



# PATHWAYS TO A RACIALLY JUST DEMOCRACY

*An introduction to where we are and where we need to go in Oregon*

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# INTRODUCTION

## Our Road to a Better Democracy

Democracy in the United States is a system of government by and for each and every one of us; it plays an essential role in advancing equity and opportunity for all of our communities. We are facing a crisis in our democracy, where a combination of voter disillusionment, unrelenting money in politics, and voting systems that structurally disadvantage underrepresented communities, threaten the future of Oregon's New American Majority - communities of color, young people and women.

Our democracy infrastructure has a direct impact on our ability to advance progressive and inclusive solutions. Yet, the health and economic inequities we see in communities of color, now representing 23% of Oregon, are evidence that the current political system is not working for everyone. Oregon has a clear need for democracy reform.

*"A racially just democracy means people most impacted by injustice, including youth, are in leadership and communities are mobilized and have the tools, knowledge, and language access to navigate and transform the political system and advocate on the issues that matter the most to us."*

*- Convening participants*

Building on the assumption that a lack of meaningful participation, influence and representation in our democracy are a root cause of inequity, a group of community organizations came together to develop a deeper analysis and recommendations for action. By engaging partners that organize directly with the New American Majority, we sought to bridge the disconnect between democracy reform and racial justice, and propose a new framework for building a democracy reform movement in Oregon.

## Urgency and Opportunity

Through grassroots advocacy and strong leadership, Oregon's community-based organizations have made powerful strides in building collective power. Yet structural barriers to inclusive and representative political power - from voting methods and district structures to wealthy interest influence - limit the ability of the New American Majority to have real political impact. Remedying these issues disproportionately burdens under-resourced community based organizations and leaders of color, often times forcing us to fight for resources. It is time we widen responsibility and expand the reach and impact of democracy reform. At the same time, a slide towards authoritarianism has further endangered our communities. Moreover, the Janus v. AFSCME Supreme Court

decision- calling for opt-in union membership - could significantly impact the financial foundation and influence of labor, a major force in Oregon, further shifting our current political climate. Finally, recent and upcoming elections signal a threat to voting rights. Our attention to these changes is paramount.

*“Oregon must be bold in the approach to build an infrastructure that centers communities of color so we can advance our solutions and leaders- not the leaders, initiatives, and battles chosen for us by people that don’t walk in our shoes.”*

*- EJ Juarez, Color PAC*

Public support for democracy reform is at an all-time high. The New American Majority is growing in numbers, which means we can also grow in power. As Oregon goes through a major culture shift and inequity in democracy deepens, more people of color are running for public office and Oregon policymakers have shown more receptivity to passing reforms. The stakes are high as we compete for power in public processes. This is our window of opportunity when collective action over the next several years could have major impact.

*This report offers an introduction and outlines a path forward. It summarizes an initial set of shared priorities that emerged from strategic conversations among roughly two dozen organizational leaders working in Oregon’s New American Majority communities. The next step is to drill down, develop a deeper analysis, and map out shared plans.*

## **A shared history**

The story of racial justice in democracy reform is one of landmark voting rights and social justice wins as well as struggles with corruption, big money, inequity, and racism. Oregon established its governance structures and institutions at the same time it codified a legal system that excluded African Americans and women from the democratic process, creating a fundamentally flawed and exclusive democracy.

Throughout Oregon’s history, voting rights have been tied to land ownership, race, gender, and citizenship. Organizing for fairness in representation and accountability resulted in increased government transparency, but our history shows these efforts are hard fought and not easily won. Our greatest progress has been made when movements intersected and united around a shared vision. Recent years have brought an onslaught of anti-immigration rhetoric and a host of new threats to communities of color, spurring new, organized, responses. **Our history reminds us how racism has shaped our current landscape, but lifts up the many ways we are poised to engage in the next wave of democracy reform.**

## The Landscape

### Money in politics

Money plays a fundamental role in politics: through the direct financing of political campaigns, the indirect money spent to influence campaigns independently (often through unregulated “soft money” channels), and lobbying - all of which ultimately impacts the platforms and agendas of candidates and elected officials. The power struggle between community voice and wealthy interests has taken a grave turn in the last decade, as legislatures and courts have majorly eroded regulations. The U.S. Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision, which lifted restrictions on corporate spending and opened the doors for “Super PACs”<sup>1</sup> was a turning point that unleashed an unprecedented flood of hidden money into our political system. Oregon has some of the weakest regulation of money in politics, leaving us among the states with the most expensive elections per capita in the country. All of this has limited our ability to successfully organize communities, elect candidates representing our interests, and hold existing electeds accountable.

