



**Success Stories of
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
By Local Leagues in NYS**

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League of Women Voters of NYS
62 Grand Street, Albany, NY 12207
www.lwvny.org
lwvny@lwvny.org

LWV of Rochester

Barbara Grosh, president@lwg-rma.org

Building Relationships to Help Our League Become Better Able to Work in a Racially Diverse City

Our chapter has focused most of our voter registration efforts and Get Out the Vote efforts on the areas of our county that have the lowest registration and turnout rates, which are also the poorest neighborhoods, with a high percentage of people of color. We are asked to come and register voters in lots of places, and we always say yes, but when it's us organizing an event, it's in a low-turnout neighborhood in the city.

We started reaching out to the city high schools about a decade ago. We try to get into Participation In Government or Economics classrooms in the spring semester to register graduating seniors. We talk with the students about upcoming elections and hear what they think about voting. We invite some black men who are enthusiastic about voting to come with us. The students seem to enjoy hearing from them, and we've have found some excellent speakers who enjoy working with us.

In the summer of 2020, there were Black Lives Matter protests almost weekly throughout the summer. We showed up often to register voters. We didn't register a huge number, because people who go to protests are mostly already voters, but it gave us a chance to get to know some of the leaders a little bit. The following spring, we were trying to think of ways to increase voter turnout for the local elections. Because of the time spent cultivating connections, we were able to recruit some really excellent speakers who are leaders in the local BLM community to appear in webinars with us, discussing public issues that we thought might get some people to think more about voting in local elections. You can see that series here: <https://lwg-rma.org/webinars.php>.

We often collaborate or cosponsor with other groups, including several black sororities as well as some more grass roots black women's groups and Latino Voter Protection, Inc. We've learned that it's important to work with them from the beginning to plan events together. For the 2020 presidential elections we met weekly for a couple of months, planning some events on the first day of early voting. We hoped to draw public attention to its availability and make it fun. We had bands at two early voting sites, had caravans with loudspeakers driving through four neighborhoods, and had life-sized cutouts of Frederick Douglass that people could take selfies with after they voted. Our partners also helped us distribute 5,000 door hangers with voting information in low-turnout neighborhoods.

Our DEI goals include making the League look more like the community by recruiting a greater diversity of members and becoming active in advocacy on local issues, holding local officials responsible. Our observer corps is a great resource on that, but cultivating deeper connections with other groups working on particular issues is also essential.

LWV of Albany County
Gail Volk, lwwacgvolk@gmail.com

Following the summer of 2020 LWVUS's Leadership Training, we prepared an organizational action plan that was adopted by the Board of Directors. The Board participated in a meeting in November of 2020 where we discussed the self-assessment results.

As chair, I was charged with developing a work group of diverse members of the organization, to focus on the implementation of the plan. The group was assembled and began meeting (virtually) starting in the winter of 2021. Our meetings were focused on trust building by getting to know one another's stories; we valued process over product. We made a group agreement about how to conduct ourselves and our work, and that we would work as a team.

We did develop a Framework which was shared with the entire membership prior to the Annual Meeting in June, and where it was presented to the attendees.

In August, we hosted a Conversation in which we invited the members of the Board and committee chairs and people who held important positions. Our intention was for attendees to leave the meeting with a thought about how DEI impacts their work. We used the Communications work as an example of how to apply the DEI lens.

We felt the event was successful because people did participate and therefore it was a conversation and not just the DEI committee as "talking heads." The next day, the Educational Events chair called to tell me that the year was already planned but based on what we presented, she needed to review decisions through the DEI lens. She had taken the LWVUS DEI lens material (which the DEI work group had presented in the Conversation) and she adapted it into a usable format. Her intention is for all leads planning educational events to use the form to ensure they incorporate DEI principles into their planning.

I mentioned that the Humanities NY Grant we applied for (I along with Ellen Sullivan) that we were awarded is a 5 week session on Richard Rothstein's book "The Color of Law" and will be led by a SUNY history professor and an Albany Law professor. The DEI focus of the LWVAC was influential in the decision to pursue this topic for the grant.

LWV of Rensselaer

Shirley Buel, sjoanbuel@gmail.com

The Board of Directors would measure the degree of success by the outcome of our efforts, eg, have we added new members who represent a different more diverse group of people or have we been successful in helping people from diverse backgrounds get registered and then vote.

At this time, we have data collection about voter registration but not about participation in voting tied to our level of voter registration. We can access general information about the level of voting in specific voting districts and infer from that. A goal is to continue to develop a non intrusive and easy to use system to help us measure success in this area.

