

Item 5 - Democracy Dollars Program Report

Advanced Policy Analysis

(Small) Money Talks: Strategies to Implement the Democracy Dollars Program in the City of Oakland

By

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On behalf of the City of Oakland Public Ethics Commission
Oakland, California

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Executive Summary

The Public Ethics Commission meets the City's long-awaited need to re-design its outdated campaign finance system with *Democracy Dollars*, a public financing program that distributes four \$25 vouchers for Oakland registered voters and eligible non-voters to give to participating candidates to help support their campaign. It is designed to allow more Oaklanders to run for office by reducing the outsized need to raise and spend private funds, increase public participation in the electoral process by way of voting and/or donating to political campaigns, and reduce the influence of large donors. The PEC needs to confront challenges created by the City's built environment that have historically kept Oakland residents from engaging meaningfully. Failure to do so will result in only increasing the participation of residents who are *already* politically engaged.

This report describes why young voters, non-English speakers, and residents with disabilities are likely to have disproportionately lower participation in the Democracy Dollars program without targeted outreach, as finding the space, time, and resources to engage are interconnected with how these communities experience the City of Oakland day to day. The PEC's community engagement and outreach plan should deepen the roots to civic engagement, expand program capacity with coalition groups, and create collective settings for trust and mutual accountability. Key questions I investigate include:

- What kind of strategies should the PEC prioritize to build an inclusive education program for Democracy Dollars? How can the PEC leverage existing City and community infrastructure to circulate information about the program?
- How can the PEC partner with the existing and ongoing coalition for successful program implementation? Does the coalition represent all Oakland's diverse communities?
- What kind of tools can the PEC use to assess community needs related to public campaign financing?
- How should the PEC communicate the impact of the program so that it is accessible to all Oakland residents?

Success in Democracy Dollars outreach looks like high levels of opportunities for participation that leads to voucher usage at the same rates as Oaklanders, especially among young voters, non-English speakers, and residents with disabilities. I recommend the PEC to pursue the following programming:

1. Provide a school-wide Democracy Dollars demonstration in Oakland Public High Schools
2. Conduct usability testing for the program materials
3. Have qualified translators that can provide nuance to the conversation at informational workshops, in addition to translation services codified in Oakland's Language Access Plan and the Fair Elections Act.

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Introduction

By the time a vote is cast, money has determined who is on the ballot and every candidate's policy agenda, regardless of the outcome of the election. The concept of large donors strong-arming elections is nothing new, as campaigns are unquestionably expensive. In our post-*Citizens United* world¹, elections are increasingly shaped by "dark money"² tied to special interests that have a direct stake in the outcome of the contest on which they are spending.³ Moreover, Super Political Action Committees (SuperPACs)⁴ allow wealthy donors to raise and spend unlimited funds, by way of independent expenditures⁵, which drowned out the donations of ordinary people. This influence of big money, compounded by other loopholes in current campaign finance laws, undermines our democracy.

Public campaign financing, in which the government provides financial support to candidates running for office, offers a promising solution to this distortion. These programs exist in various forms and are voluntary.⁶ For example, the San Francisco Ethics Commission administers a program where qualifying mayoral and supervisorial candidates who opt-in can access an initial grant for their campaign expenses.⁷ Candidates are also able to receive matching funds distributed at a six-to-one ratio for every dollar of contributions received up to \$150 from any single contributor.⁸ That means a non-incumbent mayoral candidate can raise a maximum of \$150,000 in private funds that is then matched to \$900,000 in public funds to spend on their campaigns. Other case studies include Oakland's Limited Public Financing (LPF) program that was adopted in 2001, aimed to enhance competition by giving candidates money in the form of reimbursements for campaign expenses.⁹ An evaluation found that it drove more competitive races, both in the number of contested races and incumbent margin of victory, and non-incumbent candidates who received public funds performed better across the board than non-incumbent candidates who did not receive public funds.¹⁰

¹ The *Citizens United* ruling by the Supreme Court in 2010 allowed corporations and unions to spend unlimited amounts of money on political campaigns by equating spending with protected free speech under the First Amendment (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 2010).

² "Dark money" is undisclosed spending aimed at influencing political outcomes.

³ Brennan Center for Justice. (2016). Secret Spending in States. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/secret-spending-states>

⁴ A Super PAC is a Political Action Committee (PAC) that cannot contribute directly to candidates and instead makes only independent expenditures.

⁵ An independent expenditure is money spent by a third-party person or entity who is not a candidate for office to support or oppose the election of a candidate with whom that third-party is formally unaffiliated.

⁶ In order to participate in public campaign financing programs, candidates must opt-in to spending limits and some restrictions on private fundraising.

⁷ San Francisco Ethics Commission. (2004). Public Financing Program. Retrieved from <https://sfethics.org/guidance/campaigns/candidates/public-financing-program>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Public Ethics Commission. (n.d.). Limited Public Financing Program. City of Oakland. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/limited-public-financing-program>

¹⁰ Evaluating Oakland's Limited Public Financing Act, Greg Gonzales, Goldman School of Public Policy, UC Berkeley, Spring 2013.

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In November 2022, Oakland voters passed Measure W, creating a new public campaign finance program called *Democracy Dollars* (DD), with 73.92% support. It repealed the Limited Public Financing Act (LPF) program in the City of Oakland, and established additional measures to increase the strength of small donor contributions. The new program provides Oakland registered voters and eligible non-voters with money that they can give to participating candidates to help support their campaigns. The measure amends Oakland Municipal Code and the City Charter to appropriate a total of \$4 million dollars to be distributed in the form of four \$25 vouchers (\$100 total) per eligible resident to donate to participating candidates.¹¹ Like all forms of public campaign financing, candidates must opt-in and are required to meet criteria such as accepting spending limits. The Democracy Dollars program is designed to: 1) allow more Oaklanders to run for office by reducing the outsized need to raise and spend private funds, 2) increase public participation in the electoral process by way of voting and/or donating to political campaigns, and 3) reduce the influence of large donors. The Program, which is expected to launch in 2026, is administered by the Public Ethics Commission (PEC).

Problem Statement

The Public Ethics Commission meets the City's long-awaited need to re-design its outdated campaign finance system with Democracy Dollars. However, the promise of bringing equity to the political process relies on a program infrastructure that is supported by partnerships with City staff, liaisons and community based organizations (CBOs) for engaging Oakland's diverse communities. This means confronting the institutional constraints to political participation that have historically kept Oakland residents from engaging meaningfully. Without doing so, programs will miss the opportunity to increase the participation of residents who are not already politically engaged. This report identifies and describes the communities that are likely to have disproportionately lower participation in the Democracy Dollars Program without targeted outreach. Then, it will consider implementation strategies and policy solutions that the PEC can employ to enhance broad public participation. Key questions I investigate include:

- How does our current civic infrastructure enable Oaklanders to participate in Democracy Dollars?
- What kind of strategies should the PEC prioritize to build an inclusive education program for Democracy Dollars? How can the PEC leverage existing City and community infrastructure to circulate information about the program?
- How can the PEC partner with the existing and ongoing coalition for successful program implementation? Does the coalition represent all Oakland's diverse communities?
- What kind of tools can the PEC use to assess community needs related to public campaign financing?
- How should the PEC communicate the impact of the program so that it is accessible to all Oakland residents?

¹¹ Oakland, California. (2024). Democracy Dollars. Retrieved from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/democracy-dollars#:~:text=The%20Democracy%20Dollars%20Program%20offers,to%20help%20support%20their%20campaigns>

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Section I of this report provides an overview of the operational details of Democracy Dollars, which includes the requirements to participate and the distribution of the vouchers, to address the program's goals and objectives. It also includes an analysis that demonstrates its potential impact on a candidate's campaign funds. *Section II* identifies structural barriers that may prevent particular communities from engaging in the program and the electoral process more broadly. It also summarizes best practices from interviews with City staff who are directly engaged in community outreach and representatives from community-based organizations that work to lessen the gaps in civic participation. *Section III* evaluates implementation strategies that the Public Ethics Commission should consider to maximize participation and achieve the program's intended outcomes. Lastly, recommendations are provided on how the design of the program education and outreach plan for Democracy Dollars can be most accessible to all Oakland residents.

SECTION I

Democracy Dollars Program (Measure W)

The Oakland Fair Elections Act finds that candidate contributions come disproportionately from the City's wealthiest and whitest neighborhoods.¹² Candidates rely primarily on these large donors to sustain their campaigns, and as a result, they spend a significant portion of their time engaging with only those who can contribute. A 2018 in-depth report initiated by the PEC reveals this incentive from interviews with local campaign workers who recognize that they "spend the vast majority of energy and resources on high propensity voters...because, consultants say, that is how you win an election."¹³ The creation of the Democracy Dollars program ensures that candidates who opt-in to public financing have the ability to raise enough money from public funds (assigned by residents in the form of vouchers) to keep their campaign viable. This gives every resident, regardless of wealth, the means to contribute as campaigns are most responsive to two groups: donors and voters.¹⁴

Every eligible resident receives four \$25 Democracy Dollar vouchers (a total of \$100) by mail to the address listed in the voter registration records. Eligible non-voters are able to request vouchers that are then distributed electronically, with an option for print.¹⁵ In order for a campaign to receive these funds, the candidate and the candidate's treasurer must agree to comply with contribution and expenditure limits¹⁶, alongside at least one training for the program.¹⁷ They are also required to do the following: 1)

¹² Oakland Fair Elections Act, O.M.C. § 3.15.020 (2022).

¹³ Comments made by Dyana Mardon, summarizing interviews with local candidates during her research for Enhancing Political Engagement in Oakland: Barriers and Solutions, Dyana Mardon, MPP, Spring 2018.

¹⁴ Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2016). Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(3), 545–558.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24877480>

¹⁵ The Public Ethics Commission was developing the technology needed to administer the program at the time this report was written. Refer to the Public Ethics Commission for more operational details.

¹⁶ The maximum contribution limit a candidate can receive from an individual is \$600 beginning January 1, 2023. Expenditure limits vary by office as outlined in the Oakland Fair Elections Act, O.M.C. § 3.15.140 (2022).

¹⁷ Oakland Fair Elections Act, O.M.C. § 3.15.080 (2022).

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candidates for Mayor will personally participate in at least five (5) public debates or forums; candidates for any office other than Mayor will participate in at least three (3) public debates or forums, and 2) the candidate will submit to audits by the Commission.¹⁸ Other certified candidates for the office shall be invited to participate in order for it to count. Additionally, candidates must receive a minimum amount of qualifying contributions¹⁹ for the covered office that they are seeking. These requirements ensure that Democracy Dollar proceeds are given to candidates who are committed to enlarging public discussion and participation in elections. More importantly, debates and forums give prospective candidates, who might not otherwise run without the availability of public funds, a formal and legitimate platform to communicate their policy goals and positions.

