

MEMBERSHIP & VISIBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

During the Election Season

This information is being shared with all Leagues to strengthen membership recruitment efforts throughout the organization. The ideas and messages contained in this short memo are meant to be combined with and complement the voter service efforts that your League is doing this election season. It is a reminder to all League leaders that, during a time of increased **visibility** like an election, it is critical to be able to articulate (in a concise way) why membership in League is important and to **ASK** people to join.

Membership recruitment is something that can and should be done around your League's voter service efforts.

LWV is well known for its work on election related issues. In developing the LWV Membership Recruitment Initiative, research found that LWV media coverage peaked around the 2004 elections. A significant amount of that coverage surrounded the fantastic local League election related activities, such as voter guides and candidate forums. The upcoming elections will offer a similar period of heightened visibility. To help maximize this, Leagues should incorporate membership recruitment messages into election activities that are planned – package the membership messages outlined below with your existing work/activities.

Assessing the Opportunities

In order to best leverage existing outreach opportunities, Leagues should conduct an assessment of the opportunities that are already planned where League members will communicate with potential new members.

- **Existing LWV Opportunities** – Leagues should review their entire calendar and identify scheduled events (i.e., candidate forums), communications (i.e., Web site, voters guides, flyers, etc.), and other relevant activities that will reach an external audience.
- **Opportunities Presented by Other Groups** – Similarly, Leagues should consult community calendars (often on the local media's Web site) and the events and activities that are being sponsored by other organizations including area universities, local media outlets and potential allied organizations, and generate a list of the opportunities that may exist for Leagues to disseminate relevant voter materials and membership message.

Messaging

Once Leagues have identified the opportunities, Leagues are encouraged to promote the benefits of membership and ways to join in their election activities. While different contexts may necessitate some adjustments, the membership message below is designed to tap into a core value of wanting your community to be strong, safe, fair and healthy. It is believed that this will resonate with many in your community, especially women ages 50-65, who are entering retirement and have been politically active.

“The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join LWV and be directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong, safe and vibrant.”

Membership messaging like the above should be consistent and constant. Include a membership message in as many of your media statements and election materials and activities as possible. We anticipate that messaging around strong communities and opportunities for leadership are likely to resonate powerfully during an election cycle.

The Key Step

The tips below in the Opportunities for Media Outreach section will help get your League noticed in the media, but there is an additional key step that you *must* take to gain new members: **You must ASK people to join.** Give them easy opportunities to join. Make sure the home page of your League's Web site has a highly visible and easy option for people to join. Make sure you have forms and sign up sheets at your forums. Encourage people who attend candidates' forums and debates to join. Put a "Join the League" ad in your voters guide (paid for by your operating fund), and when talking to someone who becomes excited about what your League is doing, ASK them to join right then and there! Carry membership brochures and sign them up!

Membership Messages at League-sponsored Election Events

While there are plenty of opportunities at League-sponsored events to weave in "the message," it is not always easy to make these two very distinct subjects (such as election related issues and League membership) fit together in a cohesive way. Below are some possible suggestions about how to do so this election season. The exact words are not critical but communicating the underlying values is!

- *Candidates' Forum.* From the dais, the moderator could include the following message in his/her opening remarks – "The League of Women Voters is a trusted, nonpartisan political organization. Our members do the hands-on work to safeguard democracy. While we never endorse a candidate, we are directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong. As an LWV member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I would encourage you to pick up some of the League's information available here tonight or visit our web site at XXX."
- *Issue Forum.* From the dais, the moderator could include the following message in his/her opening remarks - "The League of Women Voters is a trusted, nonpartisan political organization. Our members do the hands-on work that safeguard democracy and lead to civic improvement. As an LWV member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I would encourage you to pick up some of the League's information available here tonight or visit our web site at XXX."
- *Voters' Guide.* You may place an ad for membership – "The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join the League and be directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong, safe and vibrant. As an LWV member, you are a part of an organization where thoughtful, active leaders work to create change in their communities. To join us please visit: YOUR LEAGUE'S CONTACT INFO/PREF WEBSITE HERE.

Remember to make it easy for an individual to join. Have League materials (such as membership brochures and copies of the *Voter*) available. Offer to do follow up, use the membership messages provided, and engage people with your own personal League success story. Most importantly, make sure you remember to **ASK** people to join the League. All Leagues have the opportunity to increase membership. After all, the League is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.

Opportunities for Media Outreach

The following are suggested key outreach activities that Leagues are encouraged to explore to increase **visibility**, drive traffic to your League's Web site and, as appropriate, deliver direct membership recruitment messages through the media during an election season. When possible, we would like you to use the election as the media "hook" and overlay the membership messages. Please note that these are broad recommendations and are in no way intended to replace or interfere with existing plans that your League may have for communications and activities during the election season. At a minimum, please try to wrap up all media contacts with a "plug" for the League that emphasizes membership.

- *Membership language.* Leagues should use the membership language on all media communications (media advisories, press releases, press statements, etc).
- *Tip Sheets.* A tip sheet with ideas for creating local stories could be released in your local and regional media markets at a key point during the election season. These tip sheets would be disseminated to your local media via email and include a brief story idea and relevant League contact information where the reporter could follow-up. In other words, you can provide story ideas to the reporters in your area. They will be looking for ideas beyond the "horse race" story, and your League can provide those ideas. (Please refer to *Voter Turnout: Let's Turn It Up!*, a publication of the National Association of Broadcasters and LWV, on www.lwv.org for suggestions. Although prepared for the 2004 election, much of the information and the PSA scripts are not outdated.)
- *FAQ's* - Develop a list of the top 5 questions for journalists to pose to local officials/election commissioners regarding steps that are being/have been taken to ensure voters are enfranchised in all elections.
- *Talk Radio/Public Television.* Propose ideas to talk radio shows and public television programs about hosting key League members to discuss the status of the area's election system and any concerns about voter access or participation. Leagues may consider recruiting/recommending additional participants from allied organizations. In preparation for participation in any radio and/or TV appearance, key talking points should include a message to visit the Web site for more information. Leagues may also want to inquire about how to air PSAs. Scripts are available on the LWVUS Web site.
- *Opinion Pieces.* Draft an opinion piece that highlights key issues/concerns around the voting process or voter access to participation. Special consideration should be given to the signer of the op-ed and Leagues may consider whether co-signing the piece with an allied organization may elevate League visibility.
- *Rapid response.* Leagues should scan media coverage on an ongoing basis beginning now through the election to identify opportunities for the League to insert messages on voter access and participation through letters to the editor.