Our best example of success in the area of improving access to early voting for those who rely on buses or walking to get to polling sites occurred just recently. This was the result of working collaboratively for over two years with many local non profits and community people interested in social justice as well at the NYS Attorney General. The following is the press release:

On August 26th the New York State Appellate Court issued a unanimous decision in the above referenced case that upheld the lower court's decision, which found that the Commissioners of the Rensselaer County Board of Elections failed to comply with the standards of NYS Election Law for determining early voting sites, and annulled the County's early voting plan. In addition, the Court ordered that the Board "shall select early voting polling places for the 2021 general election that provide adequate and equitable access for all voters in Rensselaer County, including voters in the City of Troy" by September 3rd.

The full decision can be found

here: <http://decisions.courts.state.ny.us/ad3/CalendarPages/2021/08262021.html>

The coalition of community organizations including the League of Women Voters of Rensselaer County, New York Civil Liberties Union, NAACP-Troy Branch, The Sage Colleges, Troy Area United Ministries, Unity House, Troy 4 Black Lives, Rensselaer County Women for Change, Troy Coalition of Black Leaders, Oakwood Community Center, and the Justice Center of Rensselaer County worked together over the past two and half years to provide equitable access to early voting to all voters in the County. We applaud this decision by the Court and want to thank Attorney General Letitia James for her dedication to the protection of voting rights for all New Yorkers.

The LWVRC continues to reach out to many people in our community who have been discouraged from voting and will continue to do so.

LWV of Westchester

Kathy Meany, kzmeany@gmail.com

LWVW continues to put a DEI Lens on everything that we do, and we continue to offer continuing education for Board members, local leagues, and our members. To date, in our virtual meetings, we offer closed captioning and language translation services.

Goal:

- Increase diverse membership that will eventually increase diverse leadership to reflect the look of Westchester's communities and integrate culturally rich characteristics. LWVW is focusing on building community relationships right now.

What has worked:

- Consistent messaging regarding the LWVW DEI policy so that membership and the public are aware that LWVW includes all in principle and practice.
- Reaching out to other non-partisan organizations that are different from our own to meet over coffee, Zoom, or phone chats. Our goal is to find out what challenges these organizations face regarding voting rights, voter service, and other advocacies that they support. We also inquire as to how they perceive the League. We then continue the discussion to determine if there is a potential for collaboration and, if so, discuss the next steps to move forward as there is strength in numbers.
- We are beginning a new partnership with the Westchester Black Women's Political Caucus, and have recently connected with two other diverse organizations in the community. Initially, their goals are to register young people and educate – which aligns with ours.

LWV of Saratoga

Linda McKenney, majokcoach@gmail.com

Definition of Success and Story from LWV Saratoga County

From the get-go, LWV Saratoga County was enthusiastic regarding its DEI Journey. As we delved into the principles of DEI, we recognized that our success would be determined by our ability to serve all communities in our three counties: Saratoga, Washington, and Warren and to have those communities consider us an ally and resource.

The four-member DEI committee, with Board support, universally agreed that the most efficient way to serve was to first listen and form partner/relationships. We've reached out to groups such as: BLM (Black Lives Matter) Saratoga, MLK (Martin Luther King) Saratoga. Gay Pride and organizations that serve the disabled.

We developed a DEI Lens and incorporated it into our handbook for all committees to use in planning events. I believe it was that lens which prompted a formal response to comments made by the Assistant Chief of Police, at a Saratoga Springs city council meeting, regarding recent BLM protests.

The statement was supported and celebrated by many members of the community. Subsequent to the statement, members of our League met with Chief of Police, Shaun Crooks, for questions and discussion. The journey continues.

Our statement regarding Saratoga Springs NY
Police and Public Safety, June 28th Press Conference:

The League of Women Voters of Saratoga County absolutely supports individual rights including the right to protest. The right to assess government actions and indeed criticize the government is a cornerstone of democracy. Unfortunately, statements made at the Public Safety Department's press conference on June 28th linking protests and criticism of the police to increases in criminal activity appear to be aimed to intimidate those who exercise that right.

We acknowledge the efforts of the police and city leaders to listen to citizen concerns during the publicly held discussions this past year as part of the Governor's executive order on police reform. We encourage public officials and leaders to continue the dialogue, to build public trust and positive community relationships by supporting community participation in policy and decision-making, increasing transparency through the timely dissemination of information to the public, and unequivocally supporting the right to protest.

Like many organizations, the League has recently recommitted to working toward equity and inclusion, not only within the League itself but also in the communities it serves. We acknowledge systemic racism and look within our own organization and every level of government to eradicate it. The League recognizes that the individual liberties of Persons of Color are not being equally protected. We believe that racial and economic factors influence the treatment of citizens in the law enforcement system. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness for all members of our community within the procedures and processes of all systems.

For more information contact president@lwvsaratoga.org