The Fundraising Gap in Oakland Elections

The 2022 Mayoral election cost approximately \$1.9M, with the top two candidates spending \$500,000 on average even after agreeing to voluntary spending limits.²⁰ Campaign literature and mailings, consultants, and paid media account for the largest part of spending across the board—candidates are racing to get their message out. Other costs to a campaign operation include paying campaign staff, polling and survey research, and paraphernalia.²¹ While candidate quality and the overall local political environment factor into a successful campaign, fundraising takes precedence in a highly contested race. A large donor base can demonstrate the breadth of a candidate's support or a candidate's ability to use their own personal wealth. Regardless, they easily drown out the messages of candidates who are unable to match their spending. This further entrenches the idea that only wealthy Oaklanders are financing campaigns, and having money is a prerequisite to seek for elected office.

Below is a map that displays the total individual contributions made to *all* candidates who ran for Mayor by neighborhood. The shades of blue indicate the level of contribution, with North Oakland/Adams Point donating the most (\$204,081). In North Oakland/Adams Point, about seventy-one individuals maxed out their contributions at \$900 each (a total of \$63,000). The columns represent the proportion of contributions where individuals maxed out. These individuals represent 0.0009% of the adult population in North Oakland/Adams Point neighborhoods. On average, the donors who are making

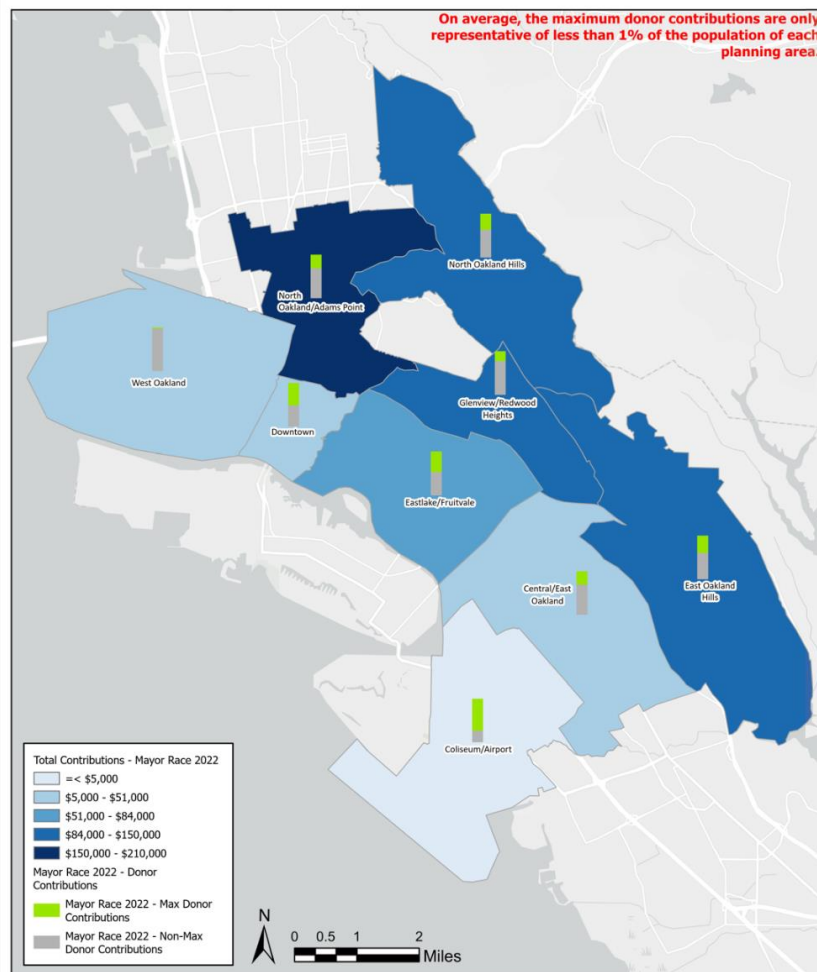
¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Qualifying contributions vary by office as outlined in the Oakland Fair Elections Act 3.15.080. For Mayor, at least four hundred (400), including ten (10) qualifying contributions from each City Council district.

²⁰ City of Oakland Public Ethics Commission Public Portal for Campaign Finance and Lobbyist Disclosure; Data export from efiled FPPC Form 460 -496 transactions for most recent filings. Last accessed 5/3/24.

²¹ Ibid.

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contributions at the maximum allowed are only representative of less than 1% of the adult population of each planning area.²²²³

The PEC's *Race for Power* report reveals that this way of campaigning perpetuates existing racial and income disparities. Oakland residents who are donating and voting at low rates are not targeted because it is less costly for campaigns to only engage high-propensity voters who are guaranteed to turn out every election. Their report shows that donations are clustered in zip codes that are non-representative of Oakland's diverse communities.²⁴ In turn, it leaves the impression that campaigns do not care about the interests of certain residents, which have historically been communities of color. A glimpse of this perception is underscored in a public survey conducted by

the PEC where "44% of online respondents who identified as people of color and said candidates and elected officials do not care...[compared to] 28% of white respondents."²⁵ Democracy Dollars helps to bring in more people in the campaign's radar by giving them the direct means to contribute, as the same survey found that 86% said they believe that money influences who is elected, 74% said that money

²² OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox. (2020, July 22). City of Oakland. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/oakdot-geographic-equity-toolbox>

²³ The boundaries of planning areas are determined by the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) Geographic Equity Toolbox to prioritize neighborhoods based on concentrations of people with demographic factors determined to have experienced historic and current disparities.

²⁴ Public Ethics Commission. (2020, September). *Race for Power: How Money in Oakland Politics Creates and Perpetuates Disparities Across Income and Race*. City of Oakland. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Report-Draft-Race-for-Power-9-2-20-FINAL.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

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influences political outcomes, and 72% said that money influences the amount of access a person might have to an elected official in Oakland.”²⁶

The Incentive for Non-Incumbent Candidates to Opt-in to Democracy Dollars

More candidates are increasingly participating in the Seattle’s Democracy Voucher program, with ten in the first mayoral contest that it was available.²⁷ The following thought experiment demonstrates the incentive to opt-in to Democracy Dollars for candidates running in a highly contested race in Oakland. Among the candidates for Mayor in 2022, non-incumbents receive the greatest potential increase in campaign funding if public financing was made available²⁸. Figure 1 displays the potential impact of public financing for Allyssa Victory, a non-incumbent candidate who placed fourth in the race. Victory received a total of \$9,208 in campaign contributions from at least 214 individual donors in Oakland.²⁹ For this race, the maximum contribution an individual can give to Victory is \$900.³⁰ Eight individuals donated the maximum amount (a total of \$7,200), and Allyssa Victory herself contributed \$200. Small contributions financed the rest of her campaign. If Democracy Dollars were available for this race, which means if every single one of her *donors* had an additional \$100 in Democracy Dollars to give, Victory could have increased her campaign funding from \$9,208 to at least \$21,400.³¹

²⁶ Public Ethics Commission. (2020, September). Race for Power: How Money in Oakland Politics Creates and Perpetuates Disparities Across Income and Race. City of Oakland. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Report-Draft-Race-for-Power-9-2-20-FINAL.pdf>

²⁷ Herwig, J. A., & McCabe, B. J. (2021). Broadening Donor Participation in Local Elections: Seattle Democracy Voucher Program. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/Program%20Data/Reports/2021%20Seattle%20Democracy%20Voucher%20Report.pdf>

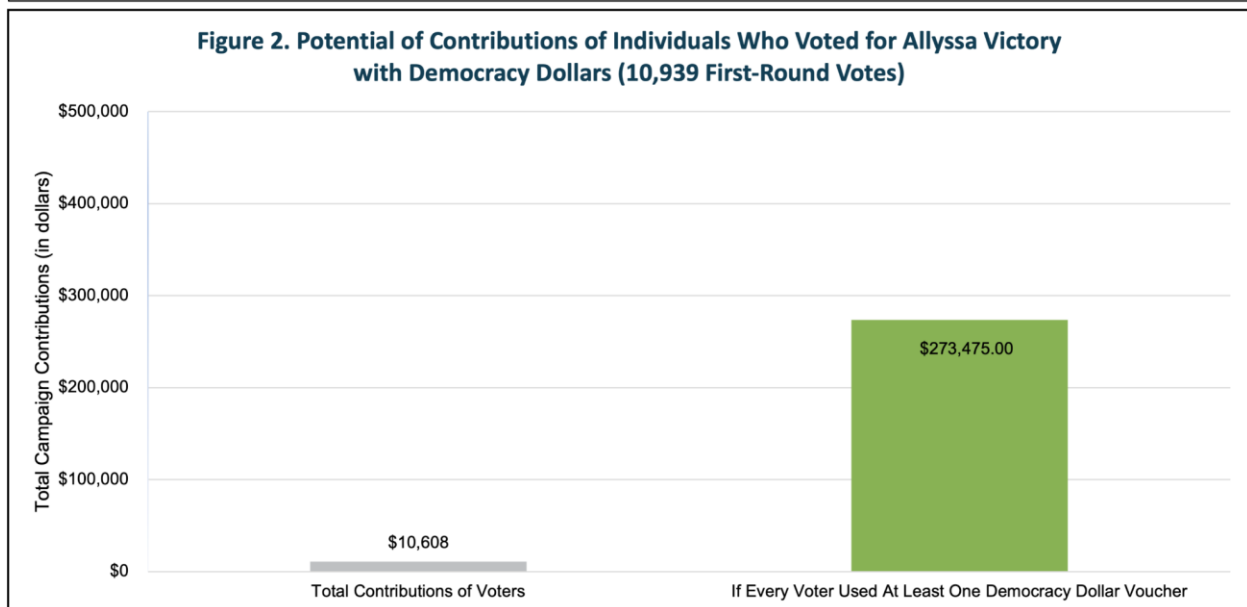
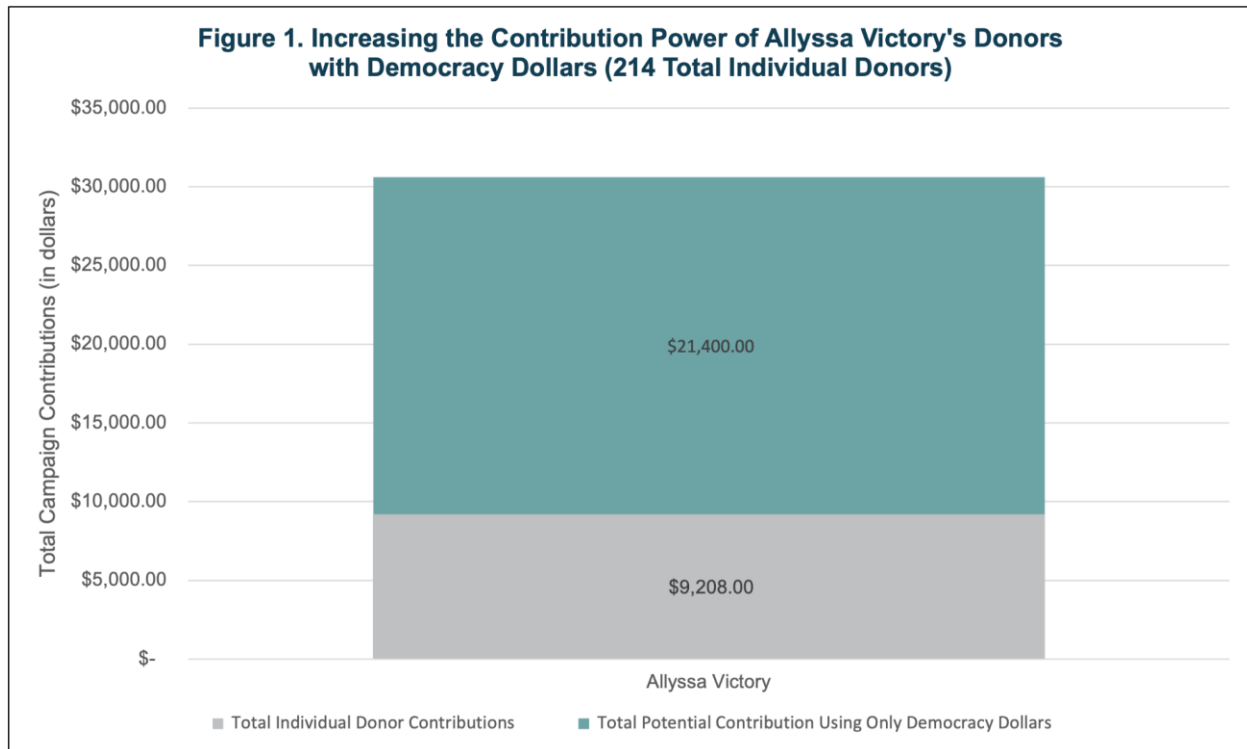
²⁸ Public funds, by way of reimbursement for eligible campaign expenses, were only available to District City Council candidates under the Limited Public Financing Act (LPF). Democracy Dollars will be available to the mayoral race and other at-large elections.

