particularly in issues they care about, activities tend to stay involved. Their experiences and social ties are influenced at times, by factors that confer certain social or economic advantages. People develop, are exposed to, and are invited to join in activities through schools, churches, workplace, social circles that can promote civic participation, and in turn, voting.

Three factors influence civic participation: resources, psychological engagement with politics, and an individual’s personal network. One aspect of resources is money and time. While issues related to actual costs are fairly straightforward, time is a factor that isn’t so. Rather than race, gender, or income level as the primary determinants, life circumstances (e.g., retirement) is a related, yet distinct factor. Additionally, skills that enable individuals to form skills relevant to civic engagement such as speaking fluently about issues, the ability to write one’s opinions to persuade, and the social and at times, the professional comfort to navigate organizational settings are resources that result from education.

Mindsets that promote civic engagement are closely tied to education. An individual’s psychological engagement with politics are tied to their interest, the degree to which they feel they can make a difference, whether they have the necessary information to know what is going on, and whether they identify with a particular party.

Summary of Three Factors of Resource Model for Civic Participation

Resources
- Money: Costs (e.g., political donations membership)
- Time: Life circumstances that influence free time, (e.g., retirement, partners’ employment status, young children in the home)
- Education: Critical thinking and communication skills that enable learning about and responding to issues
- Civic Skills: Comfort and experience in settings that provide opportunities to develop and practice these skills (e.g., church, community organizations)

Psychological Engagement with Politics
- Political Interest: Interest and stake in politics.
- Political Efficacy: Belief that one’s effort can make a difference in politically activity.
- Political Information: Knowledge of facts and players in government.
- Party Identification: The degree to which an individuals’ beliefs are aligned with a party or issue.

Recruitment into Politics
Being asked to get involved is more likely for those who have and are connected to others in their family, social circle, in their work, or community.

Organizational Factors

Twenty years ago, the political scientist and sociologist, Theda Skocpol foreshadowed the crisis membership associations would face. Membership-based volunteer associations are in decline and professionally operated; issues-based advocacy organizations dominate the space formerly inhabited by organizations like the LWVO. The following shifts the focus to consider additional barriers to reaching the League’s goals. The model discussed prior provides compelling wisdom about the multitude of factors that leads people to get involved with organizations; yet LWVO must assure it provides a form and space to welcome a more diverse membership.

Effective Civic Associations
(Andrews, Ganz, 2010)

One way researchers have attempted to understand this dynamic is through exploring civic associations as “schools of democracy” which serve multiple function: 1) public recognition or the degree to which the organization is viewed as a authority in the subject matter the civic organization focuses on, 2) member engagement or the level of participation by the organization’s members, and 3) leader development or the extent to which the activities of the organization and participation in them promote the development of leadership skills. The degree to which the three areas might meaningfully predict or describe the actual success of civic organizations is unclear due to differences in the individual factors of organizations. However, this research does underscore the importance of intentionality in civic organization towards goals that are externally visible (e.g., whether the community views the League as an authority), promotes ongoing internal growth, and intentionality to develop leaders to further its work.

Identity Based Civic Actions
(Crubaugh, 2018)

One obvious question to this research, given the demographic homogeneity of the LWVO in contrast to the diversity of Oakland, is whether the League is designed to be effective in serving the needs of the City. Identity-based civic groups consolidate power and influence around the stated identity. The resources it brings into the community are directed towards those who share its identity. In contrast, place-based (e.g., neighborhood association) groups have a different focus to bring resources into the neighborhood to be shared among community members based on the place, not the individuals themselves.

Research suggests that it’s important to look at the desired outcome of the organization, along with its form as a practical matter. Currently, the term “communities of color” or “diversity” is inextricably linked to specific areas outside the League’s cultural and geographic reach. The League should continue to seek clarity about what it would like to achieve in communities versus for the members who opt to join the League. Doing so will help to formulate specific outcomes it would like to achieve and whether its form should be further modified.
IV. Partnerships

The League recently issued its *Partnerships and Networking Manual* to provide a roadmap to their vision of *Building Broader, Stronger Community Bonds*. The manual, funded through the Alameda County Probation Department’s Capacity Building Grant, provides advice to League members and committees about how it will approach partnerships with other community organizations.

Interviews with community informants were conducted for this project to complement the League’s work towards diversity and inclusion. The following research question guided the interviews: *Do diverse Oakland community groups view the League of Women Voters as a resource to them? If yes, why and if not, why not?* At the time this report was initially submitted, seven community members provided their input.

Informants advised the League to maintain its work around government transparency, efforts around voter registration, and the voting guide. These core elements are the primary way the League continues to gain trust among the public. These services are provided by the League’s education arm – the Education Fund. However, the issues that are raised in this report are in service of shaping the League’s advocacy work, to influence public policy through grassroots advocacy.

Nearly all the informants provided insights about issues-based advocacy work happening across Oakland for the League to consider. The issues range from advocating for campaign finance reform to serving advocacy groups to take root in Oakland. This requires the League to interact with other community groups in new and different ways than it has in the past. The actual tactical levers that the League should follow given the broad nature of this advice remain unclear. Given the emergent nature of this work to the LWVO, it should continue to find opportunities for reflection and feedback from the organizations it works with to refine the manual accordingly.

