LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF EVANSTON

VOTER TURNOUT INITIATIVE
Local Program 2019-2020

Report
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Voter Turnout Initiative
League of Women Voters of Evanston

Introduction and Background
After winning the right to vote 100 years ago in 1920, the League of Women Voters was launched to encourage informed and active participation in voting and in government at the local, state, and national levels. When more Americans can participate in our elections, the outcome better reflects who we are as a country. The League works year-round at the local, state, and national levels to register voters and to enact voting reforms that best increase turnout and make our elections more free, fair, and accessible. www.lwv.org

Voter Turnout
Voter turnout in Cook County for the four Consolidated Elections from 2011 to 2017 was consistently less than 20% of registered voters. The youth vote has lagged far behind participation in other age groups and participation increases with age, as illustrated by the following national data from the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. Data from Cook County reflected similar trends.

Change in Voter Turnout in Midterm Elections by Age

Age group	2014 turnout %	2018 turnout %	Difference %
18-29	19.9	35.6	15.7
30-44	35.6	48.8	13.2
45-65	49.6	59.5	9.9
65+	59.4	66.1	6.7

(www.census.gov America Counts: Stories behind the Numbers - 2018 Midterm Elections)

The youth vote was the lowest in both elections. Voting increased significantly in all age groups in 2018, but the increase was highest in 18-29 year olds. Despite increases in the latest election, the youth vote remains low in all elections and turnout for local elections is low in all age groups. The League of Women Voters of Evanston (LWVE) decided to study the issue in order to learn more about the experiences and beliefs of young voters and non-voters. The following language was adopted as part of its local program for 2019-2020.

- To investigate reasons for low voter turnout, especially among young people (18-30) in local elections. Based on the results, develop and implement a plan to increase voter turnout in future elections.

Methodology and Focus Groups

Methods
Interested members of LWVE developed a plan to review relevant literature and best practices, and to conduct focus group discussions with young people in order to help meet this goal. Contacts at community and educational organizations helped identify potential participants. A copy of the complete recruitment flyer is included in Appendix A. The recruitment material included the following information.

The LWV of Evanston seeks your help identifying citizens to participate in two focus groups this fall. We are looking for men and women between the ages of 18 and 30. Our goal is to attract a diverse group (economic, racial, ethnic, gender and location of residence), and at least half who are not registered voters or who are registered but do not usually vote in local elections.

This project is part of an initiative to gain a better understanding of why citizens do or do not register to vote and then actually vote or not. With a better understanding, the League hopes to more effectively assist people to register and vote and to provide information and resources so that voters can make informed choices.

Focus group discussion questions were developed to elicit information from the personal experiences of the group members related to the following topics.
1. Participation in elections
2. Importance and understanding of each level of elections
3. Sources of information
4. Voting experience

The discussion question guide and information shared with the participants before the discussion are included in Appendix B.

Participants
The goal was to recruit a diverse group of young men and women who were both voters and non-voters. A total of 13 volunteers participated in one of two focus groups. Eleven of the participants were students at local universities (Northwestern or Loyola). Four of the participants were employed either full or part time. Ten participants had voted and one was registered but hadn't voted yet. One student reported that she registered in high school in a pre-registration drive before she turned 18. Only two non-voters and three men participated, and the average age of the sample was 20 (range 19-23). The sample was more diverse in ethnicity: seven white, three Latina American/Hispanic, two Asians, and one African American. Because the sample was drawn largely from University students, six of them reported experiences voting in other states (Wisconsin, New York, Indiana, Texas, Kansas, and Iowa in addition to Illinois). Despite the limitations in this small sample, participants were highly engaged in the discussion and openly shared their own opinions and experiences as well as their knowledge about opinions and experiences of their age group.

