

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Action

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the Lane County League of Women Voters (LWVLC) studied “Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in Lane County.” As a program on educating League members it met its goal, but because of the spreading Covid19 Virus, there has been no further discussion or action. Earlier, in January 2020 LWVLC surveyed itself to provide a snapshot of our membership. The results showed that we are not the least bit diverse, being 90% white women “of a certain age with higher education and income above the average population.” The survey designers and the Board determined to “look at ways to add to and listen to missing and underrepresented voices..., expanded partnerships in preparing studies and more intentional assessments about equity impacts of League positions and projects on community members and community relationships.” (*Argus April 2020*)

In addition to the virus, major acts of violence perpetrated on some Black Americans caught the media’s attention and became the catalyst for major demonstrations and protests all over the United States and the world. In response to a League member’s request, the LWVLC board decided that a monetary contribution would be given in support of an organization that was addressing solutions to the community’s inequities. This followed another member’s suggestion that the LWVLC send a letter to *The Register-Guard* editors urging city and county officials to listen to communities of color and to adopt meaningful reforms that will address systemic racism, and, asked every Oregonian to stand against racism and oppression and to support leaders working for change. (*Argus July 2020*)

Along with this, some questions arise such as: Is it also time to look at how we as a League can become better partners in our communities, in our county, in our state, in our country and commit to ensure our League is a place where differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) presented the newly approved *Policy on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* at their 2018 National Convention in Chicago. The policy’s focus was to encourage us to reach out to ALL people to become part of the League and to embrace and acknowledge the mistakes of our past and move to become an intentionally inclusive organization that works to improve democracy for everyone. (www.my.lwv.org) In 2019 the LWVUS, in an effort to assist all members in embracing the commitments of diversity, equity, and inclusion, compiled a guide to educate, enlighten, and provoke discussion as well as provide tools to apply a DEI lens to all of the League’s work. The following includes excerpts from the LWVUS’s *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Guide*.

Policy Statement: The League of Women Voters is fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of any characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are mutually reinforcing. Increased inclusion is associated with increased equity; the majority of organizations with higher inclusion and equity also have greater demographic diversity.

Diversity includes all of the similarities and differences among people, not limited to gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, appearance, language, accent, ability status, mental health, education, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, and political perspective or affiliation.

Diversity refers to population groups that have been historically underrepresented in socially, politically, or economically powerful institutions and organizations. These groups include but are not restricted to populations of color, such as African Americans and Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. They may also include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations, people with disabilities, women, and other groups.

A team can be diverse and so can an organization. A person is not diverse. Diversity is about a collective or a group and can only exist in relationship to others. A candidate is not diverse--she/he/they are a unique, individual unit. They may bring diversity to the team, but they in themselves are not diverse. They are a woman; they are a person of color; they are a part of the LGBTQ community.

"We commit to increase diversity in the recruitment, retention, and retainment at the national, state and local level, and in the leadership and executive roles."

Equity is an approach based on fairness to ensuring everyone is given equal opportunity; this means that resources may be divided and shared unequally to make sure that each person has a fair chance to succeed. Equity takes into account that people have different access to resources because of oppression and privilege. Equity seeks to balance the disparity.

Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources, including professional growth opportunities. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Equity prioritizes efforts to ensure that the most underserved and marginalized among us has as much opportunity to succeed as the most well-served and advantaged. By taking into account the various advantages and disadvantages that people face, we work to ensure every person has an equal opportunity to succeed.

"We commit in prioritizing equity in the work of the LWV staff, board, and members."

Inclusion is an ongoing process, not a static state of being.

Inclusion is the dynamic state of operating in which diversity is leveraged to create a healthy, high-performing organization and community.

An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and group to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational and societal goals.

While an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive. Being aware of unconscious or implicit bias can help organizations better address issues of inclusivity.

"We commit to making deliberate efforts to ensure differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion. We know that by creating a vibrant climate of inclusiveness, we can more effectively leverage our resources to advance our collective capabilities."

As a League we must commit to increase diversity in recruitment and retention, commit to prioritize equity and inclusion. The League's commitment to empower voters and defend democracy is a commitment to equity for all voters and the recognition that democracy is strengthened by the inclusion of all the diverse voices within the community.

