

Election Activities

The ideas and messages contained in this section are meant to be combined with and complement the voters service efforts that your League does during election season. It is a reminder to Leagues that, during this time of increased visibility, 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 voters 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 elections. A significant amount of that coverage surrounded the many fantastic local League election related activities, such as voters guides and candidate forums. The upcoming elections (local, state, and federal) will offer a similar period of heightened visibility. To help maximize this, Leagues should incorporate membership recruitment messages into election activities that are planned.

Assessing the Election Opportunities

In order to best leverage existing election 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 from September through November (or spring election months) and identify scheduled (or anticipated) 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 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 the message.

Using the Message During Elections

Once Leagues have identified election opportunities, Leagues are encouraged to promote the benefits of membership and ways to join in their activities. While different contexts may necessitate some adjustments, the membership message 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 (see messages).

Membership recruitment messaging 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 League membership providing opportunities to build strong communities and serve as community leaders are likely to resonate powerfully during the election cycle.

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 (election-related events/services and League membership) fit together in a cohesive way. Below are some possible suggestions about how to do so during election season. The exact words are not critical but communicating the underlying values are.

➤ **At a 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.”

➤ **At an Issues 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.”

➤ **In a Voters' Guide**

This must be paid for with your League’s operating funds; NOT education fund monies.

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/WEB SITE HERE.

The Key Step

There is a messaging step that you must take at all election events (and in all activities): **You must ASK people to join.** Make sure the home page of your League’s Web site has a highly

visible and easy option for people to join. 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! (Please note that membership brochures and brochure carriers can be ordered from LWVUS.)

Remember to make it easy for an individual to join. Have League materials (such as membership brochures and copies of the *Voter*) available at events. Do follow up (i.e. send participants a letter and ask them to join), 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 (see Fiscal and Compliance FAQ if you have any questions about what you can and cannot do at an (c)3 event) .

Opportunities for Media Outreach

The following are suggested outreach activities that Leagues are encouraged to explore to increase visibility, drive traffic to your League's Web site and, as appropriate, deliver membership recruitment messages through the media during the election season. When possible, we would like you to use the election as the media "hook" and overlay the membership messages. **At a minimum**, please try to wrap up all media contacts with a "plug" for the League that emphasizes membership.

- *Membership messages.* Leagues should use the membership messages 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 e-mail 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. A sample tip sheet is provided.
- *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. (Please refer to the June 2006 and October 2006 issues of the *National Voter* for possible ideas.)
- *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.



Election Activities - Press Release Template for Local Leagues

LOGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE HERE]

[YOUR LEAGUE'S WEB SITE]

Contact:

[YOUR CONTACT

PERSON AND INFO]

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF [XXX]: WORKING FOR YOU THIS ELECTION SEASON

[YOUR CITY, STATE] – From coast to coast, League members are rolling up their sleeves and doing the hands-on work of safeguarding our democracy. From educating and registering voters to breaking down the barriers to voting that still exist in many states, the League of Women Voters (LWV) has worked for more than 87 years to actively engage voters in building a better nation - and this election season is no different.

“As we approach the [DATE] Election, the LWV of [XXX] is working hard to register, educate, and encourage voters to fulfill their most precious civic responsibility,” said [LOCAL LEAGUE LEADER NAME]. This year, we have been proud to offer [ELECTION ACTIVITIES YOU'VE DONE] to the [AREA] community.”

From providing voters with nonpartisan, up-to-date and accurate candidate and issue information in their Voters' Guides to hosting candidate and issue forums, League members are actively building stronger communities. Leagues are also engaging voters and participating in voter registration drives to ensure that everyone who is eligible has the opportunity to vote on Election Day.

[INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL ELECTION ACTIVITIES]

In conjunction with the League's traditional election activities, the League of Women Voters also has an easy-to-use, nonpartisan voter information Web site, www.VOTE411.org. The site provides a polling place locator and state-specific information related to voter registration, absentee voting, early voting, ID requirements, voting machines and contact information for elections officials.

League members in [AREA] and throughout the country have also distributed [5 Things You Need to Know on Election Day cards](#) to voters. The 5 Things voter card is a handy reference – a last minute checklist – to help voters get ready to vote and participate in this election. The League of Women Voters are leaders that do the hands-on work to safeguard democracy and bring civic improvement to [XX COMMUNITY NAME]. To join or for more information, please visit [www.lwv.org or YOUR WEB SITE].