Focus Group Results

Participating in Voting and in the Political Process
Ten participants had voted and viewed it as an important responsibility. Comments included: "It's important to vote; it's about my future" and "When I vote, I know I've done my part". One of the non-voters expressed his opinion, "Voting doesn't make much of a difference. Evanston is very blue and one more vote won't count. I'm not informed enough about candidates. I can make a difference in other ways, like issue advocacy rather than politicians or parties." The other non-voter was a student who was not a citizen, and she stated that "I can't vote, but I'm involved in advocacy through the Asian Americans Advancing Justice in Chicago. On the federal level, I

think there's a deliberate tactic to disengage minority communities. They want to divide and disempower people of color."

Other participants voiced a strong interest in issue advocacy and reported that issues are important and reinforce the need to vote and be part of the political process. The March for Our Lives, a student-led issue in support of legislation to prevent gun violence in the United States, was mentioned as an important motivating factor. One student from New York attended a school where a shooting had occurred and reported that some students were left with PTSD. Climate change was also mentioned as a major issue important to young voters. Michael Brown's death and the protest in Ferguson as well as the election of Trump were also mentioned as significant events that affected the attitudes of young people.

In addition to issue advocacy, a number of voting participants reported significant involvement in elections. One student reported campaign canvassing for a Chicago alderman, and another student was engaged in the election for Chicago Mayor in 2019. Other activities that were reported included voter registration on campus, knocking on doors for a candidate, helping at events and phone banks.

Understanding Levels of Government
Participants were asked about their high school classroom experiences and their understanding of levels of government. Most of the students reported taking a class in American government in high school, but only one of them had taken a civics course. Most of them remembered seeing a video presentation about the three branches of government and how a bill becomes a law. Two of the participants remembered having a mock election in elementary school. In both cases the mock election took place during a Presidential election year.

The participants reported that they learned about national and some state politics, but nothing about local elections. Despite a lack of knowledge about local elections, several students reported an awareness of the significance of the local level. One said, "Your vote counts more for smaller elections. There's a problem with not enough information…We need more information about judges and others on the ballot, other than President and Congress." Another reported "Big issues like housing happen at a local level." She reported working at a local housing non-profit and interacting with local aldermen. Local issues on campus were also important. One student discussed a speech given on campus by Jeff Sessions, a protest, and coverage in the student newspaper.

While discussing local politics, the students were asked about any local issues that are personally important to them. The "brothel law" in Evanston was mentioned (not more than three unrelated people can reside in any living unit, apartment, or house that is being rented). One participant said, "They don't enforce it much, but it has the potential to affect students. Also, affordable housing is an important local issue, but schools are the most important." Another student agreed about the importance of schools. "In my home community we had eight elementary schools, and they wanted to close three of them." Another student identified gentrification as important. "Marginalized populations are being pushed out. Everyone deserves a home. It creates distance within communities and disrupts community organizations." Another quote summarizes the

process for new voters, "Issues are not on the ballot. You have to see how each candidate stands on the issues, and then compare them with what you believe."

Information about Candidates and Issues

Online Sources, Social Media and Mailed Information. All the participants used online sources and social media as primary sources of information about the candidates and issues. Some of the students read newspapers online, but none of them subscribed or read a paper copy regularly. None of them watch prime time news on television. Several students watched the recent TV debates (fall of 2019). One student said that the debates offer an opportunity to "get to know their personalities."

Although online sources and social media were used by all participants, they worry about the credibility. Some responses: "I have to do fact-checking for online sources. I hate all the misinformation;" "I'm very concerned about fake news. I get some postings from family on Facebook, and I don't know where they get their information, but it's biased and right wing. They're trying to scare Americans." "I get news from social media, but I'm not sure it's good information." When asked about campaign literature that they receive in the mail, participants responded that it is generally biased and they're usually tossed.

When asked about online resources that they thought were reliable they offered these examples:
- I side with .com www.ISideWith.com After a test on how you feel about the issues, this website tells you which candidates align with your positions.
- Ballotpedia https://ballotpedia.org This website is a digital encyclopedia of American politics and elections. Articles are written by professional staff committed to bi-partisanship. Voters can access a sample ballot for their address on this website.

Influence of Friends, Family, and Generational Differences. All participants reported that their friends and peer groups influence their opinions. Examples: "I want input from people who are involved and my circle of trusted friends;" and "I talk about issues more than candidates. My friends tend to think what I think."

