

“HOT TOPICS” LUNCH

Every community has topics of interest that are unique and important to its citizens. What are the challenges that face your community today? What is the hot button issue that everyone is talking about at local government meetings? Consider using the “Hot Topics” Lunch as a venue to discuss these timely issues, while also bringing a spotlight to the League and its work.

When done with an intentional focus on organizational growth, Leagues have found these events to be an extremely successful way to attract new members to the organization. The tips below were gleaned from League experiences in Florida. We thank them for their suggestions and congratulate them on their success with this program. They report gaining 1 – 5 new members at every “Hot Topics” event!

Getting Started

- **Step One:** Enlist a small committee of two or three, including Board and off-Board leaders, to draw up a plan for three to four months. The committee should decide upon the topics to be covered as well as what speakers would be appropriate. Consider “controversial” speakers or subjects that may be outside of the “usual” League interests. Customize the program to fit your League’s needs and to utilize your League’s “connections” to secure speakers. (Panels tend to get higher attendance than single speakers, but the right individual speaker can draw a great crowd.)
- **Step Two:** Secure a venue for a luncheon that you will be able to use regularly. A private dining room is a must to ensure that your guest speakers will not be interrupted. Also consider audio/visual capability; that will be a plus as you grow! Negotiate a set price for food and beverage for your guests; remind the restaurant that you will be giving them repeat business and attracting the community’s “movers and shakers” (i.e., people who are good prospects for future business). Make sure that the cost of admission covers the cost of the meal, and some Leagues add on an additional amount to help offset the League’s operating expenses.
- **Step Three:** It is imperative that you market your lunch programs consistently and frequently. Attendance will grow, but it will depend on very consistent reminders.

Some proven marketing strategies from Leagues in Florida include:

- ✓ Put Hot Topics speakers on the cover of your League’s newsletter with their photograph and a brief biography. (See www.LWVOC.org/newsletters for samples.)
- ✓ Send out a bright colored postcard with essential information and a “catchy” title. Be sure to include the location, price, and how to RSVP. The use of post cards will make the invite stand out among other mail as well as cut down on your postage costs!
- ✓ Use your email database to send out a series of reminders before every luncheon. Be sure to include the RSVP contact, as well as all relevant information.
- ✓ Encourage members to invite their friends, family, and neighbors to these events! This is the perfect venue to bring friends who *might be interested* in joining the League. A personal invitation to attend – and hopefully join – will produce results.

Additional Tips and information:

- **Time:** Plan on a minimum of 90 minutes from beginning to end. Arrive early, and remember to bring your banner, membership forms, past newsletters, and a reservation list!
- **Welcome Guests:** Warmly welcome guests to this event and invite non-members to join. Have speakers and other non-members introduce themselves briefly prior to the speaking portion of the event.
- **Designate membership ambassadors:** Have two of your most outgoing and welcoming members in charge of welcoming, handing out literature, and making sure new attendees are welcomed and seated with others. Make sure your membership ambassadors are comfortable asking people to join during conversations with prospective new members!
- **Keep it fun:** Make it an interesting and informative event for members and guests to network and socialize while showing them the value of League membership.

Sample topics:

- Climate Change
- News vs. Opinions
- Restoring Voter Trust
- Legislative Wrap Up/Kick off
- Ethics at the Local Level: Promises and Pitfalls

In Florida, each of the events listed above attracted 85 – 108 attendees!

In identifying speakers, consider local professors, reporters/columnists, agency heads, law enforcement, legislators, lobbyists, elected or appointed school officials, hospital and college administrators, local activists or organizers, and authors. Utilize connections among League members to help secure speakers.