*“Large donors dominated contributions to 2016 Oregon candidate and ballot measure campaigns. Just 723 large donors to electoral campaigns out-gave all small donors by nearly 14 to 1 – overwhelming the voices of regular Oregonians in candidate and ballot measure races.” - OSPIRG Foundation*

### Electoral systems

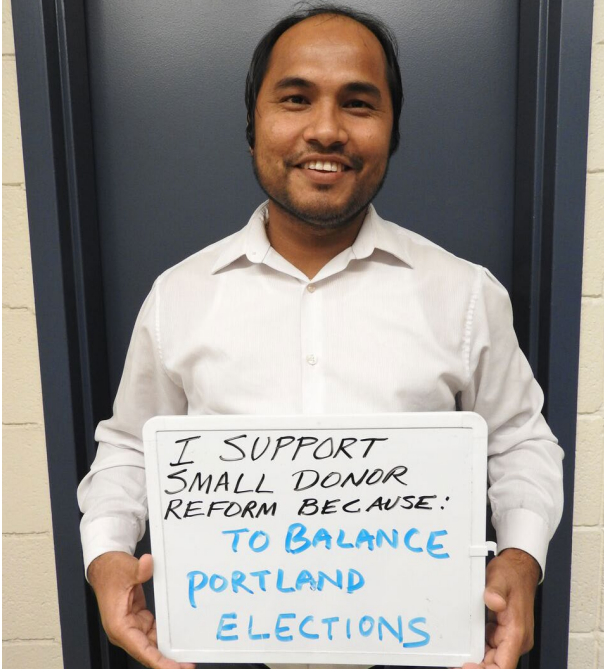
*“Campaign finance, voting methods, and district representation are all part of a broader puzzle. Reform on multiple fronts get us to the kind of change we need for more representative and accountable democracy.”  
- Kate Titus, Common Cause*

Electoral systems reform refers to structural changes in how the voters’ preferences are turned into votes, and how those votes are tallied to determine winning candidates and parties. Our current electoral system, inherited under British colonialism, is commonly

known as “first past the post”. It is based on single-member districts, which results in only two parties winning the vast majority of seats.

In Oregon, the redistricting process is controlled by the majority party in the legislature, with the focus on protecting the majority above all else. In our current scenario, without strong mobilized efforts, communities of color are left out. The control the Democratic and Republican parties have on the electoral system has forced people of color to demonstrate party loyalty even when party practices and policies run counter to the well being of communities of color.

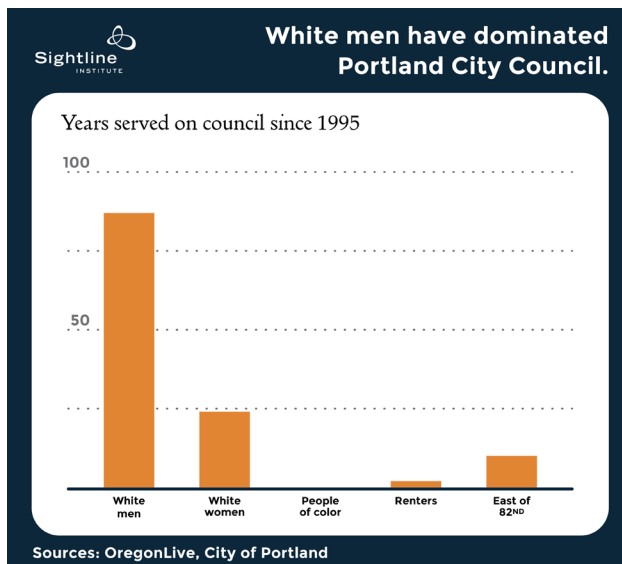
<sup>1</sup> Super PACs are political action committees set up independent of any candidate that can raise and spend unlimited money to influence campaigns.