²⁹ 214 translates to the number of reports filed indicating that the donation came from individuals in Oakland. Campaign finance law requires campaigns report itemized contributions of \$100 or more with contributors’ name, street address, employer and occupation. Contributions under \$100 are reported in the aggregate as a “lump sum,” and therefore the donor location is unknown.

³⁰ Contribution limits have been lowered to \$600 as of January 2024.

³¹ 214 donors multiplied by the total worth of four vouchers (\$100).

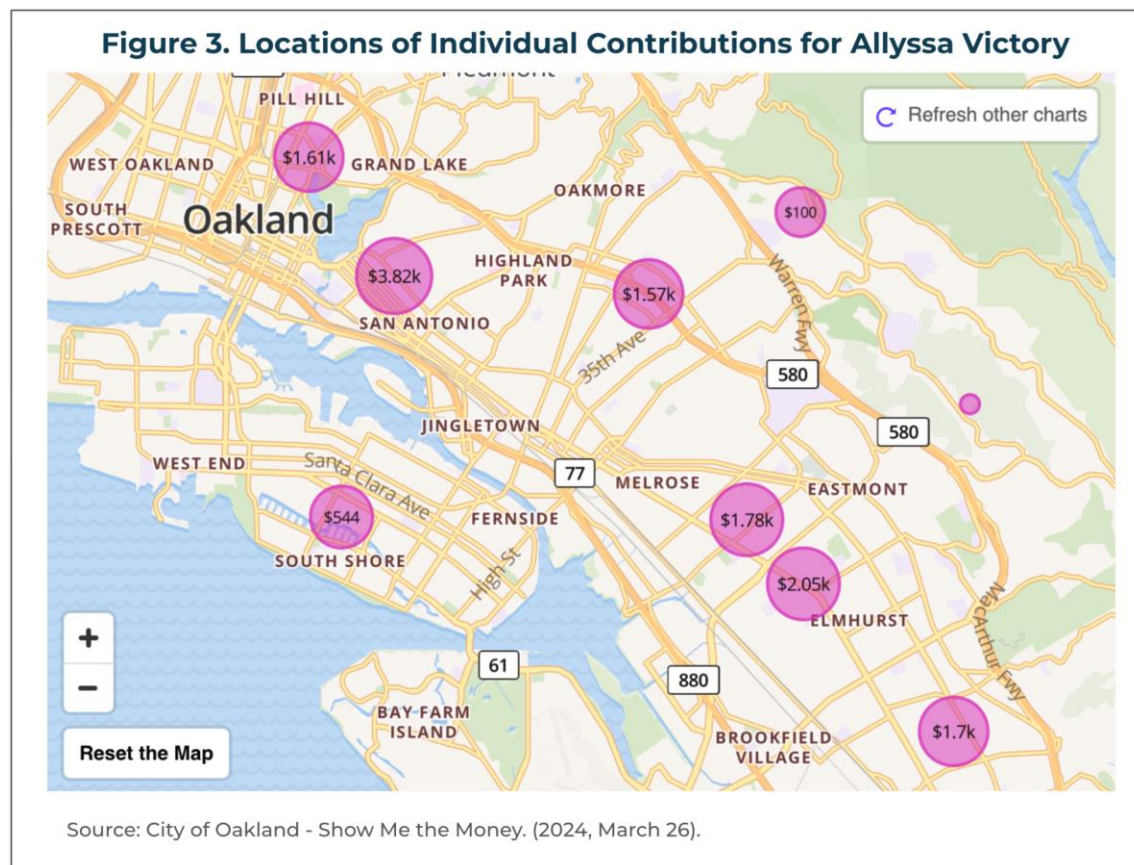
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The power of small donors is magnified in this scenario. Figure 2 shows the potential funds if every person who *voted* for Victory had the means to contribute using Democracy Dollars; Figure 3 displays where these contributions are located. In the first round of ranked-choice voting, Victory received a total of 10,939 votes that could have been worth \$273,475, if those voters each gave at least one \$25 voucher to her campaign. This would have been a 2,475% increase from her actual campaign funds. Figure 4 illustrates what it would look like if Victory had \$273,475 to spend compared to the top candidates, all else equal.

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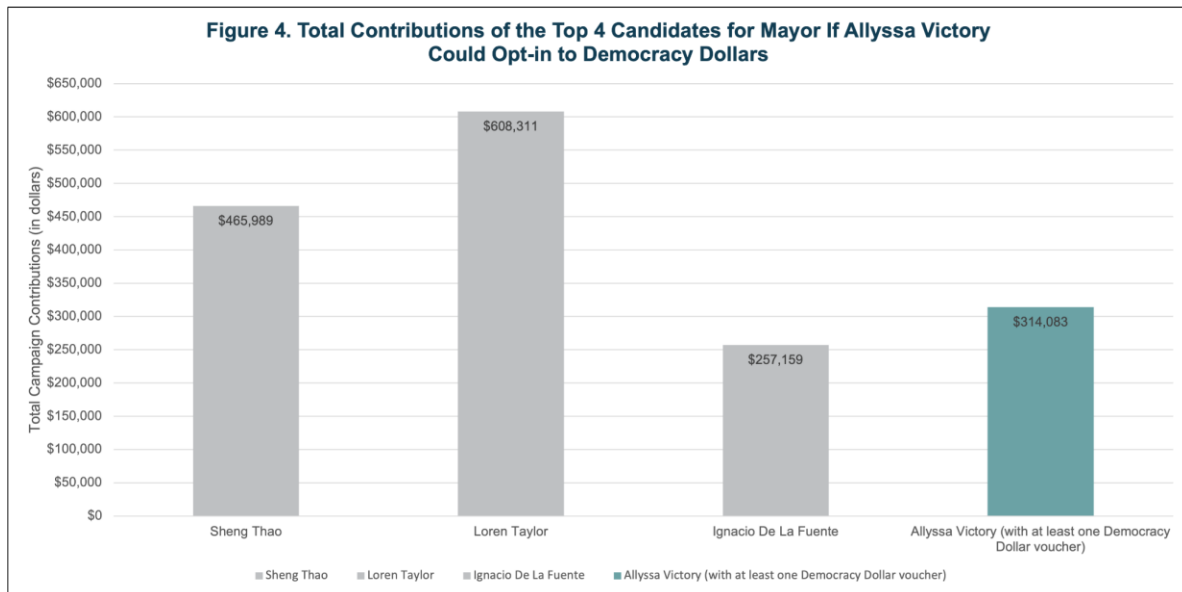
Money spent is strongly associated with political success.³² When looking at the breakdown of each campaign's cost-per-vote (CPV), the top three candidates spent an average of \$15 per vote³³. Victory spent \$2.43 per vote. A lower cost-per-vote means that campaigns can reach and persuade voters without spending as much money compared to their opponents. A significant increase in budget would have allowed Victory to shift spending to other areas that might not be traditionally prioritized for voter education and outreach, ramp up advertisements in key demographics, or expand their staff. It means candidates can devote more time considering policy issues from residents, rather than fundraising, engaging more people in the broader electoral process. This hypothetical scenario might have allowed Victory to advance further in the race. While that might not translate to a guaranteed win, opting-in to Democracy Dollars would have significantly lowered the barrier to raising this amount of money.



³² Malbin, M. J., & Glavin, B. (2017, November 9). CFI's Guide to Money in Federal Elections 2016 in Historical Context. The Campaign Finance Institute. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/2016Report/CFI_Guide_MoneyinFederalElections.pdf

³³ Cost-per-vote (CPV) is calculated by taking the total expenditure spent divided by the number of first-round votes they received.

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SECTION II

As discussed in *Section I*, making political information accessible can often be contingent on a well-resourced campaign. Building a non-partisan civic infrastructure that gives Oaklanders the capacity to engage and exercise political agency is crucial to a successful Democracy Dollars program. To do so, this section pinpoints three structural barriers that may prevent different types of communities from engaging in the program and the electoral process more broadly.

This section also summarizes best practices from interviews with City staff directly engaged in community outreach and representatives from community-based organizations that work to lessen the gaps to civic participation. These best practices are assessed through the City of Oakland's Department of Race and Equity (DRE) under their administrative instruction (AI). Additionally, I will be using the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT)

OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox

This report uses this toolbox as a way to draw attention and funding to neighborhoods that may have been historically and currently overlooked by city services and planning processes. Level of priority is determined by the following demographic factors:

- People of Color
- Low-Income Households (<50% Area Median Income)
- People with Disability
- Seniors 65 Years and Over
- Single Parent Families
- Severely Rent-Burdened Households

Geographic Equity Toolbox as a reference to where the communities I describe are concentrated in the City. Planning areas that are designated as “high” to “highest” priority are neighborhoods where more in-depth community outreach is needed to understand their specific needs. West Oakland, Downtown, Eastlake/Fruitvale, and Central/East Oakland are planning areas that have the largest concentrations of people to have experienced historic and current disparities. This report refers to these designated planning areas as neighborhoods.

Structural Barriers to Participation in the Democracy Dollars Program

Civic engagement does not occur in a historical vacuum. The structural barriers discussed in this section are some examples of how our current civic infrastructure can mimic long standing patterns of exclusion. As administrator of the Democracy Dollars Program, it is imperative that the PEC consider strategies that are contextualized within the potential challenges described below. *A Democracy Dollars program that advances equity requires targeted outreach to Oakland's young voters, non-English speakers, and residents with disabilities.* These communities face the greatest obstacles to participation

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as finding the space, time, and resources to engage are interconnected with how they experience the City of Oakland day to day.