LWVUS CEO Virginia Kase challenges us to do better, to put DEI into action. She recounts that the League was founded in 1920--just months before the ratification of the 19th Amendment--by suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt. Catt was a complicated character, a political operative, and by modern standards, yes, racist. While fighting for the 19th Amendment and lobbying Southern senators, she famously claimed "White supremacy will be strengthened, not weakened, by women's suffrage."

These remarks are sometimes brushed over as a sign of the times or a political strategy. But actions speak louder than words, and our organization was not welcoming to women of color through most of our existence.

Even during the Civil Rights movement, the League was not as present as we should have been. While activists risked life and limb to register Black voters in the South, the League's work and our leaders were late in joining to help protect all voices at the polls. It wasn't until 1966 that we reached our first position to combat discrimination. Still, our focus on social policy was

from afar--not on the front lines.

The League of Women Voters serves millions of voters in underrepresented communities across America every year, but as an organization, our membership does not always reflect the communities we serve. At our 100th anniversary, we are not only striving for better, we will do better.

We are having tough conversations about race in this country--and making sure that as an organization we confront our place in history. African Americans were shut out of the vision of the League. As we continue to grow our movement, we acknowledge our privilege and must use our power to raise the voices of those who haven't always had a seat at the table.

We have embraced a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy. We know policy alone does not solve a problem. The League is committed to living our values and prioritizing inclusion. We hope that as an organization we offer and nurture a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment that is welcoming to all who are drawn to our mission and wish to make a positive impact. Today, we invite all people, regardless of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, or race, to join us as we commit to righting the wrongs of our past and building a stronger, more inclusive democracy. (<https://www.lwv.org/blog/facing-hard-truths-about-leagues-origin>)

Being a Better Ally to People of Color

From the *DEI Guide*, we are including Savonne Anderson's brief article "5 Initial Ways You Can Be a Better Ally to People of Color:"

Communities of color continue to fight every day against racism, and heal from the effects it has had on their lives. Great allies can support them, however, and help dismantle the ways in which our institutions and culture are deeply rooted in oppression.

In the traditional sense, allies are partners with equal resources who choose to work in tandem for mutual benefit. But when it comes to racial justice, this definition cannot stand--communities of color do not have equal resources, and white allies will not gain the same benefits.

As a result, it can be difficult to figure out how to be the best ally you can be. While the decision to use your privilege for good is the right thing to do, it's simply not enough. Here are five ways you can be useful and effective as an ally, rather than just wearing the title.

1. *Be willing to listen and learn.* In order to be an effective ally, it's necessary to understand the experiences of those you want to support. The best way to reach that understanding is to be a good listener.

When people of color voice concerns, vent about issues they face or discuss oppression, you

should be taking notes. These concerns and issues are often a result of actions by people who look like you, so it can be easy to get defensive--"not all white people," etc. But the more challenging thing to do is to understand that these concerns are not a personal attack, and trust the experiences of those who are oppressed. If a person of color trusts you enough to share how racism and prejudice affects them, take it as an opportunity to learn rather than prove your innocence. If you reach out as an ally, you're already moving in the right direction.

2. Help open up spaces without taking them over. As an ally to people of color, it's important to use your own privilege to assist in efforts toward equality. An ally's role is never to speak *for* others, but to take down the obstacles facing the oppressed to allow them to speak for themselves.

3. Do your research. You can't be an effective ally if you don't know what the issues are. And you can't help deconstruct institutional racism without first understanding how it is built.

Start with a book--*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, *A Different Mirror* by Ronald Takaki, and *Understanding and Dismantling Racism* by Joseph Barndt are great places to start. Go to an organizing event in your community.

Many allies resort to asking people of color to explain racism and oppression--while often well-intentioned, this places a burden on the very communities you're aiming to assist. Go one step further and teach yourself, so you can educate other allies and relieve people of color of that labor.

4. Resist the "white savior" complex. The "white savior" complex manifests itself in many ways, and allyship tends to one of them. As an ally, your role is not to "fix" communities of color. It is not your job to swoop down and take action on their behalf without knowing what the community needs to begin with. It might be easy to succumb to the desire to do things that seem good for others because they make *you* feel good, but it's important to resist that urge and reexamine how to help.

Telling a person of color how to deal with oppression may seem like a helpful idea, but in reality, it's harmful. Offering advice implies that the onus is on them, and assumes they have not already made efforts to overcome racial injustice.

It's better, for example, to ask, "Is there anything I can do to make you feel safer?"

5. Start in your own circle. White allies usually have the advantage of being able to communicate with more white people within their own circles. You have the chance to help people of color by promoting equality and racial justice in your own community.