*Photo courtesy of Common Cause*

## Running for office

The cumulative impact of emboldened wealthy interests and an electoral system that structurally disadvantages our interests is greatest for Oregon's New American Majority. It not only influences our ability to move a racial justice agenda, it also impacts candidates of color running for office. Our current campaign finance system favors wealthy interests and disadvantages both low-income communities and candidates. Poor compensation for public office, few support networks, and a heightened vulnerability to racist media and opponents further discourages people from running for office.



*From Portland, We Have a Problem, by Kristin Eberhard, Copyright 2017 Sightline Institute; used with permission.*



## Our Approach and Working Values

To build power and capacity to advance a racial justice agenda, democracy reform must:

- Invest and build out political education that supports a New American Majority led movement
- Develop and fund sustainable, people of color led political infrastructure
- Carve pathways for people of color to elected and appointed leadership
- Move reforms that fundamentally shift power from wealthy interests to marginalized communities.

We define political education as supporting, educating, and developing leadership to ensure our communities understand our democratic systems, roles of elected officials, and the electoral process.

### Working Values:

Building upon the tenets of Oregon's growing racial justice movement and affirmed through community leaders, we propose this starting place for our Democracy Reform values:

- Racial Justice is a foundation of meaningful democracy reform.
- Communities most affected by racial & economic inequity should be centered and leading democracy reform.
- Meaningful democratic participation, representation, and influence are essential to advancing an economic, racial, and health equity agenda.
- Elected and appointed leadership should reflect communities most impacted by injustice.
- Our democracy should be accessible and transparent to all people.



*Photo courtesy of APANO, taken by Nikki de Leon*



# FINDINGS

## The intersection of democracy reform & our work



*Photo courtesy of Carlos Flores*

We spoke with leaders from over 20 organizations doing base-building work with communities of color, women, and youth. We sought to identify the ways in which they feel our communities have meaningful engagement and influence in the democratic process. We asked about the barriers, opportunities, and levels of interest in democracy reform work- from organizing communities to running for public office.

### *Current Engagement*

More than half of the groups we talked to engage in voter registration/ get out the vote work and almost all were engaged in policy advocacy. When asked how they felt their communities were meaningfully engaged, had real influence, or were effectively represented in our democracy, most organizations - over 60% - said they felt they had some influence on public policy “in the building” and through outside, organized response; 45% felt organized responses and community forums helped to hold electeds accountable.

### **Major Barriers to Political Representation and Participation**

Community leaders echoed a host of barriers to political representation and participation. Specifically, the lack of political education and preparation to serve, time, and the financial resources to run for office and support our candidates are major barriers to progress. Additional barriers included the time spent on ongoing battles against anti-immigrant and racist ballot measures and legislation that continue to arise, the lack of salary especially at the legislative level and in smaller towns, and an established political system that has historically tokenized and/or marginalized New American Majority communities.

## Political Education

Over half of the community leaders we spoke with said a lack of voter education was a major barrier to political participation. This included a lack of political education programs, funding, in addition to a strong infrastructure for this work.

## Running for Public office

It takes time and resources to run a campaign; but poor public office salaries mean it also takes time and resources to sit in public office. Respondents also cited a general lack of a peer network to both share strategies and build collective power, as well as donor networks to ensure they are able to run viable campaigns. They also flagged the uphill battle of facing xenophobic and racist attacks from the opposition and media.

## Other Barriers Include:

### Time and Resources:

- Support political education work
- Influence elected officials
- Fight large corporations and wealthy interest
- Run for and serve in office

### History of exclusion:

- Fosters uncertainty/distrust of politicians
- Creates general lack of faith in the public process
- Supports current exclusion by politicians

### Disconnect from our Issues:

- Politicians make cultural assumptions about us
- Politicians don't understand our issues
- Democratic reform does not push immediate issues

*"We need to create more transparent processes that break down language barriers and fight cultural assumptions that have been made about us. Right now, people don't trust the process."*

- Community Leader

*"We don't have the capacity to do the political outreach to students we need to; funding for this is declining. Oregon is not a swing state and so less resources are available."*

- Lamar Wise, Oregon Student Association

*"A lot of electeds are racist and don't understand our communities, and speak in ways that are marginalizing. We are in a very conservative area and too often we are stereotyped as trouble makers. At the same time, corporations have so much power, are greedy, and benefit from all the public deals. They have so much influence and it is often hidden."*

- Community Leader

*"So many farmworker members aren't able to participate, due to citizenship status. But their children are participating and have increasingly become a force at the ballot. In Woodburn, we are a big political force and really starting to take the power."*