Spatial Proximity to Electoral Activities

Where residents learn about the program matters. Forums/debates are the main point of contact for both the participating candidates (required) and residents (who are most likely learning about Democracy Dollars for the first time), since vouchers can be submitted by personally delivering it to a candidate or a representative of the candidate who is registered with the Commission.³⁴ For the 2022 Mayor race, these events were held closer to Downtown and North Oakland (if not hybrid or fully virtual) depending on the host organization. Every attendee, who is an eligible resident, would not have had to overcome additional hurdles to redeem their Democracy Dollars if they choose to assign their vouchers then. However, this point of contact is limited to those who can learn about and get to the events. For example, a car-less resident who lives around the Elmhurst neighborhood that wants to attend a forum hosted in Jack London Square would face an average commute of one hour by public transit, assuming that there's a direct line to the venue.³⁵ Since public transportation is the ultimate enabler of proximity, its inefficiencies can significantly impede a resident's ability to participate in electoral activities. A study on transportation barriers for residents found that focus group participants living in East Oakland or closer to San Leandro felt “trapped” or constrained, faced with long walks to bus stops without benches and dependent on public transit that was often crowded and unreliable.³⁶ The study concludes their findings that severely rent-burdened individuals face the greatest barrier to accessing public transit.³⁷ This is reflected in OakDOT's designated “high” and “highest” priority neighborhoods as well. This underscores how civic capacity is greatly affected by historical transportation and land use planning decisions that have disproportionately unmet the needs of low income communities of color.³⁸ While mailing Democracy Dollars directly to the Commission is another option, an individual would need to find a separate time to do so—raising the cost to participation even higher (while losing the opportunity to directly interact with candidates). Civic organizations recognize this barrier, and thus, are prioritizing activities that bring election-related information directly to cultural places where residents organically gain knowledge about the City. For example, Oakland League of Women Voters (LWV) recently expanded their voter registration drives and education at Oaktoberfest in the Dimond District—a family-friendly beer festival.³⁹

³⁴ Oakland Fair Elections Act, O.M.C. § 3.15.110 (2022).

³⁵ Candidate forums were hosted at the following locations: Jack London Square (Oakland waterfront), Temple Sinai (North Oakland), Castlemont High School (East Oakland), and Laney College Theater (West Oakland).

³⁶ Pan, A., & Shaheen, S. (2021, March 1). Strategies to Overcome Transportation Barriers for Rent Burdened Oakland Residents. UC Berkeley Transportation Sustainability Research Center, 100. <https://doi.org/10.7922/G237771N>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Creger, H., Espino, J., & Sanchez, A. S. (2018, March 12). How to Make Transportation Work for People. The Greenlining Institute. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Mobility-Equity-Framework-Final.pdf>

³⁹ Interview with Gail Wallace, President of the Oakland League of Women Voters, conducted on March 25, 2024.

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Potential Activities at Community Events in High Priority Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Promote Democracy Dollars launch by signing up residents up for vouchers● Help residents learn how they can update their mailing address with Alameda County● Help residents request vouchers in their preferred language● Help residents request replacement vouchers● Help residents learn about the participating candidates● Help residents learn how to complete and use their vouchers

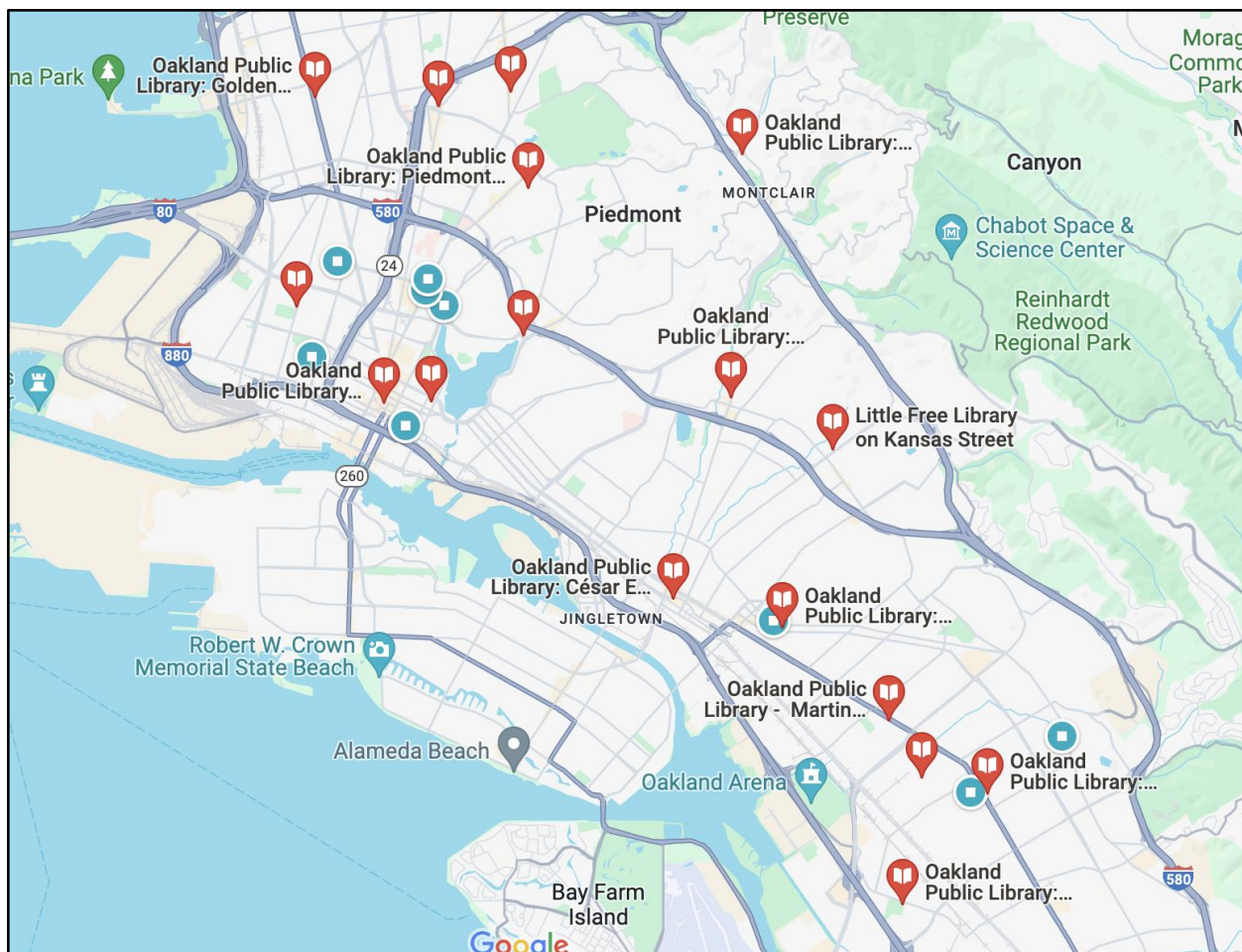
Information Engagement and the Digital Divide

The media infrastructure dictates *what* and *how* residents learn about Democracy Dollars. As political participation shifts primarily online, those who are not equipped to interact with technology are likely to remain disengaged. Existing literature suggests that the digital divide, which is the gap between people who can use and access the Internet effectively and those who cannot, reinforces existing inequities in the highest poverty census tracts.⁴⁰ In Oakland, these areas are likely to be Eastlake/Fruitvale, Central East Oakland, and Coliseum/Airport given their priority designations by OakDOT.⁴¹ The twenty-two public libraries throughout the City help lessen this gap by providing public access to computers and the Internet—free community events and workshops are also available to the public. Additionally, the PEC’s ongoing partnership with Open Oakland to create user-friendly prototypes for the program is crucial to accessibility.

⁴⁰ Sylvester, D. E., & McGlynn, A. J. (2010). The Digital Divide, Political Participation, and Place. *Social Science Computer Review*, 28(1), 64-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439309335148>

⁴¹ The priority neighborhoods depicted informed the OAK WiFi program, an initiative that provides free internet access for students, seniors, job seekers, small businesses, the underserved, and unconnected.

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Current approaches to information accessibility require individuals to seek out and access information about programs and services first. Solely depending on the Internet to raise awareness about the program can also create inefficiencies for those who do not have the *skills* to discern mis- and disinformation in our increasingly complex political environment. While information technology reduces the cost to political communication,⁴² online platforms (through their business models) have an incentive to reinforce existing dispositions and ideologies of its users.⁴³ These epistemic bubbles imitate deliberation without any exchange of ideas and opinions. An individual who turns to Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to learn about Democracy Dollars for the first time is likely to be systematically constrained (through algorithms) in interacting with only those who share like-minded views about issues adjacent to democracy. This is especially a risk for this program as introducing major electoral reforms can evoke feelings of skepticism.⁴⁴

⁴² Drew D., Weaver D. Voter Learning in the 2004 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter? *J. Mass Commun. Q.* 2006;83:25–42. doi: 10.1177/107769900608300103.

⁴³ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 2012, Penguin Books, New York: NY.

⁴⁴ Comments made by Former Executive Director of City of Oakland Public Ethics Commission, Whitney Barazoto, on October 20, 2023.

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Whether online or in-person, City staff and community liaisons repeatedly emphasize that language access goes far beyond just the distribution of translated materials.⁴⁵ Currently, Oakland's Language Access Plan and the Fair Elections Act codify specific services needed to ensure that "limited-English proficiency/speaking persons (LEP or LES), have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in City programs and activities."⁴⁶ This includes having qualified translators that can provide nuance to the conversation and using advertisements placed through radio, television, newspaper, online, and other forums that serve or reach LEP populations. Almost all high priority planning areas of OakDOT's equity toolbox have more than 8.5% of their adult residents and over who have limited English language ability.⁴⁷ The PEC must be able to guarantee that non-English information about the program is accurate, complete, and uniform—that is, the quality of translation should not be defined solely by the interpreter themselves. These languages are Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog, Khmer, and Korean.⁴⁸

Disillusionment in City Government

Low levels of political participation are reflected in voter turnout disparities shown in the map below. Despite California's robust electoral administration that has made it easier to vote, these disparities persist in high priority planning areas that have the highest proportion of residents of color.⁴⁹ Areas such as North Oakland Hills or Glenview/Redwood Heights, where more residents actively participate in civic activities, are likely to continue their engagement through Democracy Dollars.⁵⁰ Making non-English materials available, continuous presence of language interpreters to facilitate conversation, and deep canvassing are some best practices that civic organizations invest largely in to mobilize voters.⁵¹ As an example, members of the Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC) and Oakland Rising are door-to-door canvassing in the flatlands.⁵² This is the scenario we see in Seattle's Democracy Voucher

⁴⁵ Summarized comments made by Lakshmi Rajagopalan (AICP, Planner), City of Oakland General Plan, Community Engagement and Khalilha Haynes (Planner), City of Oakland General Plan, Community Engagement, on March 11, 2024.

⁴⁶ City of Oakland. (2022). Language Access Services, Plans & Forms. City of Oakland. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/documents/language-access-services-plans-forms>

⁴⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019.