Participants generally also agreed that they don't like to talk politics with their families. There were clear generational differences. Sample of comments:
- "My parents have a very different view. One is from Texas and the other is from rural Wisconsin. People listen to news based on where they grew up."
- "My mother is from Columbia. She's very Republican and watches Fox News. My friends dread talking to their parents."
- "Issues are more important, and my parents vote very differently, so I don't get information from them."
- "My family of immigrants talk more about politics in Korea than politics in the U.S. There's a language barrier in my family and community. I talk more with my friends about politics."
- One student presented another perspective, he said, "My education has given me a better understanding. My family is from a lower income group. There's more diversity of opinions there. I tend to be a resource for my parents."

Informational Needs. Participants identified two sources of information that would be helpful to them. As new voters they felt poorly prepared for their first voting experience and were interested in succinct information on the nuts and bolts of the voting process. They also felt that it would be helpful to have information that offers "a comparison of candidates focusing on the issues with an objective lens."

Experiencing the Voting Process

Participants mostly reported being uneasy the first time they went to vote. One stated that" No one told me what to do and I felt uncomfortable." In addition to voting at their polling place on Election Day, some participants had voted by mail. Most of the college students in the focus groups voted on campus, but several reported that they voted at their home address. Some voted at their home address because they felt like they could have more of an impact there. One student wanted to vote in his home state of Indiana for this reason, but after three unsuccessful requests for an absentee ballot, he ended up voting on campus. One student said she liked to vote by mail, because "there is time to look things up." Some participants didn't know you could take notes into the voting booth with you, and many didn't know that you could leave some things blank. Several didn't know in what situations they may need an ID to vote. Many were unaware of a credible source of information to make decisions about voting for judges.

Online voting was discussed by the participants. They thought it would be good to be able to vote online but were concerned about security issues. One stated, "It would solve the accessibility problem. We should be able to do it." Others agreed that "It's inevitable in the 21st century."

Problems with voting were also discussed. Several participants reported having to stand in long lines to vote, and one participant said there were problems with the voting machines at her polling place. A student reported her campus experience, "There was a program where you could register and vote on the same day. There was free pizza but it was too crowded, so I left." When asked about barriers to voting several students recommended that Election Day should be a national holiday. They reported that work, classes, or transportation make it hard to get to the polls.

Voter suppression activities were also reported. Some campuses encourage voting and make it as accessible as possible, but others do not. One student reported that "my friend lived in a red area but the college was blue and they moved the polling place further away from the college." Another stated, "I was helping to register voters in North Dakota, but they couldn't vote because they didn't have an address."

The issue of lowering the voting age to 16 was raised at the focus groups and the response was divided. One student said that "I can't imagine myself voting at 16." Another reported that "this age group may have a harder time distinguishing between reliable and biased information." Others said they are "still growing up" or there's "too much parental influence." One supporter of the idea stated, "I support voting at 16. They can be tried as adults in court so they should be able to vote." Another noted that "they may be more invested in climate change." One participant had a different perspective and voiced the idea that "maybe it would be good to start voting in local elections at 16, but not national issues. At 16 they're still trying to figure

themselves out." Participants in this study were divided on the topic of lowering the voting age, but most supported a lower age for voting in municipal elections if it was integrated in the curriculum and after school activities.

Important Issues in 2020
At the conclusion of the focus groups, the participants were asked to identify the most important issues in 2020. These were the issues most relevant to the participants:
- Climate change
- Student debt
- Gun violence prevention
- Criminal justice reform
- Wealth disparity
- Women's rights and human rights
- Immigration reform
- Health care – accessible to everyone
- Discrimination in the workplace with wages and with the LGBT community
- K-12 education – too testing oriented
- Voting rights reform including fair district maps without gerrymandering, allow voting for people who have committed a felony, provide better language access, and end voter suppression

Key Findings from Focus Groups

- Lack of Knowledge – Even though there are now civics education requirements, the age group included in the focus groups missed out and received little to no civics education in school. What they did learn was almost exclusively about the national level. They have a sense that the local and state levels are important, but they lack knowledge of how those levels of government operate and the responsibilities and authority of elected officials.