Finally, all informants acknowledged the League’s reputation drawn from being an organization comprising members that do not reflect the diversity of Oakland as a whole. This reputation requires the League to “show not tell” through demonstrating that it is committed in particular to the work of advancing racial and economic equity. This is a necessary precursor to changing its reputation because race continues to determine the social and economic divides depicted in Section III of this report. This work should not interfere with the League’s objectives and rather, contribute to the League’s desire to distinguish its second, lesser known role as a grassroots advocacy organization.
V. Policy Recommendations

This section is a departure from the prior four sections, which directly address the research questions that the LWVO commissioned. The following policy recommendations to the League of Women Voters of Oakland address the primary problem the organization is addressing at this stage of its work towards fulfilling its five year Strategic Plan: the League of Women Voters of Oakland does not sufficiently understand the diversity of Oakland, and subsequently, the factors that influence civic participation among people across Oakland. In order to service all communities across Oakland, the LWVO must create an inclusive organization that actively promotes diversity. This transformation requires the League to adopt a variety of strategies in the near, mid, and long term.

The demographic analysis of Oakland in Section III demonstrates the multiple ways that socio-economic factors are related to voter disengagement. Income, race, education, and language drive patterns of voter participation. While the League cannot solve persistent inequality, it can adapt its organization to explicitly acknowledge these barriers, and more importantly, to act towards enhancing greater equity across Oakland.

To this end, the League can learn from the academic literature highlighted in Section IV to develop its strategies to recruit new members. The LWVO must lower the barriers towards civic engagement through adapting the ways in which the internal norms activities rely on life circumstance and financial resources that exclude the communities they seek to serve.

In order to attract and retain new members, the League must assure those who will be entering an organization unaccustomed to such diversity that it is capable of changing its cultural norms, both formal and informal. The League can act as a school of democracy and in order to do so, it has to create space for those who to come to the organization to gain new civic skills, particularly through leadership roles to shape the organization.
Recommended Strategies

The following are recommendations to the League of Women Voters to continue to understand the diversity of Oakland, and to act towards welcoming new members to their civic association. The League should use the following suggestions as starting points towards building out strategies that are both sustainable to a volunteer-run organization and actively work towards addressing the opportunities to better serve the community at large.

Short-term Strategies

**Lower Barriers to Membership**

Lowering the cost of membership signals the League values the contributions from people who do not have the financial resources to purchase a membership. At the current rate of $70 per year, the League’s membership revenue is estimated at roughly $27,000 per year. A majority of the dues the LWVO collects is then passed along to the state and national League. This leaves limited flexibility to lower its membership fee given it is a volunteer-run organization and as it stands, has very little revenue to divert. The LWVO may, however, change its messaging to promote transparency about where membership dues go to dispel any preconceived notions about the League itself, versus the individual members’ own socio-economic status.

The League currently has differentiated annual memberships: Regular ($70), Additional Household Member ($35), Young Adult ($25), and Student ($10). There may be an opportunity to update these membership levels so they do not carry with them implicit beliefs about what a potential member can afford and their life circumstance. For example, the term “Student” carries with it an underlying status of youth, or someone who is not fully professionalized. To fully execute this recommendation, the League may need to engage the National League of Women Voters, who may also benefit from an update.

**Initiative to Promote Advocacy Side of the League**

The League should establish a public information initiative to distinguish its advocacy work from its voter education arm, emphasizing the role of members in establishing the advocacy agenda for the organization. Currently, there is knowledge asymmetry between the League and its constituents about the two sides of the League’s work. Most people associate the League and its reputation with its educational arm, active during the lead-up to elections. The League desires to support Oakland residents toward greater political efficacy. To do this they provide opportunities for members and the community to learn how the political system works through political analysis of issues that are important in different communities.

**Transparency Around Committee Activities**

To better inform all League members and the community of its current work, the League should establish a monthly newsletter that provides timely updates on its efforts. For example, a brief conversation with a Research Committee member revealed a number of committees whose work promotes the goals of this research:

- The Education Committee’s work with the Oakland public schools to research equity for Latinx students;
- The Action Committee’s Speaker Series and the Hot Topic sessions seek new locations across the city to hold events;
• Voter Services’ efforts to diversify voter registration tables so that there are community members present;

• The Reentry Task Force’s efforts to organize peer-to-peer training among formerly incarcerated members of the community.

Their efforts should be front and center in the League’s communication with the community to highlight the full breadth of its efforts.

Middle-term Strategies

Refine Leadership Selection and Training

In accordance with Goal #3 from the Strategic Plan, the LWVO should consider seeking partnerships with groups who have expertise in helping white communities to pursue racial justice. Organizations such as Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) provide trainings targeted towards organizational leaders that may be helpful: https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/trainings.html.