⁴⁸ The City arranges for the translation of written materials into languages spoken by threshold LEP language groups (At least 10,000 LEP) and into LEP language groups (At least 1,000 LEP) upon request. The City Administrator annually issues guidance identifying the Threshold LEP Language Groups.

⁴⁹ Alameda County Registrar of Voters. Voter File 2022. Alameda County, CA, 2022.

⁵⁰ Herwig, J. A., & McCabe, B. J. (2021). Broadening Donor Participation in Local Elections: Seattle Democracy Voucher Program. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/Program%20Data/Reports/2021%20Seattle%20Democracy%20Voucher%20Report.pdf>

⁵¹ Summarized comments provided by the BayPEC coalition representatives on March 14, 2024.

⁵² Ibid.

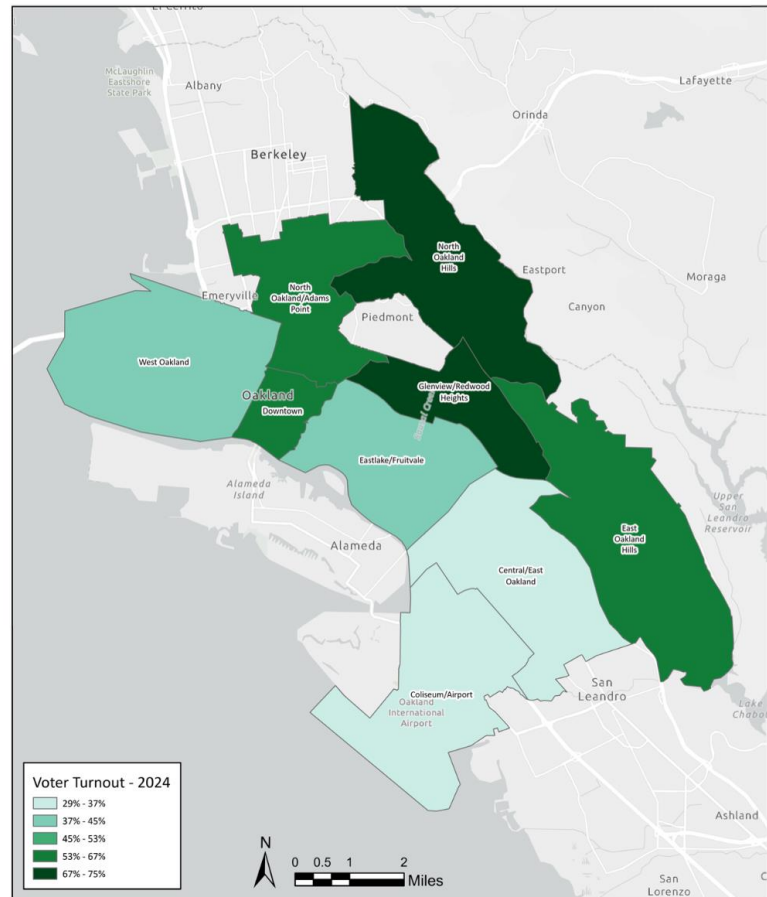
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Program (DVP). Voucher users closely follow the voting patterns of their electorate— “these include people who are regular voters in local elections, older residents, those who live in majority-white neighborhoods, and those who live in upper-income neighborhoods.”⁵³

Trust in government has long been linked to political participation. The cycle of disengagement—where residents do not feel like the City reflects their needs, and thus, participate less in the political process—creates a challenge for Democracy Dollars. High levels of disillusionment in government means the program may face more resistance or cynicism from Oaklanders, even if the Measure was passed with overwhelming support.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, concerns about the program should be met with a willingness to address them constructively, as there is a long history of reforms, electoral reforms as well as others, actively being used as tools to suppress community power.

Section III

In the previous section, I illustrate how Oakland’s built environment shapes who is likely to learn about and participate in the program. A conventional response to those challenges might be to change the *technique* in how we conduct outreach to increase participation (i.e., requiring public meetings and hearings to solicit feedback or tabling at community events to impart information). **Community engagement, in the context of Democracy Dollars, should focus on developing an inclusive process where its partners can identify the creative solutions necessary to address the local needs related to civic participation.** To do this, I will first establish inclusive principles that can form the environment for



Voter Turnout by Planning Area -
Oakland, CA

⁵³ Herwig, J. A., & McCabe, B. J. (2021). Broadening Donor Participation in Local Elections: Seattle Democracy Voucher Program. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/Program%20Data/Reports/2021%20Seattle%20Democracy%20Voucher%20Report.pdf>

⁵⁴ Mardon, D. (2018). *Enhancing Political Engagement in Oakland: Barriers and Solutions*. AWS. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/OAK070808.pdf>

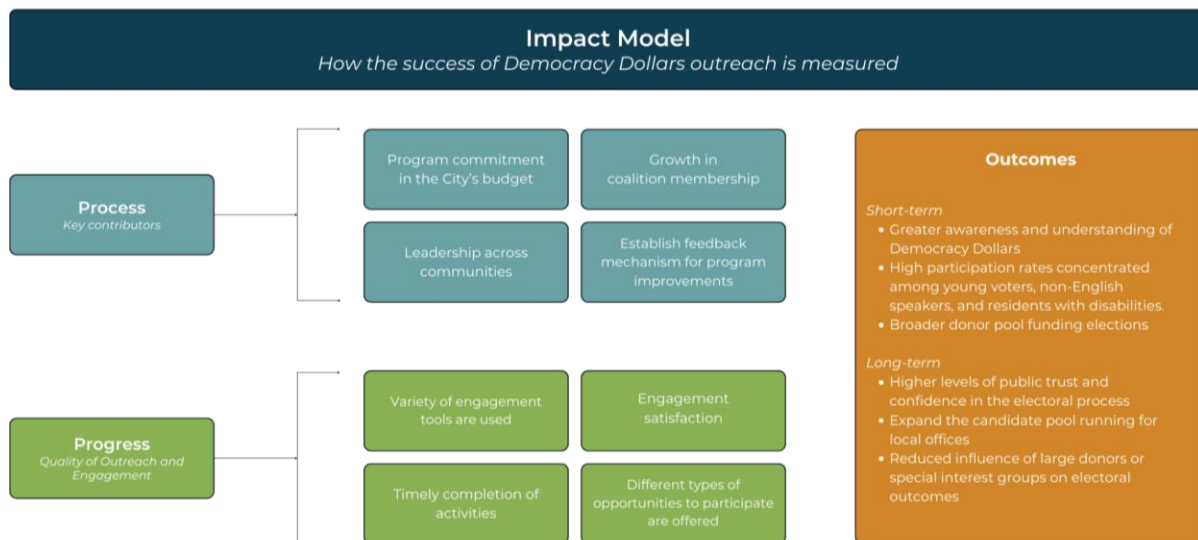
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a successful program implementation. Then, this section describes what kind of strategies and tools are needed to: 1) deepen the roots to civic engagement; 2) expand program capacity with coalition groups, and 3) create collective settings for trust and mutual accountability.

Defining Success

The goal is to illuminate gaps in service that might prevent communities who have been traditionally marginalized from the local political process. Success in Democracy Dollars outreach looks like high levels of opportunities for participation that lead to voucher usage at the same rates as Oaklanders overall, reflected among young voters, non-English speakers, and residents with disabilities. Guided by the principles outlined in this section, this can be measured in two ways:

1. *Process*: How did the PEC create the environment in which residents engaged in the program?
2. *Progress*: How effective are the outreach strategies in achieving the goals of the program?



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Characteristics of Success

Efficiency	Effectiveness	Equity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do our existing partnerships engage diverse segments of the population?• Are the identified communication channels effective for reaching our target audiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many residents who were exposed to our outreach efforts have attended informational sessions, candidate debates, and used their vouchers?• What level of interaction are we receiving from residents? (e.g., online likes, shares, comments, or attendance at events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do outreach and engagement efforts reach communities who are least likely to participate?• How well do residents understand the impact of using their vouchers?

Maintaining the coalition that championed Measure W helps ensure that the policy is accountable to the people. Seattle’s Democracy Voucher Program (DVP) continuously partners with organizations who were primarily involved since its inception, with over half of their outreach fund allocated to those that serve permanent residents and other immigrant communities.⁵⁵ These CBOs are supported with a toolkit to help onboard and train their own staff. In addition to committing funding for contracting opportunities in the program budget, the PEC can continue to uplift community partners through three levers: 1) learning and facilitation; 2) amplifying work done by network; 3) convening and providing. Below is a spectrum of social change strategies that envisions where these activities are necessary for effective implementation. These are further discussed under implementation strategies.

⁵⁵ Interview with Rene LeBeau and Fedden Amar, Seattle Democracy Voucher Program, conducted on February 14, 2024.

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Working in
the existing
political
system



Challenging
the existing
structure to
re-orient it

Direct service	Automatically mail vouchers to Oakland registered voters. Create a user-friendly website for anyone that wants to learn about Democracy Dollars. Explore media and public relations strategies to advertise the program in the City.
Program Education	Host forums, debates, and other electoral activities in community events to expand the likelihood a resident will learn about the program. Printed program materials should be available to take home that informs how to use Democracy Dollars vouchers. For example, the PEC can create activities where residents are given a clear opportunity to engage, such as partnering with voter registration drives during High School Voter Education Week. Invite local news organizations to amplify awareness of the program.
Base building	Budget for a community-based organization to be a vendor/contracted via Request for Proposal (RFP) to conduct outreach. The PEC directly provides program training and technical support for candidates and community organizations to strengthen their own understanding of the program.

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Policy advocacy	Expanding the coalition by pursuing new partnerships and garnering support for program implementation from City leaders.
Organizing	Coalition partners utilize their existing digital organizing communication strategies for get-out-to-vote (GOTV) efforts to promote the use of Democracy Dollars during critical campaign times.

Implementation Strategies

1. Deepen the Roots to Civic Engagement by Mobilizing Institutions

Champion the Youth

Bringing youth (16 to 18 year olds) into the formal political process can lead to sustained civic participation in their adult lives.⁵⁶ The PEC should create an *explicit* opportunity for youth to engage with the program by partnering with public high schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Current youth's perceptions of their ability to amass political power underscores that "too many young people—often those from historically marginalized groups—continue to say they don't feel well-informed or qualified enough to participate in political life."⁵⁷ Democracy Dollars can create an early, positive civic experience that helps instill confidence in the political system.