- Lack of Information – Participants expressed confusion about the voting process and where to locate resources about issues and candidates as well as concern about the accuracy and security of online resources. They expressed greater interest in issues than candidates, but voiced confusion about what they perceive as a complicated, unfriendly and time-consuming voting process.

- The lack of knowledge and information left some participants without a sense of the importance of voting (especially in local elections) or the wherewithal to become informed and get to the polls. Generational differences also had an influence on their attitudes about the importance of voting. The participants related that their own life experiences were different from that of their parents and grandparents, and those differences led them to hold different views on political and social issues.

Review of the Literature
In many ways, the results of the focus group discussions confirm what is reported in articles about voter turnout. The literature includes articles on the importance of civics education in the high school curriculum including education and engagement in local elections.

Civics Education. A 2018 article in *The Atlantic* magazine reported that the youth voter turnout is low in the U.S. and concludes that civics education helps create young voters and activists. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/10/civics-education-helps-form-young-voters-and-activists/572299/

Research supports the conclusion that civics education increases voter turnout in young people. A study published in 2008 in the journal, *Applied Development Science*, examined the long-term effect of the *Student Voices program* in Philadelphia public schools. The program is used in most Pennsylvania high schools and eight other cities across the U.S. to engage students in creative, hands-on activities. Mock debates, videos, interactive Internet discussions, and question-and-answer sessions with politicians are sample activities. Research findings supported this program as a way to increase subsequent youth participation in politics. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10888690801910526?journalCode=hads20

In many high schools, civics activities are part of the curriculum and are supplemented by extracurricular activities. *The Civics Center* is a nonprofit program that collaborates with schools on a national basis to preregister 16 and 17 year olds to vote when they are 18. They provide in-person and online workshops on how to organize student clubs to promote voter registration. They also help students encourage preregistration using social media. https://thecivicscenter.org/ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1udhhp7jZz62WoNYRcGbgLBOP3ThSm4hY

Another research study, published in 2016 in the *American Educational Research Journal* reported on the results of the National Educational Longitudinal Study. A major finding in this study is that community service in high school was a strong predictor of adult voting and volunteering. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831206298173?journalCode=aera

Recent legislation in Illinois is changing school curriculum to include civics. In 2015, Governor Rauner signed a bill requiring that future Illinois high school students complete a stand-alone, semester-long civics course. Course content must include instruction on government institutions, current and controversial issues discussions, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes. The course mandate applied to incoming students for the 2016-17 school year. Evanston Township High School began offering a civics course to sophomores in the 2017-18 school year.

Change is coming at the middle school level as well. In 2019, Governor Pritzker signed a law requiring a semester of civics in grades 6, 7, or 8 with the middle school mandate set to be implemented beginning with the 2020-21 school year.

Information on Illinois civics education laws and guidelines can be found at this website. https://www.illinoiscivics.org/2019/resources/illinois-civic-education-legislation

Increasing Voter Participation. Young people have the lowest voting turnout. In order to understand ways to improve turnout, it's important to recognize variables that influence the youth vote. A Wikipedia article on the *Youth Vote in the United States* lists key reasons for the low turnout in this group.

Voting Process – Voting is a two-step process that includes registering to vote and voting itself. The rules are different in different states and regulations vary on the time and avenue through which a citizen can vote. When first registering and voting, citizens need education and informational resources. They also need encouragement to vote from peers, educators, and community leaders.

Frequent Change in Residence – Young people change residences often and may not be aware that they need to re-register with each move. In addition, college students must decide if they want to stay registered and vote in their home town or register and vote where they reside.

Lack of Candidate Contact – Politicians tend to spend less time with youth because of low turnout, and candidates focus on issues that pertain to voters who are more likely to turn out.

Two Party System – Young people are increasingly supportive of 3rd party candidates and are critical of the current system where the "winner takes all," which limits the success of 3rd party candidates.