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. With more than 87 years of experience and 850 local and state affiliates, the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations.



Election Activities - Sample Post-Election Letter to the Editor

On Election Day, the real winners were the voters. Voters nationwide turned out in large numbers and, according to exit polls, 87 percent of them reported that they felt confident that their votes would be counted accurately. According to initial reports from election officials, nationwide voter turnout was more than 40 percent-- higher than during the 2002 midterm election [CHANGE TO CURRENT STATISTIC].

As a leader of the [LOCAL TOWN] League of Women Voters, I work year-round to safeguard democracy and ensure that our democracy works at all levels of government. I was immensely gratified to see so many people engaged in the political process. As the League's work continues, I encourage others in the community to maintain their commitment to civic improvement by joining the League. Together we can keep our community strong, healthy, and vibrant.

Sincerely,

[LOCAL LEAGUE PRESIDENT NAME]
[LEAGUE NAME]
[TOWN/CITY]

Election Activities -Sample Reporter Tip Sheet**Story Idea #1**

This year brings a new way of voting and these differences will make many feel like first-time voters.

For example, there are plans that require eligible voters to show not only photo I.D. at the polling place, but also present documentary proof of citizenship. The public has yet to be informed of what's changed – the system has failed to include a mechanism to educate the public about these important changes within an already complicated voting system.

An explanation of the new requirements to prepare your readers and [COUNTY's] voters is critical to avoid the potential for widespread voter disenfranchisement.

The League of Women Voters opposes such plans and is available to speak about both the details of the plan and what voters can do to ensure their vote counts on Election Day.

Story Idea #2

Have American's lost their will to vote?

With ongoing debates about the validity of elections and so much attention being paid to voter disenfranchisement are we just further dampening the enthusiasm of voters?

We need to do everything possible to encourage and assist voters in exercising this important right. Members of the League of Women Voters are working to build enthusiasm for November [OR SPING ELECTION MONTH] and [CONTACT] would be interested in speaking with you about a potential piece that highlights some of the encouraging news as we enter this year's election season.

Story Idea #3

Although rarely mentioned, confusion about the location of polling places was one of the biggest barriers to voting in 2004.

Voting seems like an easy thing to do, but there are several things the voter needs to know prior to going to the polls, chief among them where to go!

The League has taken this problem into their own hands and has developed a new one-stop-shop for election information, www.VOTE411.org. VOTE411.org launched in 2006 and includes an interactive feature for voters to find their specific polling place. The LWV would like to discuss this and other steps that voters can take to make sure their vote counts on Election Day.

Election Activities - Examples from MRI Year One**Great Success Story - Saginaw County - MI**

LWV of Saginaw County has a reputation in the community as being a very politically active League. During the election they worked to maximize this image and become more proactive with their outreach. They began by sending out letters offering to speak before groups and received four speaking engagements. They reported that this resulted in at least one new member who is connected to an allied organization.

The "message" was used in the League's speech at an event for local ballot measures and at the introduction at many of their forums. The MRI message was also added to Letters to the Editor and other media outreach. There was media good coverage of the forums and events and though this was their first try at implementing a proactive election strategy, the results were apparent.

Additional Examples of Election ActivitiesGreater Omaha, NE

- The Omaha ballot had an amazing number of initiatives that puzzled some members of the community. Greater Omaha reached out to confused members with business cards that said, "Be Informed on Current Issues. Join the League of Women Voters!" and included the League's contact information. The League asked members to bring them along to their polling place when they went to vote.

Oakland, CA

- Oakland incorporated the message on printed election materials like their Pros & Cons of local ballot measures, a list of state & local ballot measures handed out to participants at Pros & Cons presentations. They also used messages on an advocacy piece about ballot measures supported and opposed by the state and local Leagues, and in the scripts used by moderators at candidate forums and Pros & Cons presentations.

Palm Beach County, FL

- Palm Beach County incorporated the message into their speakers bureau presentations around the election. The League gave over 35 speeches leading up to the election. Membership materials and sign-in sheets were brought to these presentations, which resulted several new members.

Spartanburg County, SC



Membership Recruitment Initiative - Year Two

- All election related press releases and meeting announcements contained the MRI message. The Spartanburg County president also included it into her speech at the League's November meeting focused on elections.