Partnering with the Alameda County Registrar of Voters during their annual High School Voter Education Weeks (HSVEW) is an excellent opportunity for program education. In 2023, the registrar held these events in five high schools with the goal of boosting voter registration.⁵⁸ Priority should be given to high schools in areas who are not currently participating in HSVEW and have the lowest levels of voter turnout. These high schools are McClymonds (West Oakland), Fremont (Eastlake), and Castlemont (East Oakland), which have a 100% total enrollment of minority students and almost 100% of them are economically disadvantaged.⁵⁹

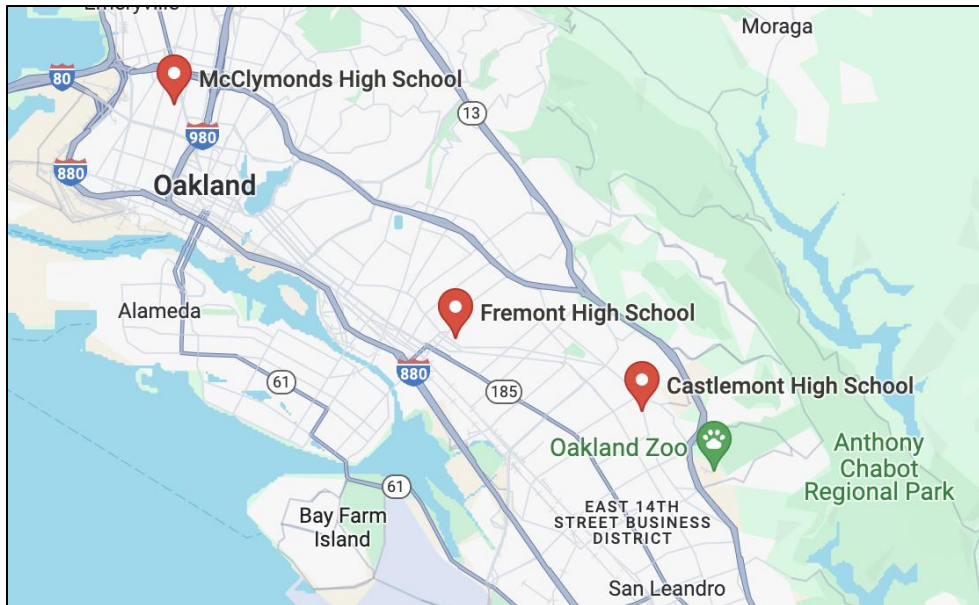
⁵⁶ Booth, R. B. (2023, January 30). Youth Are Interested in Political Action, but Lack Support and Opportunities. Tufts' CIRCLE. Retrieved May 1, 2024, from <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-are-interested-political-action-lack-support-and-opportunities>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ High School Voter Education Weeks were held at Oakland Unity High School, Oakland Military Institute (twice), The College Preparatory School, McClymonds High School. The California Department of Education does not require schools to participate, rather it is optional with possible support provided.

⁵⁹ U.S. News & World Report. (2024). *High Schools in Oakland Unified School District Public School District | California | Best High Schools | US News*. USNews.com. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/california/districts/oakland-unified-school-district-110567>

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Having students be the champions of Democracy Dollars can ripple awareness of the program to their households and surrounding communities. Young people are oftentimes the primary messengers for their parents who may not have time to learn about the program or have limited English language and technological ability. Many also interact with City offices and bureaucracy on their family's behalf. When we invite them to share it with family, friends, and neighbors, the PEC should have printed program materials and an online toolkit they can take home. It should be similar to the one provided by the California Secretary of State for their Back-to-School Pre-registration Toolkit, which includes a public service announcement (PSA) by students urging 16- and 17- year olds to pre-register to vote, sample social media posts, downloadable posters, brochures, and useful links to learn about Democracy Dollars.⁶⁰ The PEC should adapt those materials to the program.

Engage the Union Workforce

Scholarship on political participation has increasingly emphasized the role of mobilizing *institutions* to voter turnout.⁶¹ Most notably, labor unions have a positive impact on turning out members in presidential and congressional elections (compared to non-union members), controlling for individual-level characteristics such as education, income and occupation.⁶² Members avowedly practice democracy through collective bargaining and voting for their union representatives—a fundamental aspect of organized labor. Therefore, unions are well-situated to facilitate the participation of Democracy Dollars because they already serve as central venues for socialization.

⁶⁰*Back To School Pre-Registration Tool-Kit :: California Secretary of State.* (2024). California Secretary of State. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/back-school-pre-registration-tool-kit>

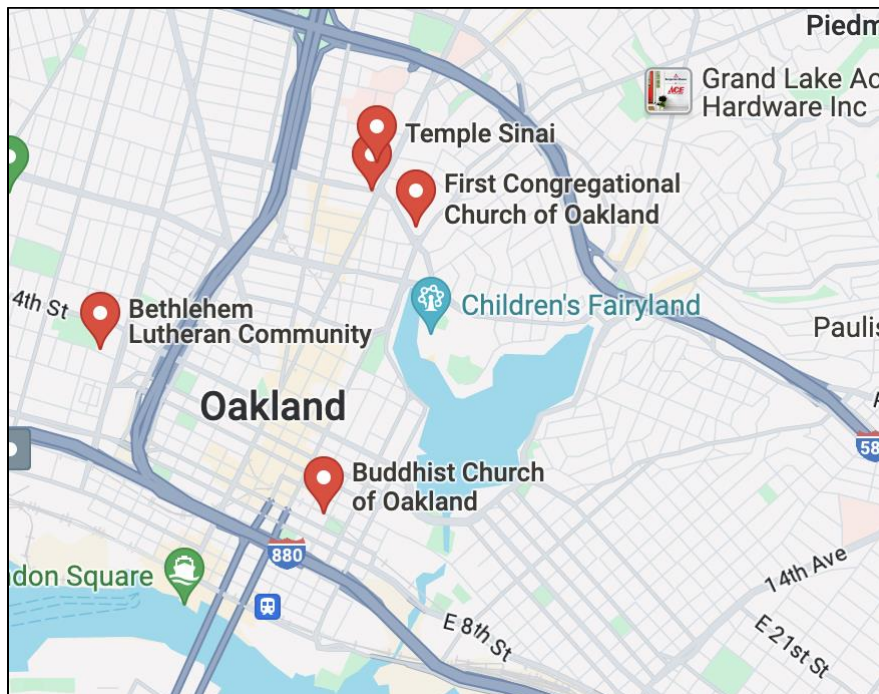
⁶¹ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Harvard University Press, 1995); Hahrie Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations and Leadership in the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶² Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, "Unions, Voter Turnout, and Class Bias in the U.S. Electorate, 1964–2004," *The Journal of Politics* vol. 69, no. 2 (May 2007), pp. 430–441, at p. 439.

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Connect with Churches

The PEC should offer informational sessions about Democracy Dollars in churches and temples. In addition, sponsoring free events like walking tours of Oakland's historic churches and temples can help bring other members of the community together.⁶³ Religious membership has historically fostered political participation—churches act as generators of skills necessary to civic life.⁶⁴ Churches in Oakland serve as places to not only convene for worship, but also as centers for organizing. During the Civil Rights Movement, Black churches and Black Panther Party (BPP) leaders routinely conducted political education for community members and took on issues such as police brutality, poverty, inadequate healthcare, and miseducation of Black youth.⁶⁵



2. Build Incentives to Participate through Public-Private Partnerships

Partnerships with direct service providers that connect residents to the City at-large can unify and scale efforts across different groups engaged in Democracy Dollars. Though public-private partnerships alone cannot substitute the need for the City to address the underlying challenges to participation more broadly, tapping into private sector capital increases the chances of building a strong pipeline. Below are areas where we can build incentives to participate in the program.

⁶³ In 2019, the City of Oakland held free walking tours of churches and temples. These highlighted First Presbyterian, First Congregational, First Christian churches, and Temple Sinai.

⁶⁴ *Religion and the Black Church*. (2024, March 26). Oakland Public Library. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://oaklandlibrary.org/content/religion-and-the-black-church/>

⁶⁵ McCutchen, S., Jeffries, J. L., & Dyson, O. L. (2013). *The Black Panther Party and the Black Church*. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/O_Dyson_Black_2013.pdf

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Transit

1. Partner with the Alameda-Contra Costa District Transit (AC Transit) and/or the *Transit* app, to incorporate interactive locations where a resident can learn about Democracy Dollars. For example, Santa Clara County offers interactive locations of vote centers where the user can “touch a check mark on the screen, information pops up, including an option for “directions to polling place” to plan a trip on VTA to that location.”⁶⁶ This can be adapted to the program by providing information about any events hosted by the PEC and its partners (e.g., workshop on how to use vouchers, candidate debates, voucher drop-offs). Bringing in groups who are engaged in voter registration drives to this partnership can provide convenience to residents: they can register to vote and learn about Democracy Dollars.
2. Explore paid advertisements on bus lines for program awareness. Bus lines such as the 57, 12, and ones that connect residents to BART have the highest potential for visibility.
3. Offer discounted rides to candidates forums and debates, or partner with nonprofit groups to provide free ride codes, through ride hailing apps like Lyft, to areas that aren’t as accessible.⁶⁷ This can be available during a program launch for Democracy Dollars.

Art

1. Integrate visual artwork into informational sessions/workshops to welcome who is in the room. For instance, the PEC can introduce Democracy Dollars through a community mapping exercise. This allows people to identify individual, community, and institutional assets in their neighborhood. A toolkit can be found [here](#).
2. Collaborate with groups like the Community Rejuvenation Project (CRP), Oakland Mural Superhero Project, and those involved in the Alice Street Mural Project to integrate Oakland’s rich history into the program paraphernalia. Art is a formidable tool to counter a history of invisibility by reshaping public narratives of justice in communities. The 1,000 murals throughout the City are the most visible examples of how public art can bring residents together and galvanize the community to take action.⁶⁸
3. Host a candidate forum or informational booth at Oakland’s First Fridays to facilitate new connections. Art-based civic engagement can lower the barrier to interaction, as artists bring authenticity and credibility to the work (especially when they are part of the community that’s being reached out to).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Valley Transportation Authority. (2020, October 30). *Interactive Locations of Vote Centers Now Available on Transit App*. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.vta.org/blog/interactive-locations-vote-centers-now-available-transit-app>

⁶⁷ Westhagen, A. (2018, June 7). How Lyft Works with Public Transit Agencies. Lyft. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.lyft.com/blog/posts/how-lyft-works-with-public-transit-agencies-across-the-country-to-eliminate-transportation-barriers>

⁶⁸ Oakland Murals | Oakland Street Art & Public Art Locations. (2024). Visit Oakland. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.visitoakland.com/things-to-do/arts-and-culture/murals/>

⁶⁹ Why Municipalities and Artists Partner. (2024). Municipal Artist Partnerships. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://municipal-artist.org/nuts-and-bolts/laying-the-groundwork/why-municipalities-and-artists-partner/>

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Technology

1. Integrate Democracy Dollars in the Open Data portal, so that residents can “track” voucher usage (similar to candidate contributions in “Show me the Money”).
2. Conduct usability testing where residents are presented with one of two versions of the program’s website and training videos. While it may be costly and time-consuming to undergo multiple iterations of this, success is contingent on how well it can meet the needs of its users. Focus groups can allow the PEC to be proactive about ensuring that the design is accessible.
3. Partner with The Center for Independent Living (The CIL) to provide assistive technology that makes it easier for residents with disabilities to interact with the program. Additionally, ensure that there is staff available to help residents fill out forms, address any concerns, and answer questions about the program.

3. Expand Program Capabilities through Collaboration with the Ongoing Coalition

The existing coalition for Democracy Dollars, which includes the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California, California Common Cause, League of Women Voters Oakland, Oakland Rising, Bay Rising, and many more, have an enormous wealth of power in their combined social capital.

