

**Things You Should Know About the Alameda County Probation Department's Capacity  
Building Grant to the League of Women Voters of Oakland  
(or Frequently Asked Questions)**

The Alameda County Probation Department (Department) has awarded the League of Women Voters of Oakland (LWVO) a two-year grant for approximately \$68,000. The grant will fund LWVO activities to enhance its ability to encourage informed and active participation in government.

LWVO will use this money to strengthen the organization's operations through

- Improved volunteer recruitment
- A more robust communications strategy
- Updated technology, management systems and governance
- A development plan based on long-term sustainability
- An increased knowledge of the reentry community and potential partners to reach them
- Helping LWVO be more effective in making democracy work for all

**Why did the LWVO apply for this grant?**

- It is a rare opportunity to have the time and financial resources closely to examine our work and improve our approach to our mission.
- Its primary aim is to improve our effectiveness sustainably by investing in LWVO's core power, our volunteers, through building our internal expertise and knowledge in various areas.
- It allows us to focus on the issues most relevant to LWVO and its future existence.
- It will help us increase civic engagement among all Oaklanders. Civic engagement, including voting, within the reentry community is associated with reduced recidivism. Yet, these citizens are often unaware of their suffrage rights and LWVO does not traditionally reach them. This grant will help LWVO grow its knowledge of this community and of the diverse community organizations serving reentrants that could be LWVO partners.

**What's the timetable?**

The LWVO started the process of applying for this grant in the summer of 2016. Based on an initial application, in July 2016 the Department selected LWVO, along with about 80 other community-based organizations, to receive an initial \$5,000 grant to support our proceeding to the next stages of the process. We subsequently completed a capacity assessment and a capacity building plan. LWVO completed a detailed response to the County's Request for Application (RFA) in early September 2016, based on the capacity assessment and building plan work. We requested \$70,000. We received notice of the award for \$68,199 a few weeks later. We were one of 18 awardees out of 55 RFA applicants.

We are currently in the contract negotiation stage. We anticipate that the contract will be in place this spring, at which time work under the grant can begin. The grant will run for two years from the date we enter into the contract.

**Can the LWVO use grant funds for regular operations?**

No. This is not a program, operations or services award, whose funds can be spent on existing LWVO work or even directly on providing new services. It is to build organizational capacity in designated areas so we can be a stronger, more efficient organization in position to provide community services and programs more effectively and sustainably.

### **How is the LWVO planning to use the funds?**

There are seven areas where we will be building our capacity:

*1. Strategic Planning* - Working with a consultant, we will build a three to five year strategic plan aimed at

- Meeting some of the civic engagement needs of the diverse population of Oakland, including supporting the reentry community;
- Constructing a comprehensive civic education curriculum that can be tailored to engage different demographics;
- Developing a voter registration program that includes actively engaging the reentry community;
- Collaborating with community organizations that support the general and reentry populations;
- Measuring the attainment of these goals.

*2. Organizational Structure: Volunteer Services* - Working with a volunteer coordinator to

- Conduct a survey to assess volunteer needs from LWVO's and individuals' perspectives;
- Increase the recruitment of volunteers representative of the Oakland population;
- Better focus, direction and coordination of volunteer functions within the organization;
- Develop volunteer job descriptions, policies, procedures and standards;
- Develop a reporting mechanism that will provide timely statistical and activity reports on volunteer participation and feedback.

*3. Governance and Leadership* - Working with a consultant to

- Develop performance targets for the Board of Directors;
- Develop effective structures, processes, skills, tools, frameworks to drive a positive Board culture;
- Develop strong succession plans and crisis management strategies;
- Explore how the Board can identify and leverage opportunities;
- Examine and adopt as appropriate good governance approaches, assumptions, questions and practices.

*4. Management Systems and Operational Ability* - Working with interns and a technology consultant to

- Codify and archive accrued institutional knowledge by creating or updating templates and procedural manuals;
- Conduct a technology maintenance needs assessment;
- Build a technology plan to make sure that hardware and software systems are appropriately maintained;

- Provide implementation training on the most efficient means of communicating with leadership, members and the community;
- Research, identify and implement a suitable database and management reporting system tied to the organization's evaluation, learning and reporting needs as identified in the strategic plan;
- Evaluate application and deployment issues, including training and competency audits;
- Evaluate hardware and software needs going forward.