Money in Politics – The candidate who spends the most money is generally the candidate who wins. The general perception of our current system for funding campaigns is that candidates will vote in accordance with the interests of their large donors to ensure future donations during their reelection bid.

Attitudes about Politics – Young people tend to separate political from civic activities. They often focus on volunteer opportunities and activist activities where they see short-term gains. The long-range view of politics is more complicated and intangible.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_vote_in_the_United_States

Increasing the vote in local elections is especially challenging, and a 2013 article from *The Week* recommends four strategies to boost turnout.

- *Give People a Stake in their Government* – One example of how this can be done is through participatory budgeting. This system gives citizens control of a slice of their city's budget, such as parks.
- *Use Peer Pressure* – Reminders from neighbors and friends are effective in increasing turnout. Personalized mail reminders can also be effective. A Yale study found that participation in a 2006 Michigan election increased by almost two percent when voters simply got mail reminding them to go to the polls.
- *Make Polls a Party* – On Election Day, the rewards of voting may seem meager, especially if it involves long lines and waiting inside polling places such as a school gymnasium. The authors of the article recommend throwing an Election Day poll party with food and music. Controlling for past turnout rates, Yale researchers found that throwing an Election Day poll party increased voter turnout by over six percent.
- *Bring Voting into the 21ˢᵗ Century*
  The use of social media and apps are effective ways to get younger voters to the polls.
  https://theweek.com/articles/460223/4-ways-boost-dismal-turnout-local-elections

In 2018, *The Center for American Progress* published a report on strategies to encourage full participation in elections, especially among young voters. The report also includes strategies to remove unnecessary barriers in the voting registration and voting process. Strategies recommended in this article and identified by participants in the focus groups include:

- Same day voter registration*
- Pre-registration*

- Online registration*
- Early voting*
- No-excuse absentee voting*
- Restoring rights for formerly incarcerated people*
- Strengthening civics education in schools*
- Investing in voter engagement and outreach*

*Each of these strategies have been enacted in Illinois
https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/

Preregistration laws allow teenagers to register to vote before they will be eligible to cast ballots. In twenty-three states, teenagers can preregister to vote when they are under 18. Fourteen states allow preregistration at 16, 4 at 17, and 5 allow pre-registration at some point between age 17 and 18. Research findings documented increased youth voting when they had preregistered to vote.
https://journalistsresource.org/studies/politics/citizen-action/voter-turnout-registration-teen-youth/

Lowering the Municipal Voting Age in Evanston. In 2018, the U.S. News and World Report published an article reporting that many states hope to increase voter engagement by allowing students to pre-register or, in some cases to vote before turning 18.
https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2018-06-04/states-want-voters-to-start-young

The National League of Cities (NLC) published a report that can be downloaded by searching the title: Lower the Voting Age in Municipal Elections. They offer the following rationale:
- A lower voting age increases voter turnout.
- Youth manage other adult responsibilities successfully. For example, young people can have jobs, pay taxes, and drive at 16.
- Youth do not automatically vote with their parents or celebrities
- Many cities across the country are beginning to make the change. Three cities in Maryland allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections. Takoma Park, Maryland was the first city to lower the voting age. Berkeley, California passed an ordinance to lower the voting age for school board elections to 16.Washington D.C. and other large cities continue to make progress toward a lower voting age.

Additional information on lowering the voting age can be found at http://vote16usa.org/

The NLC report includes a link to Lowering the Voting Age: A Legal Feasibility Study
https://fairvote.app.box.com/v/voting-age-feasibility-study
According to this study, cities in Illinois can lower the voting age through charter amendments. It further explains that the Illinois Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Illinois Constitution states that home rule units "may exercise any power and perform any function pertaining to their government and affairs" except as expressly limited, and that home rule powers "shall be construed liberally" (Article 7 Section 6). Neither the constitution nor state statutes explicitly preempt municipalities from lowering their voting ages.