Nationalized groups like the ACLU have strong networks with media outlets and are likely to have a dedicated communications staff. They can provide internal training to other coalition members on how to effectively provide language to journalists and news editors about Democracy Dollars. Groups like the Oakland League of Women Voters (LWV) and Bay Rising use political campaign software to assist them with managing tasks related to voter outreach, volunteers, and canvassing—tools that can be adapted to this program.⁷⁰ These local organizations, whose endorsements are highly sought after by candidates, play a critical role in grassroots mobilization since their relationship of trust in communities enables them to serve as a bridge.

Subsequently, the key to adapting to the changing needs and priorities of Oakland’s diverse communities is growing the coalition. To do so, the PEC needs to formalize relationships with potential partners early-on to account for bureaucratic hurdles that can slow down the formation of new projects within Democracy Dollars. Manifestations of bureaucracy are often the inflexibility to established procedures (which can hinder the PEC’s ability to respond to the evolving needs of its partners), slow decision-making (where the need for approval from different agencies lead to missed opportunities for timely community engagement), and administrative burden (where time, resources, and staff are consumed by paperwork rather than doing outreach).

Work in Reciprocal Relationships with Communities

An implementation process built upon affirming community knowledge and power is more likely to be effective in addressing the needs with regards to participation in the program. The PEC should center reciprocal practices and relationships when doing outreach for Democracy Dollars. This requires confronting the power imbalance created by the presence of highly professionalized organizations. A conventional strategy might delegate leadership roles to those who are “legitimate,” as opposed to

⁷⁰ Summarized comments provided by the BayPEC coalition representatives on March 14, 2024.

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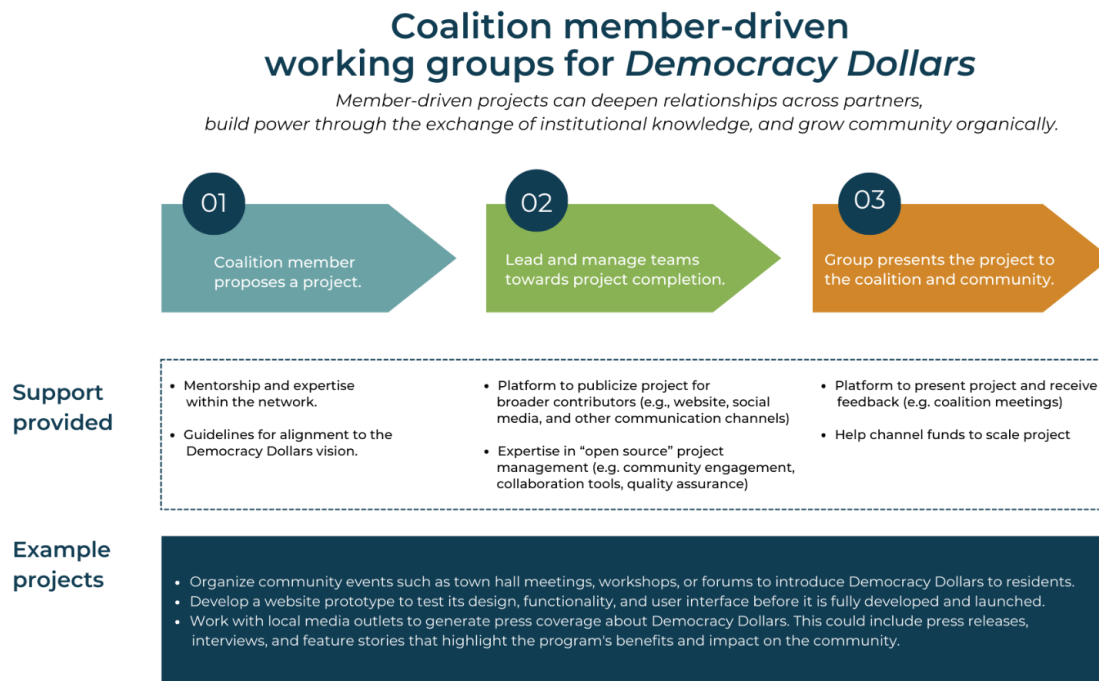
smaller, local partners. These top-down hierarchies can result in disempowering communities by reinforcing silos within the coalition.⁷¹ Furthermore, community engagement that is ad hoc (when we do it because we cannot get what we want without collaborating) is inherently transactional without an environment of trust and knowledge about the communities. An example of this would be routinely asking residents to “consult” projects by attending public meetings or providing feedback through City-led surveys *after* major decisions have been made.

Adopting a horizontal organizational structure between the PEC and coalition partners would allow the group to strategize program implementation around their talents and skills—roles and responsibilities are grouped and led by those who are best positioned to do them.⁷² It also forms a collaborative environment that is strategic and mutually beneficial. For instance, creating a coalition member-driven working group can deepen relationships across partners, build power through the exchange of institutional knowledge, and build community organically. Current and prospective coalition partners, such as BayPEC, should be asked to fill out the survey to help the PEC plan outreach activities and evaluate the participation for Democracy Dollars according to their ideas of what it should be. A standardized questionnaire was created as a tool to capture ongoing community attitudes, preferences, and other types of methods to communicate. This survey can be found in the Appendix A. A separate criteria should be developed with community members to consider requests for proposal (RFP)s. The PEC can use Seattle’s as a baseline and adjust accordingly (Appendix B).

⁷¹ Holley, K. (2016, May 23). Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Transformative Guide | Kirwan Institute. Kirwan Institute. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/civic-engagement-transformative-guide>

⁷²A horizontal organizational structure is where the decision-making authority is distributed evenly across partners, with a focus on teamwork and collaboration.

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Integrating Feedback and Setting up Cycles of Engagement

Engagement efforts, especially at the neighborhood level, should be shaped by the community members themselves. Creating an established process in the program to “close the loop” so that residents can see the impact of their contribution instills transparency and accountability.⁷³ After residents are invited to be a part of the outreach process, it is important that the PEC communicates how their involvement steered decision-making about the program. This does not have to only occur after the election day through formal program evaluation. Outcomes of every engagement activity should be well-documented and directly available to those who participated. Communities should be asked if the results are representative of their needs and priorities to ensure that the PEC (the administrators of the program) interpreted it correctly. This iterative process of feedback formalizes the PEC’s commitment to engage in continuous reflection and willingness to change course should initial engagement strategies not lower the barriers to participation for Democracy Dollars.

Ideas to close the loop

- Under each milestone of the project timeline, engagement summary reports should be available that includes themes of feedback received, items discussed, and photos. Consider developing an infographic to share on social media.
- Invite people to register their details to be kept informed of the project and future engagement opportunities.

⁷³ Holley, K. (2016, May 23). Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Transformative Guide | Kirwan Institute. Kirwan Institute. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/civic-engagement-transformative-guide>

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Time Horizons

The PEC can use this general framework to track milestones, monitor progress, and plan engagement activities that could be used for program evaluation after a cycle ends.

Horizon 1 6-12 months	Horizon 2 1-2 years	Horizon 3 3+ years
<p>1.1 Establish a budget for outreach and engagement.</p> <p>1.2 Launch low-hanging fruits: internal member and resource directory, online presence, program materials for print, streamline administrative process for RFPs</p> <p>1.3 Create working groups to prepare for initiatives like programming for High School Voter Education Week (HSVEW) and other community engagement activities.</p>	<p>2.1 Open source information to communicate with stakeholders and residents.</p> <p>2.2 Provide training and capacity-building activities to equip staff, candidates, and stakeholders with the skills and knowledge to use Democracy Dollars.</p> <p>2.3 Launch more heavy-lifting projects like conducting focus groups to test user experiences for program technology.</p>	<p>3.1 Further facilitate partnerships and collaborations that deepen civic engagement.</p> <p>3.2 Build PEC capacity to develop technology solutions that can better manage and automate data collection</p> <p>3.3 Advocate for long-term campaign finance reforms related to Democracy Dollars</p>

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Conclusion

Summary of Strategies

Implementation Strategies			
Deepen the Roots to Civic Engagement	Champion the Youth	Engage the Union Workforce	Connect with Churches
Build Incentives to Participate	Transit	Art	Technology
Expand Program Capabilities	Coalition member-driven working groups	New Partnerships	Integrate Feedback and Set up Cycles of Engagement

Recommendations

Ultimately, the three implementation strategies discussed above are needed to achieve the goals of Democracy Dollars. When there are clear opportunities to participate (by providing coalition partners the tools necessary to build the incentives to engage), residents can see the positive impact of contributing to political campaigns (which cultivates civic habits). This report recommends prioritizing the three activities to address barriers to participation and enhance awareness for young voters, residents with disabilities, and non-English speakers:

1. Provide a school-wide Democracy Dollars demonstration to Oakland Public High Schools
2. Conduct usability testing where residents are presented with one of two versions of the program's website and materials
3. Have qualified translators that can provide nuance to the conversation at informational workshops, in addition to translation services codified in Oakland's Language Access Plan and the Fair Elections Act.

The goal of this report was to anticipate any gaps in service that would significantly impede a resident from using their vouchers, and what the PEC can do to reduce the costs of those barriers. An early engagement infrastructure is required to establish an ecosystem of candidate and community members meaningfully engaged in.⁷⁴ While these activities are aligned with the goals of Democracy Dollars, cultivating in-depth partnerships with the communities described would ensure that it is tailored to their own needs and priorities. This requires the Public Ethics Commission to empower communities as stakeholders early on by providing positive, civic experiences.

⁷⁴ Public Ethics Commission. (2020, September). Race for Power: How Money in Oakland Politics Creates and Perpetuates Disparities Across Income and Race. City of Oakland. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Report-Draft-Race-for-Power-9-2-20-FINAL.pdf>

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Methodology

This project employs quantitative and qualitative research methods to capture the perspectives, sentiments, and concerns related to political participation and engagement. The foundational principle of building fair elections in the City of Oakland is to expand public participation in the local democratic process by empowering all residents with an opportunity to engage meaningfully. The project is particularly interested in the following purposes outlined in the Chapter 3.15.030, “Oakland Fair Elections Act”:

1. Creating a Democracy Dollars public finance program to expand the pool of candidates and **donors** for City of Oakland offices;
2. Ensuring all Oakland residents have an opportunity to **participate** in local elective and governmental processes and to have their voices heard in their local democracy;
3. Ensuring that candidates are able to raise enough money to **communicate** their views and positions adequately to the public, thereby promoting public discussion of the important issues involved in political campaigns

Quantitative

Oakland’s electoral data in terms of vote shares and voter turnout used in this report can be obtained from the Alameda County Registrar of Voters. Data on political contributions are available in the City of Oakland Open Data Portal. Additionally, the PEC’s “Show me the money” app is an interactive disclosure tool that puts information on the funding sources of local candidates for office and political committees. These, overlaid with the 2019 5-Year American Community Survey data used for OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox and the City’s updated Council District boundaries, are used to select the communities in Oakland that are likely to have disproportionately lower participation in the Democracy Dollars Program without targeted outreach.