- Jaime Arrendondo, PCUN

*"Time, language, lack of political education, and access to information are the biggest issues. Our members, who are primarily low-income, are overworked as a result of their occupation"*

- Gustavo Morales, Euvalcree

*"Running for office often requires you work for free and many positions don't pay a livable wage."*

- Jo Ann Hardesty, City Council candidate & former Oregon legislator

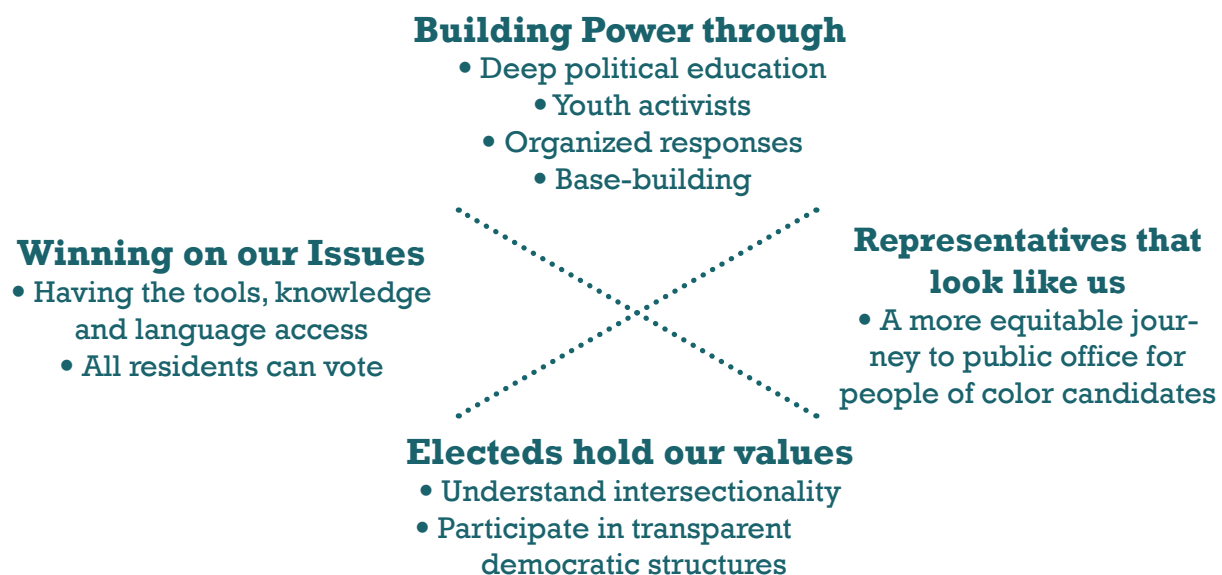
## What does a Racially Just Democracy Look Like?

*“Achieving a more equitable, accessible, and representative democracy means we can win on our issues through strong organizing and base-building, electeds are accountable to us, and having ability to organize an effective response.”*

*- Community Leader*

Almost all of our interviews and convening discussions with leaders affirmed similar visions for this movement and the journey to get there: A racially just democracy means people most impacted by injustice, including youth, are in leadership and communities are mobilized and have the tools, knowledge, and language access to navigate and transform the political system and advocate on the issues that matter the most to us. We want a political system that centers and follows the leadership of those most impacted by injustices.

## A Racially Just Democracy Means...



In addition to a clear set of barriers to progress and vision for change, the survey and convening also lifted up the desire, interest, and motivation so many community groups have to engage in this work. It illuminated the many ways communities are already engaging in the political process and want to shape a system with fewer roadblocks and greater access.

# CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

## For action and reform

A true shift in power towards a racially just democracy requires both capacity building, structural reform, and direct investment. Based on the current Oregon democracy landscape and issues raised in our conversations with community leaders and partners, we compiled an overview of potential opportunities for action in three core areas of work: capacity building, voting rights and elections, and money in politics.

### Capacity Building

In order to articulate, support, and win structural reforms, capacity building is foundational. This means political education, building power and strengthening our political voice to successfully advocate for small donor networks and organized voting blocks, candidate pipelines, and opportunities to participate in processes that influence redistricting, charter review, etc. Additionally local charter review processes provide us with opportunities to put in place stronger oversight accountability and structural reform.