Lowering the voting age for municipal elections in Evanston has been discussed and challenges identified. Overlapping school boundaries between Evanston and Skokie and administrative costs to make the change would need to be resolved but are not insurmountable.

Best Practices from the Literature

- Civics education is an important part of the curriculum in public high schools and middle schools and is now mandated in many states, including Illinois. Civics education leads to increased voter participation among young adults who consistently have the lowest voter turnout of any age group.
- Research supports the benefits of community service and participatory activities as part of civics education.
- Preregistration to vote increases future voter turnout, and it can be integrated into civics education.
- Research supports the idea that the earlier people vote, the more likely they are to continue to vote. Lowering the voting age could allow educators to integrate education and the reality of voter participation and lead to increased voter turnout.

Recommendations

Considering the findings from the focus groups and the literature review, the committee makes the following recommendations:

- Actively work to support the schools' civics programs and explore ways that we can actively participate in the portion of the curriculum relating to local government. Provide input and support in the development of the middle school civics curriculum.
  - Integrate community engagement in civics curriculum.
  - Increase education on the local level of government in the curriculum.

- Continue to support activities that increase voter participation, including but not limited to the following:
  - Create a series of fact sheets or Frequently Asked Questions/FAQs to provide more information on the registration and voting process and include links to reliable informational sources.
  - Revive active collaboration with other organizations to register voters and increase voter turnout through the *Voter Participation and Action Coalition*/VPAC.
  - Expand voter registration opportunities at events and venues that have the potential to increase voter turnout among all ages and with a greater focus on information about local government and issues.
  - Advocate for expanded preregistration and easy access to polling stations, including on-campus voting at college campuses.
  - Advocate against legislation and other measures that suppress the vote.

- Consider the potential for lowering the voting age to 16 for Evanston Consolidated Elections.

Conclusion

The League's 2019-2020 local program includes this initiative focusing on identifying reasons for low voter turnout in local elections, especially among young people. The goal is to develop and implement a plan to increase turnout in future elections based on this report. The committee believes that there are steps that will increase turnout and strongly encourage continuation of this initiative in the 2020-2021 year. The recommendations that the committee has made include both short-and long-term projects. If the League membership agrees with the findings and recommendations, an action plan will be developed and interested members identified to implement the recommendations. In the short-term, we encourage continued work with the schools and developing the FAQs, as these are time-sensitive.

Appendix A

The LWV of Evanston is looking for citizens to participate in two focus groups this fall. We are looking for *men and women between the ages of 18 and 30. It is important that at least some of the participants be individuals who are either not registered voters or who are registered but do not usually vote in local elections.*

Participants can choose to participate in one of the following groups:
Saturday, November 16, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm <u>OR</u>
Monday, November 18, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm
Both focus groups will be conducted in Room 2402 of the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Evanston

Refreshments will be provided and a gift card in the amount of $40 will be given to each participant at the end of the focus group.

This project is part of an initiative to gain a better understanding of why citizens do or do not register to vote and then actually vote or not. With a better understanding, the League hopes to more effectively assist people to register and vote and to provide information and resources so that voters can make informed choices.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, observes governing bodies, and provides information for the voters at election time. The League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties at any level. The League supports issues and legislation after comprehensive study and member consensus.

Appendix B
Focus Group Introduction and Discussion Questions

Focus Group Introduction
Welcome, my name is…… and I will be the facilitator of our discussion today.
Thank you for participating in this focus group. This is one of several focus groups being conducted by the League of Women Voters of Evanston (LWVE) to gain a better understanding of why citizens do or do not register to vote and then actually vote or not. With a better understanding, the League hopes to more effectively assist people to register and vote and to provide information and resources so that voters can make informed choices. Possible outcomes of these focus groups include the preparation and distribution of an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) and/or a GOTV (Get Out the Vote) initiative.
The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, observes governing bodies, and provides information for the voters at election time. The League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties at any level. The League supports issues and legislation after comprehensive study and member consensus.