OakDOT Geographic Equity tool

The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) Geographic Equity Toolbox was created as a way for the City of Oakland to prioritize neighborhoods based on concentrations of people with demographic factors determined to have experienced historic and current disparities⁷⁵. Identified “priority neighborhoods” are suggested to receive more in-depth community outreach in order to consider their specific needs for policies, programs, projects, and funding based on seven demographic factors:

- People of Color
- Low-Income Households (<50% Area Median Income)
- People with Disability
- Seniors 65 Years and Over
- Single Parent Families
- Severely Rent-Burdened Households
- Low Educational Attainment (less than a bachelor's degree)

⁷⁵ OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox. (2020, July 22). City of Oakland. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from <https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/oakdot-geographic-equity-toolbox>

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The “highest to high priority” areas classified by OakDOT closely follow literature and community perceptions on which groups are disproportionately excluded from the political process. About a third of the City population live in these neighborhoods⁷⁶. Therefore, this project recommends that the PEC should conduct targeted outreach in these areas.

Qualitative

As this project is conducted on behalf of Oakland Public Ethics Commission (PEC), the analysis is narrowly focused on how the commission can achieve the stated purposes by developing a robust community engagement strategy for the identified communities of interest. The author conducted **12** on-the-record interviews with City department staff, community based organizations (CBO) who work closely with the communities of interest, and any additional stakeholders identified in the process. Additionally, recommendations on *designing* the outreach plan incorporate feedback from the City’s Department of Race and Equity (DRE) and members of the Citywide Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG). Outreach to the groups are based on guidance from DRE, CEWG, PEC, and the author’s own networks in Oakland. Additionally, a standardized questionnaire was created as a tool to capture ongoing community attitudes, preferences, and other types of methods to communicate that would help the PEC understand how to best conduct outreach and evaluate the participation for Democracy Dollars. The form can be found in Appendix A.

A substantial literature review on community engagement and which demographic groups are less likely to participate in the political process were conducted in tandem. Academic findings are used to contextualize electoral data in terms of voting behavior, such as turnout and engagement. Lastly, the project draws important contrasts from the participants in Seattle’s Democracy Voucher Program (DVP)-the only, and first, program of its kind in the United States.

Limitations

Due to the limitations of the scope and time constraint, the recommendations for the outreach plan does not capture all communities nor can it isolate for a single demographic. For instance, outreach can look completely different for non-English speaking communities in different areas of Oakland, as these populations are not concentrated in one or two neighborhoods of the City. However, this does not mean they cannot be captured using the general outreach procedures outlined in the City’s Administrative Instruction (AI)⁷⁷.

Furthermore, campaign disclosure forms that contain contributions from donors are submitted by candidates and committees, which may include errors or are incomplete. Small contributions, anything under \$100, are aggregated as “lump sum,” so we do not know *exactly* where small donors are. However, contributions under \$100 make up a small proportion of contributions to candidates.

⁷⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019

⁷⁷ CITY OF OAKLAND. (2021, June 14). Amazon AWS. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Administrative-Instruction-580-Race-and-Equity_2023-03-22-211634_ykyr.pdf

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Appendix A

Standardized Questions for Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

Purpose: Establish standardized questions on community attitudes, preferences, and other types of methods to communication that would help the PEC understand how to best conduct outreach and evaluate the participation/engagement for Democracy Dollars.

Description

The Democracy Dollars Program provides Oakland registered voters and eligible non-voters with vouchers that they can give to participating candidates to help support their campaigns. These vouchers are in the form of four \$25 vouchers (\$100 total). The Program, which is expected to launch in 2026, is administered by the Public Ethics Commission (PEC). The PEC would like to use this questionnaire as an ongoing tool to capture community attitudes, preferences, and other types of methods to communicate that would help us support the outreach to all of Oakland's diverse communities.

Questions

General

Organization name/affiliation

Location of the community you serve **[check all that apply]**

- North Oakland/Adams Point
- North Oakland Hills
- West Oakland
- Downtown
- Glenview/Redwood Heights
- Eastlake/Fruitvale
- East Oakland Hills
- Central East Oakland
- Coliseum/Airport

What do we need to know to best reach your community members?

Sample answer: our organization holds events primarily in the evenings so more people can join.

Who are trusted organizations/messengers for your community (name/affiliation)? **[short answer]**

What are the preferred *methods* of communication when reaching out to your community members?

[check all that apply]

- Email listserv
- Texts
- Phone Calls
- Monthly meetings
- General program events

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- Social media
- Print materials (flyers)
- Website
- Other:

What are some challenges or barriers to *delivering information* about public services? **[check all that apply]**

- Technological barriers - internet or digital inaccessibility
- Language and/or cultural barriers - requires translating
- Trust/credibility
- Information overload - process is too complicated and time consuming
- Program is not their first priority
- Other:

What do you think could be done to help close or lessen the gap of individuals who do not participate in services/programs? **[short answer]**

- *Sample answer:* having someone to walk through the application process 1-on-1.

How do you know that outreach is effective? **[short answer]**

How do you receive feedback from your community about the impact of your program?

- Quarter/Yearly feedback survey
- In conversation with community members
- Public Forum
- Not applicable
- Other:

Are there any existing partnerships or collaborations your organization has been a part of that were successful? How so? **[short answer]**

Democracy Dollars Program

Do you want us to keep you updated with Democracy Dollars? **[yes/no]**

If so, who should be our primary contact so we can keep you informed/get your feedback as we implement? **[name/affiliation]**

How can we tailor our outreach and communication strategies to better align with your organization's needs and priorities? **[check all that apply]**

Would you be interested in partnering with the PEC for design and implementation?

How do you prefer to receive information from the PEC programs/initiatives? **[check all that apply]**

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Appendix B



Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund Request for Proposals

GOALS AND PURPOSE

The Democracy Voucher Program established this contracting opportunity to increase diversity and representation of Democracy Voucher usage and achieve greater equity for underserved communities.

The Democracy Voucher Program has budgeted \$225,000 to award 501(c)(3) community-based organizations to conduct outreach to underserved communities in Seattle. Of the overall budget, \$150,000 is dedicated to organizations focusing on lawful permanent resident enrollment and education.

Community organizations are asked to submit proposals that respond to one or more of the following:

- Promote civic engagement in underserved communities by educating residents about the Democracy Voucher Program.
- Provide program education and enrollment to lawful permanent residents with a high degree of cultural competency.
- Remove barriers to the program by providing in-language program education and distributing translated program materials.

PRIORITIES

We will prioritize applications from organizations that serve Black, Indigenous, People of Color, limited-English communities, lawful permanent residents, immigrant/refugees, People with Disabilities, East Africans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Latinx, low-income, LGBTQ+, unsheltered individuals, youth, and more.

Democracy Vouchers are available to Seattle residents who are:

- At least 18 years of age;
- Either a U.S. Citizen, U.S. National, or lawful permanent resident ("green card holder"); and
- A resident of Seattle for at least 30 days.

ELIGIBILITY FOR CONTRACT

- Organizations must be non-partisan.
- Organizations must be 501(c)(3) organizations working in Seattle, Washington [or have a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor].

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Proposals Due by 4:00pm on
September 16, 2022

CONTRACT TYPE

Organizations are invited to apply for this contract type:

- **Education and Enrollment Programs**
Up to \$15,000

ELIGIBILITY

501(c)(3) organizations [or organizations with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor] working in Seattle, Washington.

CONTACT

DemocracyVoucher@seattle.gov

(206) 727-8855

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FUNDING AVAILABLE

A total of \$225,000 in contracting opportunities are available to community organizations. Of the overall budget, \$150,000 is dedicated to organizations focusing on lawful permanent resident enrollment and education.

- **Education and Enrollment Program – May be up to \$15,000**
Contracts will be awarded to organizations that provide an ongoing education and enrollment program through **August 31, 2023**.

TIMELINE

- **August 17, 2022 and August 22, 2022** - Optional information sessions (may be held remotely).
- **September 16, 2022** - Proposals are due by 4:00pm.
- **October 10, 2022** - Notice of award.
- **October 17, 2022** - Awardee kick-off (may be held remotely).
- **November 9, 2022 and November 16, 2022** - Two required training sessions (may be held remotely).
- **December 1, 2022** - Outreach activities may begin.
- **August 31, 2023** - Outreach activities must be completed.

SUBMIT A NARRATIVE: QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA

Please submit a narrative answering the following questions. Proposals will be selected and funded based upon the degree to which the narrative meets the following criteria.

Please limit narratives to 5 total pages.

Review (insert fund webpage) for examples of DVP materials available for distribution.

1. Education and Enrollment Program Contract Criteria

Section	Questions for you to answer:	What we're looking for:
A. Target population (15 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your target population(s) for this outreach effort?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the organization know the needs of the communities?
B. Experience (20 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does your organization currently serve and interact with the targeted communities?• What are the roles of the staff and/or volunteers who will be implementing the outreach activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the organization have the expertise to effectively educate and engage residents?• Is the organization equipped to implement the proposed outreach activities?
C. Outreach Plan & Budget (65 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your strategies to increase engagement with the Democracy Voucher Program? Please describe your outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the organization identify specific strategies and plans that address the unique needs of the targeted communities?

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Appendix C

The Public Ethics Commission should manage a comprehensive outreach database that identifies City departments, community based organizations, and community leaders that should be prioritized when conducting outreach. A *sample* is provided below.

Name of Organization	Type	Notes
League of Women Voters Oakland	Voter Education	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus	Civil Rights	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
California Common Cause	Civil Rights	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
MapLight	Political	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California	Civil Rights	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
Bay Rising	Civics	Member of Bay Area Political Equality Collaborative (BayPEC)
Asian Pacific Environmental Network	Environment	Member of Oakland Rising
Causa Justa :: Just Cause	Tenant's Rights	Member of Oakland Rising
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy	Economic Development	Member of Oakland Rising
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights	Civil Rights	Member of Oakland Rising
Parent Voices Oakland	Education	Member of Oakland Rising
St Mary's Center	Health	Member of Oakland Rising
Mujeres Unidas Y Activas	Community Organizing	
Ella Baker for Human Rights	Civil Rights	
Mobilize the Immigrant Vote	Civic Engagement	
Youth Impact Hub	Civic/Youth	
Bay Area Urban League Young Professionals	Youth Development	
East Bay Asian Youth Center	Youth Development	
Youth Radio	Youth/Media	
Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY)	Community Organizing	
Creative Growth	Arts/Disability Services	
Disability Rights California	Disability Advocacy	
Center for Independent Living	Disability Advocacy	
Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy	Faith-based	
Oakland Community Organizations (OCO)	Faith-based	
Oakland Community Organizations	Faith-based	
Allen Temple Baptist Church	Multi-Service Faith	
Oakland Rising	Civic Engagement	
Open Oakland	Tech	
Mayor's Commission on Persons with Disabilities (MCPD)	Commission	
Ability Now Bay Area	Disability Advocacy	
Oakland Youth Commission (OYC)	Commission	
Oakland Youth Vote (OYV)	Youth/Community Organizing	
Alameda County Registrar of Voters	Voter Education	
Spanish Speaking Citizen's Foundation	Latino Advocacy/Education	
Center for Independent Living (CIL)	Disability Services	
The Unity Council	Social Equity	
Cultural Affairs Commission	Arts/Culture	

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