Long-term Strategies

Focus on City-wide Issues to Achieve Equity

Due to the unique history of Black, Asian, and Latinx communities in Oakland, a neutral stance on racial equity is an endorsement of the status quo, which inherently puts communities of color at a disadvantage. In several places throughout this document, the interplay of race, education, and distribution of political power underscore the need for the League to adopt this as a core issue.

One opportunity for the League to do this could be for the organization to work with the City’s Department of Racial Equity to identify programming that the League can design to raise awareness of the indicators that the City has agreed to work towards.
Recommended Areas for Further Research

The research in this document should be complemented with additional information as the League’s resources and time allows for. The following are additional areas to consider:

1. **Review and analysis of organizational practices for appointing leaders** – given the mandate to diversify the League, it must be mindful of unintended biases baked into its processes. For example, League members may naturally nominate and encourage members in their own social and volunteer circles towards leadership posts - given the League’s relatively homogenous demographic make-up, this may further its lack of diversity.

2. **Input from individual community members across Oakland** to learn about the general interest in joining volunteer organizations. Doing so may provide the League with realistic goals regarding membership recruitment.

3. **Feedback and input from existing community partners to identify new opportunities for the League to pursue.** For example, the League’s work with the school district or other CBOs may provide formative information to help League committee’s with modifying its work.

4. **Research among the League’s existing members** to learn about the broader interest of its less engaged members for ways to diversify the League. The Member Survey can be modified next year so that there is much more time to collect surveys to assure a high response rate. The League can also recruit less involved members for focus groups to learn about how they might be motivated to increase their activity within the League in service of the additional activities suggested in the prior section.

5. **A comprehensive review of implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives in volunteer civic organizations** can provide the League with practice-proven frameworks for diversifying its membership.
## Appendix

### Section II. Internal Characteristics


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**Total** 389 100%
Section III. Community Characteristics

2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (US Census Bureau)

The table below is detailed information about the American Community Survey Estimates that the demographic information.

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<td>Age by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English</td>
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<td>Household Income</td>
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<td>B19013</td>
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Geography

Community characteristics are presented in this document by Council Districts (i.e., D1, D2) in some places throughout this document to provide a smaller unit than city averages that are substantive in meaning. However, one constraint of compiling public data from a variety of sources is that data is available with different geographic boundaries. For example, the most recent American Community Survey 5-year estimates for the topics of interest (e.g., income, age, education) are available by census block group, and voter turnout data is recorded at the county voter precinct level. Data across different data sources were matched to Council District boundaries; errors are certain as a result of this technique and all data in this section are estimates, not to be interpreted for precision. Below are the geographic areas for each map source that I used, shown by Council District.
Council District Boundaries
Source: City of Oakland, Open Data Portal, retrieved from: https://data.oaklandnet.com/

Census Block Group Boundaries
Source: US Census Bureau, retrieved from: https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-file

Voter Precincts
Source: Alameda County, Open Data Portal, retrieved from: https://data.acgov.or
<table>
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<th>Council District Boundaries</th>
<th>Census Block Group Boundaries</th>
<th>Voter Precincts</th>
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Map - Council Districts

Source: https://data.oaklandnet.com/City-Government/City-of-Oakland-Council-Districts/g7vb-tiyh
Map – Neighborhoods

Source: https://data.oaklandnet.com/Property/Oakland-Neighborhoods/7zky-kcq9
Literature Review

I conducted a search of academic literature, in the form of articles published in peer-review journals, and full-length texts, using the following keyword searches: voter turnout, civic associations, diversity, leadership, voting behavior, civic engagement, and League of Women Voters, voluntary associations, civic volunteerism, and democracy. Initially, I had over 100 sources which I reviewed and refined to 26 articles by eliminating articles that were not focused on democracy in the United States, were not specifically addressing civic engagement or civic organizations, or focused on the psychological factors of voting; these issues while related, are not focused at the issues I attempt to address in this report.

The research I reference in the body of this document were chosen because they directly and most relevantly address the issue that the LOWV is grappling with.
IV. Partnerships

I conducted interviews with the following community members and/or organizations: 1) Jon Jones, Community Activist, 2) Dan Lindheim, former city manager Oakland, Dellums Institute, 3) Annie Campbell Washington, former Council Member, Vice-mayor, 4) Jennifer Tran, Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce, 5) Nicolas Heidron, Common Cause, 6) Jonathan Stein, Asian Law Caucus. Initially, I contacted 36 organizations and did not successfully schedule interviews with some of the organizations. Many organizations did not respond to repeated inquiries that I sent.
End Notes

For more about the history of the League of Women Voters: https://www.lwv.org/about-us/history

https://www.lwv.org/league-management/policies-guidelines/transformation-roadmap

The League of Women Voters of Oakland, *Strategic Plan (FY 2018 – FY 2022)*

Ibid.


The average size of local leagues across the U.S. is 66 members.

According to the American Community Survey 5-year Estimate (2017), the estimated median income for Oakland is $63,251, in inflation adjusted dollars.

In this instance, the “other ethnic minority groups” referred to are are the US Census categories: Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Other.