*“Democracy reform should be transformational, not transactional.”*

*- Joy Alise Davis, Portland African American Leadership Forum*

### Voting Rights & Elections

Voting rights work today not only means expanding voter access and advancing innovative systems, but also, and perhaps more urgent, defending against voting rights and election rollbacks. With a secretary of state currently in office that threatens regression in voting rights, our ability to monitor and resist upcoming issues is critical. This also includes ballot measures that specifically incite anti-immigrant rhetoric. Currently, some opportunities exist to build upon automatic voter registration at DMV and expand it to other agencies.

### Money in Politics

Shifting the balance of power begins with changing the role that money plays in politics, including elections and legislative agenda setting. This means reforms that focus on limiting the role of money in politics and revolutionizing transparency in government. We can pass campaign contribution limits as well as measures that would amplify small donor networks.

# MAPPING OUR PATH



*Photo courtesy of NAACP Portland Branch*

We asked community leaders and partners to review and workshop these three areas. A full day retreat, which included a deep dive into prioritizing potential reform, lifted up a few clear paths forward: In order to successfully win our issues, we need robust political education, strong candidate pipelines as well as structural reforms that increase small donor capacity and power, shift voting methods, and move us towards fair and proportional representation.



Convening participants also identified the importance of building and supporting a strong, people of color-led, political infrastructure as a core area of work. Finally, robust political education was highlighted as a core component of all of these work areas. The first two work areas focus on capacity building, while the last two are focused on reform.



# Building a Sustainable, People of Color led Political Oregon Infrastructure

The power shift we want to see requires growth in our political capacity. While many strong c(3) and c(4) tables convene regularly--from One Oregon, Our Oregon, Fair-shot-- the sustainable political infrastructure needed to take our strategies to scale does not currently exist. Whether building upon existing capacity of a c(4) table, coalition, or establishing an independent one, our current priority is to first define the need, vision, and next steps.

Oregon's New American Majority growing communities need ongoing, robust and coordinated conversations about its future; one with strong messaging that unifies communities. This is particularly timely as we prepare for the Janus v. AFSCME decision, an upcoming Governor's race, ballot measure IP22<sup>1</sup>, and other threats to our communities. If we fail to invest in sustainable, people of color led political infrastructure, we not only lose the opportunity to move a self-determined agenda, but Oregon risks sliding further right. In order to take this work to scale, we need a place we can grow.

*"We are so marginalized every day and in so many ways in trying to do this work. We need to build the ship the way we want it to look. It's the only way to get the representation we need."*

*- Nancy Haque, Basic Rights Oregon*

## What do we mean by infrastructure?

### Organizing capacity building

- Building organizers' skills
- A space to convene, educate, organize and activate new leaders
- Coordinate, connect, and amplify base building efforts in community organizations

### Tactical collaboration and coordination

- The space to build and lead campaigns with strong and resonant communications
- Build leverage and power with political parties and actors

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<sup>1</sup> IP 22- a new ballot initiative that would require voters to re-register and prove their citizenship via birth certificate, passport, or other proof of citizenship.





*Photo courtesy of APANO, taken by Nikki de Leon*

### Next steps:

- A collaborative process, where people of color led advocacy and organizing groups, including c(4) partners, identify needs and reach a shared agreement on infrastructure and lead organizations
- Additional planning on how we will grow out this infrastructure
- Fundraising
  - Directing cyclical, transactional investments, such as voter registration, GOTV and Census resources to this effort, including people of color- led organizations
  - Explicit leadership roles for people of color-led organizations in ballot measure campaigns
  - Engaging national funders about current risks we face in Oregon

With this capacity, we can fully support campaign finance reform. Additionally, we can also achieve ballot measure reform essential to creating equitable processes that block opportunities for emboldened racist rhetoric and waste already strained resources. The result will be stronger organizations that are more powerful to advance their policy agenda and leaders who hold a shared approach and commitment to coordination.

# 2 Leadership Pipelines for People of Color Candidates

As we win reforms that shift power and create access for New American Majority leadership, we must also ensure we have leaders ready to run for office and serve in appointed positions.