*5. Partnerships, External Relations, Networking* - Working with a community-relations, communications or networking coach to

- Develop and strengthen relationships with and understand the civic engagement needs of a cross-section of community groups, including groups that interact with the reentry population;
- Increase LWVO visibility, especially among diverse populations;
- Integrate networking in our recruitment strategy;
- Stimulate networking at our programs and events;
- Train LWVO to identify and pursue collaboration opportunities, shared learning with other community organizations, and other relationship-building opportunities;
- Build LWVO skills in communications and image management;

*6. Fundraising, Revenue Generation, and Fiscal Sustainability* - Working with a fundraising consultant and a short term intern to

- Build and execute a diversified development plan, implement information technology systems, and develop strategy to maintain and actively engage major donors;
- Oversee grant seeking, including research and reporting;
- Build internal LWVO knowledge of relevant aspects of fundraising practices;
- Develop creative publications to support fundraising activities.

*7. Reentry Knowledge and Best Practices* – working with a program evaluator and local reentry specialists/service providers to

- Host peer learning forums and networking opportunities for Law enforcement and CBOs, as well as public learning on AB 109/SB 85 (Public Safety Realignment);
- Evaluate LWVO programs to ensure dosage and intensity of services meets minimum best practice recommendations;
- Provide training for volunteers to build competence and skills related to individuals returning from prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities, as well as skills in gender sensitivity and cultural competency; and
- Focus on collaboration with the community groups working with the reentry population, where LWVO can learn more about best practice models to address reentry client risks and needs regarding civic engagement.

### **How will the work under the grant be handled?**

- The LWV of California (LWVC) is the fiscal sponsor of the project, the contracting counter-party with the Department. LWVC will provide limited fiscal administrative support to LWVO's implementation of the grant.

- Dawna Williams, At Large Member on the LWVO Board of Directors, serves as the LWVO Account Manager. She coordinates all activities under the grant, is the main point of contact on grant implementation for LWVC and the Department, and reports to and is responsible to the LWVO Board.
- The LWVO Board oversees the Account Manager and, through her, grant implementation.
- The Account Manager will oversee seven Team “Leads”, who will each provide direction, instruction and guidance on one of the seven areas of capacity building detailed above, and will work with retained consultants, volunteers and interns. Team Leads will set goals, delegate tasks, set deadlines, collaborate, monitor progress, track budget, report progress to the Account Manager, etc. The Strategic Planning Team (and its Lead) will be the first to be recruited and launched as its work will inform the other areas of the project. Subsequent Teams will work concurrently or sequentially, as appropriate.
- A Guidance Committee supports and provides guidance to the Account Manager. Members of the Guidance Committee, in addition to the Account Manager, are Louise Rothman-Riemer, Momy Flores-Bauer, Madeleine Nelson, Deborah Shefler and Treva Reid.
- Regular status updates on the grant will be made at LWVO Board meetings.
- All public records related to the grant and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the grant will be posted on the LWVO website and updated as necessary.

### **Why has the County made this funding available?**

Pursuant to criminal justice reforms over the past few years, the responsibilities and resources of the Department have expanded. Assembly Bill (AB) 109 and AB 117, commonly known as the "Public Safety Realignment Act," reassigned housing, supervision, and parole/probation responsibilities for many reentry individuals from the State to local jurisdictions such as Alameda County. Along with realignment came a permanent funding stream for counties allowing them the discretion and flexibility to implement their new responsibilities, including by awarding grants to community-based organizations like LWVO that could partner with the county in accomplishing its increased workload.

Alameda County realized that there are a number of existing organizations that could assist it. To help assure that these organizations will have the resources necessary to support the County’s realignment work, the County chose to engage those organizations in capacity building, i.e., internally evaluating their current operations and spending time and money to address areas for improvement. To implement this approach, the County established the Community Capacity Fund (Fund).

Ours is one of a number of grants the Department has made through the Fund to expand the number and diversity of community-based agencies that have the capacity effectively to contract with the Department to improve outcomes for the realigned community, which is part of the reentry community. As this population grows, the County wants to ensure that local organizations wanting to serve this population will be sustainable. While increasing the pool of potential contractors is the County’s primary motivation in offering this funding, receipt of this grant does not require or obligate us to contract with the County for other activities.

Please see Alameda County Probation Department’s page [here](#) and Alameda County Health Care Services Agency’s helpful page [here](#) for further information on the origin of this program and funding.