



Annual Report from the Racial Justice Task Force for 2020-2021

In June of 2020, Susan Millinger presented this Directive to the LWVA Steering Committee:

Directive to Steering Committee: Prioritize Antiracism in 2020-21

In the current condition of the nation, and given the racism acknowledged to be part of the early history of the League of Women Voters, I suggest that the Steering Committee identify antiracism as a priority for this coming year.

I suggest the formation of a task force, or the assignment to the Social Justice Committee, of the question of identifying how the Amherst League can best address the issue. This group or a group it identifies would also provide leadership for the work to be done, once the Steering Committee agrees with the work proposed.

Marcie Sclove became chair of this newly transformed committee (from the Social Justice Committee), referred to as the Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF). There are currently 11 members: Andrea Battle, Rebecca Fricke, Meg Gage, Martha Hanner, Ash Hartwell, Bonnie Isman, Renee Moss, Marcie Sclove (chair), Sudha Setty, Mira Setty-Charity, and Dave Williams. Joan Rabin is our Steering Committee liaison. We have been meeting biweekly for the past year.

The RJTF established 4 initial goals, approved by the Steering Committee:

1. Collaborate with individuals and community groups addressing racial injustice. We will be guided by League principles such as non-partisanship in identifying the individuals and organizations with whom we will partner.
2. Explore involvement with the proposed resident committee that will work with the police on safety in Amherst.
3. Seek to diversify the membership of the Amherst League, following the National and State League Principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
4. Create a communication stream in both the Amherst League and the local community about issues of racial justice and legislative efforts by the state LWV.

One of our early actions was to arrange for Prof. Traci Parker, UMass Professor of Afro-American Studies, to be the speaker for the League's Opening Meeting. She gave an inspiring talk, with much to think about as we move forward.

In September, we [proposed](#) that the committee being formed to review policing in Amherst be called the Resident Safety Committee, with a broader mandate to clarify what safety means in Amherst to different people and different communities and to suggest new ways of organizing policing and safety.

The Community Safety Working Group has indeed solicited input from community members on what they need to feel safe and their recommendations cover a range of potential solutions to the safety issues identified.

In keeping with the League's commitment to provide non-partisan information on important issues, we researched racial equity data publicly available for Amherst, including demographics, employment and income, housing, health, education, policing and justice, and Town governance.

Our report, [Indicators of Racial Equity and Justice for Amherst](#), concluded that, while considerable regional information exists, very little data analyzed by racial categories is available specific to Amherst. Furthermore, the large student population in Amherst can overwhelm the statistics, making it difficult to determine demographics and income levels for the non-student residents. We have met with the Town Manager, Human Rights Commission, Community Safety Working Group, Reparations For Amherst, and others to discuss our report and recommendations and have had significant impact.

One area highlighted in our [Indicators of Racial Equity and Justice for Amherst](#) report is the need to bring diversity to Town staff and the many boards and committees. Recently, we have completed a report, [Building a More Diverse Amherst Town Government](#), which lays out a strategy for diversifying Town staff as well as the volunteer Town boards and committees.

We have had very positive meetings with the Town Manager and we will be reaching out to other groups and committee chairs in the upcoming weeks and months. We are hopeful that League members who have served on Town boards and committees can help us in this effort.

Collaborating with other racial justice groups in Amherst is desirable, in order to encourage a focus on common goals. On March 23rd we hosted a Zoom forum “Working Toward Racial Equity: A Roundtable and Dialogue” ([recording.](#)) Six groups presented their work on Racial Justice issues, followed by Q&A. 185 people attended, including a number of League members. We are exploring creating a Network of such groups, attempting to bring communication and resource support to these groups. We were invited to the radio program “Black in the Valley” to discuss this event.

In order to deepen our understanding of racial justice in our community and the actions all of us can take, we will be hosting a Brown Bag Series via Zoom for League members and the public, starting in June. The series will feature discussion with individuals who are working on racial justice in Amherst. Please stay tuned for the announcement of our first Brown Bag gathering.

In our monthly write-ups for the e-Bulletin, we include suggestions for relevant resources on racial justice issues, including videos, webinars, books, and more.

In the coming year, we hope to strengthen the network of racial justice groups to foster communication, share resources, and organize around common goals. Also, given the enthusiastic interest at our Roundtable & Dialogue in March, we hope to nurture the larger community’s interest in the efforts of these groups and build momentum of support. To follow up our report on [Building a More Diverse Amherst Town Government](#), we plan to engage in discussions with many community members to help bring diversity to our Town boards and committees. We will continue to schedule Brown Bag sessions to keep us all informed about how our Town can move forward on racial justice. The recommendations from the CSWG will also be a focus for our work.

We will strive to stimulate conversation and learning amongst LWVA members as we all try to grow and learn to understand the history and current realities of institutional racism that we all live with in this country. In conclusion, we are committed to the 2020 LWVUS Resolution, Motions #136 and #139:

Motion #136 - We Resolve First, That the League advocates against systemic racism in the justice system and, at a minimum, for preventing excessive force and brutality by law enforcement. We also call for prompt actions by all League members to advocate within every level of government to eradicate systemic racism, and the harm that it causes; and,

Motion #139 - We Resolve Second, That the League help our elected officials and all Americans recognize these truths to be self-evident; that Black, Indigenous and all people of color (BIPOC)

deserve equal protection under the law; and that we demand solutions for the terrible wrongs done, so that regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and gender identity or sexual orientation we may truly become a nation “indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

More information about RJTF, our reports, the recording of our event, and more can be found on the [LWVA website](#).

Respectfully submitted,

Marcie Sclove, Chair, Racial Justice Task Force