In addition to structural barriers highlighted in the community scan, organizational culture and dominant-culture centered approaches also limit traditional candidate clearinghouses, such as EMERGE, the Democratic Party, and Labor, from adequately supporting people of color. In many instances, these organizations act as gatekeepers and ultimately block people of color's access to power. Limited financial support from institutional players, few professional support staff, and a lack of a coordinated (c)3 and (c)4 network that do in-depth field and voter outreach during elections also impede success and serve as deterrents to running for office. Our two party system, which has traditionally excluded people of color's voice and ideologies, further separates our community leaders from existing opportunities.

*"As we pave the way for more people of color in public office, we need people ready to run, who are supported and held accountable."*

*- Kayse Jama, candidate*

Establishing and strengthening pipelines to identify, develop, recruit, train, and help support new candidates and campaign staff of color is critical to supporting our ability to maintain and leverage the power gained through other (c)3 and (c)4 advocacy activities across people of color led initiatives.

## What does this look like?

### Convening space

- Space for education, networking, and training that is built by and for people of color, skill development

### Sequencing and planning map

- Establish a long-term strategy that identifies open seats with a timeline attached

### Resource sharing

- Sharing campaign staff
- Advocating to own the Voter Activation Network
- Leveraging other leadership development programs

### Structural changes

- Public financing & campaign finance reform
- Support livable wages while in public office, and standardizing part-time public service pay (school boards, part-time city councils, etc.)

## Targeted investment plan

- Leverage considerable financial and human capital for targeted interventions in races which shift the majorities of councils, commissions, legislative bodies, and courts
- Media and communication that center merit and lived experience
- Build out people of color led PACs connected to base building organizations

## Next Steps

### Fundraising

- Focus investment on people of color PAC development that can leverage the Oregon Political Tax Credit
- Advocate for multi-year grants and cross organizational work planning that cultivates robust individual donor bases, and provides training and skill development spaces for leaders
- Support of robust political education: (c)4 and (c)3 can focus capacities on strong political education and coordination



*Photo courtesy of Carlos Flores*

# 3 Small Donor Power

Small Donor Matching reform is currently one of the most effective approaches to reducing the “money barrier” to running for public office. It enables candidates from underrepresented communities to run viable campaigns, creating more representative legislative bodies. It also incentivizes all those who get elected (regardless of their background) to be more accountable to constituents rather than to a wealthy donor class. The reform shifts how electoral campaigns are paid for, providing some public funding to match small contributions of community members in support of candidates who take no large contributions.

Having just passed this reform in Portland, we should now have a chance to use it in the 2020 Portland election, and are making progress to pass it statewide. This is our biggest immediate opportunity. However, given the enormity of the crisis of money in politics, we also need to map out a broader comprehensive plan beyond small donor reform. Small organizations are sorely stretched to invest significant time and resources due to the nature of the lift; the long-term benefit of this kind of power shift is not always clear to our communities or to electeds. Many organizations are forced to use the systems currently in place to achieve short term wins. They also do not have the capacity to address the consequences that the uphill battle of inaction creates.

## What does this look like?

### **Broad Small Donor reform coalition**

- Continue to drive the small donor reform effort over the finish line
- Launch small donor reform in Portland and pass it at the state-level
- Prepare our communities to take advantage of this reform - with candidates prepared to run, small-donor networks emerging to contribute, and community organizations understanding how to work in this new landscape to build more power for our communities

### **Organizations working in communities of color, and with other under-represented constituencies**

- Communities of color entered in reform leadership
- Organizations of color financially sustained and supported in political education, engagement and coalition work

### **Long-term planning**

- Develop a deeper analysis & map out a plan that goes beyond this one reform



## Next Steps

### Focused investment

- Overall campaign coordination
- Supporting a broad cross-section of organizations from underrepresented communities to be able to remain active or join in as leaders of this campaign

### Planning

- Map out a shared analysis and more comprehensive plan on money in politics that includes but goes beyond small donor matching reform



Images courtesy of Every Voice, art by Sheika Layton

# 4

## Voting Methods and District Structures

People of color, women, and millennials are underrepresented at all levels of government. Ensuring fair representation will take a combination of electoral reforms. While reigning in the power of big special interest money is key, two other reform challenges are imminent:

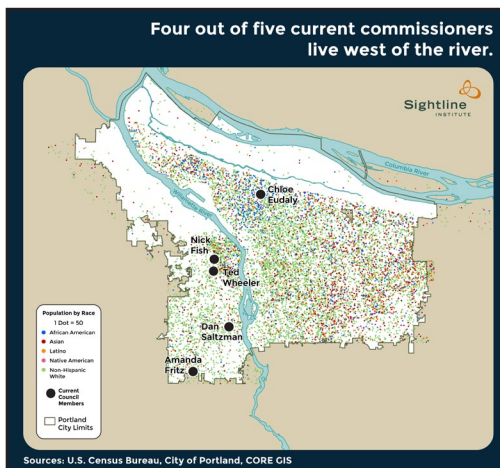
### Voting & District Structures

In our current system, the two major political parties dominate the political debate, weakening pressure for electeds to feel directly accountable to people of color, and making it harder to lift up racial justice. Candidates representing less powerful communities are often at a disadvantage to win majority support. Sometimes dividing local races into smaller districts can help, but less effective for Oregon's people of color and other underrepresented populations that do not live in highly concentrated communities. Multi-member districts and replacing primaries with ranked choice voting are other potential tools. There is a growing support for voting and district reform in Portland - including a new report from the Portland City Club - that could build momentum for further state-level and national reform.

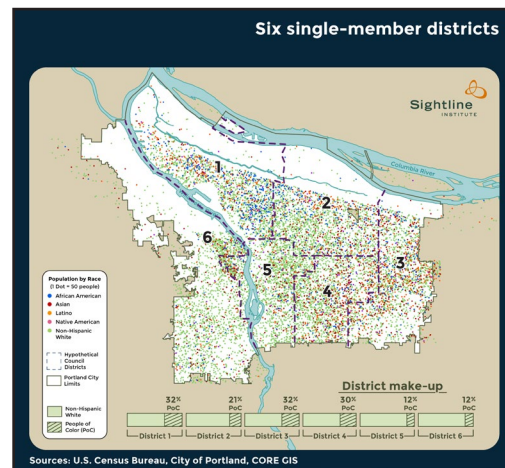
*“Electoral systems reform is absolutely essential to shifting power. The rules of the game have a huge impact on who gets elected and, therefore, who sets the agenda.”*

*- George Cheung*

Our current system...



Shifting district structures could increase representation in our communities...



From “Could Portland Create a City Council That Looks Like Portland?”, by Kristin Eberhard, Copyright 2017 Sightline Institute; used with permission.

### The Upcoming Census & Redistricting Process

Preparations are already underway to conduct the next federal census in 2020, and then the year after, for states to redraw their political districts to adjust for population changes. In Oregon, state legislators oversee the redistricting process and it is highly political,



though advocates were able to pass reform for more transparent and participatory processes in 2015. Oregon's Secretary of State has also been promoting a bold proposal to move the redistricting process from the legislature to an independent commission. This proposal, however, is still somewhat flawed; now is the time to begin monitoring and influencing the rules for the upcoming redistricting process. Once that redistricting process is underway, engagement is critical to ensuring revised district lines – in both rural and urban parts of the state – allow a fair landscape for our communities to build voice and power.

## What does this look like?

### **Modify the rules**

- Alter district structures to increase opportunity for more representative government
- Shift voting methods to support voting access and community representation

### **Start local**

- Begin with the City of Portland, where opportunity for reform is high
- Build on local wins throughout the state to grow our political power

### **Census and redistricting**

- Monitor and influence the rules of the upcoming census and redistricting process
- Engage in public meeting processes to ensure that revised district lines allow a fair landscape for our communities to build voice and power

## Next Steps

### **Planning and consensus**

- Build consensus and map out a shared plan to reform Portland's voting methods and/or district structures
- Build on local wins to achieve statewide reform
- Identify process to build consensus around plans for the census and redistricting

### **Funding**

- Raise money to support the necessary community education and campaign work
- Help community organizations and our communities better connect fundamental reforms to our issues
- Develop leaders and anchor organizations within this movement to ensure central leadership from people of color and other underrepresented populations

## Issues We Can't Ignore



*Photo courtesy of Common Cause*

A few others areas of work emerged at the convening and in interviews as integral to a racial justice democracy reform agenda. They call for community oversight, political engagement, and organized responses to processes that impact the New American Majority. They are also clear opportunities to begin to engage and educate new communities on our democratic system.