Your responses will be kept in confidence, will be used only for the purpose stated and will be available only to the LWVE focus group team. We are taking notes today to prepare a written report. No one will be able to identify you when the results are reported and your name will not appear anywhere in the written report. You are not required to respond to any question or participate in any part of the discussion that you don't want to, but we encourage your active participation. We requested that you complete a very brief questionnaire so that we have the demographics of the focus groups which may be helpful in understanding voter opinions by different types of groups (age, gender, race, etc.)
Please be respectful of each other, raise your hand if you would like to respond or add your comments to any part of the discussion, and refrain from being judgmental or critical of other participants' comments. We are seeking your opinions and there are no right or wrong answers.
[Provide any logistics necessary – remind to turn quiet cell phones & leave the room if taking a call is necessary; stopping time; location of restrooms; help yourself to refreshments at any time, etc.]
Are there any questions before we begin?

Focus Group Discussion Questions (Primary and follow-up questions)

Participation
Let's start with your interest and participation in voting. Talk about whether you are registered to vote – if not, why - and if so, whether you actually vote. And, talk about why or why not.
- Did you vote in the last Presidential election in 2016?
- Did you vote in the last local (consolidated) election in 2017 for mayor, aldermen, etc?
- Did you vote in the mid-term election in 2018?
- Did you vote in the 2019 local (consolidated) election for school board members?
- Why/ why not

- Have you ever actively supported a candidate or referendum? What was that experience like?

- Have you ever volunteered to help with voter registration, get-out-the-vote or any other election-related activity?

- If registered, when/ how/ where did you register?
    - By a dep registrar, at a city or county clerk's office, online, application by mail, on election day

Importance

- Do you think that one level of elections is more important than another?
    - National - the President, US Representative & Senator election
    - State offices (Governor, Lt Governor, Atty General, etc.) and state legislature (state representatives and state senators)
    - Local (or consolidated) elections for mayor, aldermen, city clerk, school board; also county officials

    Why?

- Which level of elected officials do you feel <u>affects</u> you the most? Why? How?

- Do you feel confident that you understand the responsibilities of the various offices for which you elect your representatives (national, state, and local)?

    - Where did you learn about the responsibilities of elected officials or where would you go to learn more?

- What (or how much) did you learn in school about elected offices, voting and elections? Have you ever taken a civics course?

Information

- How do you find out about candidates and issues before an election? Where do you get your information?
    - Have you ever attended or watched a candidate forum or debate?
    - What online resources have you used? (candidate websites, news articles, etc.)
    - Social media?
    - TV? Newspapers?
    - Literature you receive in the mail?
    - How much do you depend on family and friends for information?
    - Have you met candidates? Has a candidate ever come to your door?
    - Other?

- Are you concerned about the reliability or accuracy of information about candidates or issues?
    - Where do you think the most accurate information can be found?
    - How do you decide what to believe?
    - Do you engage in discussions with friends and family about candidates and/or issues?

Voting Experience

- I'd like to hear about your voting experience – things like how did you find out where to vote, did you know what your ballot would look like before voting, have you voted using paper ballot or computer, is there a comfortable feeling at your polling place– that sort of thing.
    - Do you know your "political address"? (ward, precinct)
    - Do you know where to get information about your polling place, ballot, hours to vote, if you are registered to vote at your current address, etc?
    - When you last voted did you have to wait? How long?
    - Have you ever voted early?
    - Have you ever voted absentee ballot (mail-in)?
    - Do you know what the judges and other workers at the polling place do?
    - Do you know where to find information about the long list of judges?

    - When you last voted were there any problems at the polling place?
        - Equipment problems
        - Election judges couldn't find your name
        - Accessibility issues
        - Other

    - Have you ever been registered and voted in another state? If so, how was that experience different?

    - What do you think first-time voters need to know that's hard to find out, especially that first time?

- If you are a registered voter, have you ever ***not*** voted because you:
    - didn't have time to vote
    - didn't have time to become informed or didn't feel prepared
    - couldn't make up your mind who to vote for
    - didn't have a way to get to your polling place
    - didn't feel your vote would count
    - didn't like any of the candidates