Call out friends and family on their racism and micro aggressions, even when it's uncomfortable or there are no people of color around to be offended. They'll likely be more open to listening to you, and it will give you the opportunity to effect real change.

Examining Our Work Through a DEI Lens

As we move forward and address local issues, we want to utilize and include local knowledge and skills and create powerful partnerships, consider the stakeholders (race, gender, age, ability), and assure that we include the people who represent the community in the planning and the process.

What to ask when examining through a DEI lens:

1. Who is involved in the process?
 - a. Are key stakeholders meaningfully included?
 - b. Is this work that impacts a group or community? If so, is their voice represented?
 - c. How diverse is the group of decision makers? Is it diverse enough?
2. Who will be impacted?
 - a. Who benefits from this?
 - b. Who is burdened by this?
 - c. Does this help us meet the needs of underserved voters?
 - d. Have we considered various, specific marginalized groups and how they might be impacted?
3. What are the intended and unintended outcomes?
 - a. What issue are we trying to solve?
 - b. What do we hope will happen?
 - c. What are the potential negative impacts? Who could be hurt by this?
 - d. What data or evidence supports this?
 - e. How might this be perceived by others?
4. Does this align with our vision for an equitable and inclusive organization?
 - a. How is equity addressed?
 - b. What barriers might this place in the way of achieving equity?
 - c. How does this impact the League's culture?
 - d. What changes could be made to make this more equitable?

(<https://lww.org/league-management/diversity-equity-inclusion-continued-learning>)

As we incorporate DEI into our activities and programs we will address root causes of exclusion and oppression by seeking to change attitudes, behaviors, and policy through education and activism. We will challenge ourselves and others to address privilege and power, to work collaboratively, and to find avenues to help build leadership, especially for the marginalized and disempowered.

Resources from the LWV DEI Guide for Further Study and Information

Included in the *DEI Guide* are links to recordings of webinars that accompany the study materials. (<https://www.lwv.org-management/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-webinars>) The guide also lists the following reading and audio resources. Also check out Sherrill Kirchhoff's "Book Review" in the September *Argus*.

Articles:

- "Diversity and Authenticity," Katherine Phillips, Tracy Dumas, Nancy Rothbard - (<https://hbr.org/2018/03/diversity-and-authenticity>)
- "How Black Women Describe Navigating Race and Gender in the Workplace," Maura Cheeks (<https://hbr.org/2018/03/how-black-women-describe-navigating-race-and-gender-in-the-workplace>)
- "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage," Robert Austin and Gary Pisano (<https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>)
- "Reducing the effects of gender stereotypes on performance evaluations," C.C. Bauer, B.B. Baltes (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A10216527696>)
- "Unlearning Automatic Biases: The malleability of implicit prejudices and stereotypes," L.A. Rudman, R.D. Ashmore, M.L. Gary (<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2001-05123-009>)
- "Warmth and Competence as Universal Dimensions of Social Perception. The Stereotype Content Model and the BIAS Map," Amy Cuddy, Susan Fiske, Peter Glick (<https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=34511>)

Books:

- Ariely, D. (2009). *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*. New York NY: HarperCollins.
- Banaji, M.R., & Greenwald, A.G. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Brown, B. (2017). *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Coates, T.N. (2015). *Between the World and Me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.
- Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The Power of Thinking about Thinking*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Irving, D. (2016). *Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press.
- Ross, H.J. (2014). *Everyday Bias*. Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Thomas, A. (2017). *The Hate You Give*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Vance, J.D. (2016). *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Wilkerson, I. (2011). *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Audio

- Being Color Brave, Mellody Hobson
(https://www.ted.com/talks/melody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave)
- Believing in Refugees, Luma Mufich
(https://www.ted.com/talks/luma_mufich_don_t_feel_sorry_for_refugees_believe_in_them)
- How to Overcome Biases, Verna Myers
(https://ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them)
- I'm Not Your Inspiration, Stella Young
(https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much)
- The Urgency of Intersectionality, Kimberle Crenshaw
(https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectional)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is *white privilege*?
2. What step(s) should I, each member, our Unit, the Membership Committee, take to increase diversity in our organization?
3. How can we better partner with other organizations which share the same goals?
4. What can we do to address voter registration and voter participation with minorities, older and younger persons, and the unhoused?
5. Which portion(s) of the "Examining Through a DEI Lens..." should LWVLC prioritize?