### Census Count

The Census and American Community Survey directly affects our local, state and federal ability to ensure equal representation because these counts inform how Oregon draws its electoral districts. As previously mentioned the 2020 census process is currently underway. Once completed, Oregon will go through a 2021 redistricting process that redraws every candidate district to be in place through 2030. Voting power is decided by how our districts are drawn. Drawing districts that keep our communities together geography can increase power and responsiveness of our elected officials. Additionally, Oregon is likely to be reapportioned an additional congressional district and we need to ensure communities of color benefit from this additional representation. This is especially vital at a time when our current administration has created fear in many of our communities around democratic participation.

This process also helps monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity. It assists state and local leaders in identifying and addressing emerging needs for health care, education, housing, food and income security, rural access to broadband, and other services.

It decides how \$600 billion a year are allocated. Communities of color, especially immigrants and refugees, are the hardest to count. Robust political education and capacity is needed to ensure early engagement with local and state officials.

## Defending against Rollbacks

As we continue to advance voter rights and accessibility, we also need to protect against existing threats to voter access for underrepresented populations. Oregon's Secretary of State has proposed a number of rule changes that rollback progress in voter's rights and pose threats to progressive voices, including communities of color. To date, these changes have included undermining Oregon's Motor Voter letters to omit information on disability access and confidentiality for victims of domestic violence/abuse; amending the signature-gathering process to allow organizations to gather signatures under unverified ballot measure language; and taking away information captured through the Voter Activation Network. We anticipate continued rule changes to restrict voter access.

## Local Charter Review processes

Municipal and county level charters serve as our local constitutions, defining how our elections work and how communities are represented. Portland is one of a few jurisdictions that requires a mandatory, periodic, review of its charter. This not only offers a more direct route to the structural reform we need, it also provides an opportunity for additional reforms, such as stronger police oversight and accountability. Ensuring community representation on this charter review board and mobilized community support could help move local democracy reforms forward, including redistricting, stronger police accountability, or non-citizen voting for school board elections.

# INVESTMENT, BUILD, REFORM



## INVESTMENT... to create the capacity

Funders should focus investments in:

- Political education, particularly in organizations of color, and including with youth
- Community organizing & base-building programs connecting democracy reform to our issues
- Space to convene, educate, and align communities
- Leadership pipeline: networks & skills development
- Political engagement in public processes
- POC focused (c)4, PACs, and small donor networks
- Advancing structural NAM priority reforms, including small donor matching fund reform, voter methods, district structures, ballot measures, etc.

## BUILD CAPACITY... to grow a movement

Community organizations should partner in order to:

- Engage communities most impacted in visioning & planning
- Create space to convene, educate, and align communities
- Build out sustainable, people of color-led infrastructure
- Develop candidate pipelines and small donor networks for candidates of color
- Develop organizing capacity in lead organizations
- Defend against rollbacks to our democracy structures
- Engage communities in census and redistricting processes
- Pass key structural reforms, particularly on money in politics and district representation.

## REFORM... that shifts power

Build an agenda that:

- Empowers people over money with small donor public financing reform
- Shifts district representation structure and voting methods toward proportional representation
- Ensures well-resourced, mainstream institutions share resources and provide support
- Centers the New American Majority and continues to grow a racial justice platform

# CONCLUSION

## What it will take to get there

Oregon's New American Majority has an opportunity to transform our growing number of people into political strength, and in turn, to build a more just democracy.

These are extraordinary political times, with the battle for political power at an extreme. Yet the enormity of the challenges - the huge overreach of money in politics and blatant vote rigging and vote suppression - also creates strong public support for reform. Now is the time to take on democracy reform and to build our political power. If we do not, others will, and our battle to advance racial justice will only get harder.

Democracy reform is racial justice. It is gender and age justice. It is class justice. In order to concretize this connection and build the collective power of Oregon's New American Majority, current reform efforts should decenter whiteness and carve the space for reform campaigns that reflect the New American Majority. This means communications that are engaging, accessible, center youth, women and people of color, and create clear and inviting pathways for participation.

Our strengths lie in our ability to build cross-cultural, multi-racial coalitions; to reflect and learn from past wins and losses; and build movements around shared visions. We need to connect these strengths to a coordinated investment in political education and a people of color-led political infrastructure. With the stakes this high, winning is more than just passing reform, it is mobilizing communities, building power, and creating the conditions critical for a racially just democracy.

