

## Membership Recruitment Initiative Overview

In the fall of 2005, LWVUS confronted a single question that had been the biggest challenge for the League over the past 30 years: *Can something be done about membership?*

To answer the question, the League hired Spitfire Strategies to start research. They conducted interviews with stakeholders, reviewed organizations who conduct similar work previous three years. The information that they found answered the initial question and was the foundation for the strategic decisions that created the membership recruitment initiative.

Descriptions of the League and its strengths varied. The research conducted showed that the League has a very respected reputation and a strong and proud history. The challenge existed, however, in that while there was great name recognition of the League of Women Voters, there was limited awareness about the core value that the League offered to potential members.

The media scan with over three years of coverage found over 700 articles. Of all these articles, 50 percent were news pieces, but of those articles, only one communicated the value of the LWV – the mission.

Overall, the big finding was that communications about the organization's work and the value in LWV membership are inconsistent. The key challenge that the MRI was designed to overcome was inconsistent communications. While LWV has a solid reputation and strong name recognition – largely stemming from our long history and work on candidate forums, it was clear that LWV did not have a strong, easily defined position that is distinct among other groups who are engaged in similar work in similar issue areas.

Overall, what was discovered was that individuals outside the organization do not have a clear understanding of the value in becoming an LWV member because LWV members are not communicating it in a consistent way that resonates with potential members. The theme & message, outreach strategies, and initiative components were designed to address this challenge.

### THEME & MESSAGE

#### **“LWV: Where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement”**

The central theme of the initiative: “LWV: Where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement” was selected because it connects directly with the interests of the women we’ll be asking to become members. Women who are leaving the workforce or those who have recently left retain their commitment to leadership, their desire to give back, and their dedication to civic improvement. We will be weaving this basic theme into ALL of the activities associated with this initiative and asking you to add a message like this to the existing activities that you have planned for the year. (The specific messages derived from this theme and how to use them are available in the "Messages and Values" section.)

## OUTREACH

The membership outreach campaign has been specifically designed to help League leaders communicate the benefits of League membership to potential members and to highlight the great work that League members do to create civic improvement in communities around the country. The communications tactics that are outlined here offer opportunities for local and state Leagues to get the message out but we also encourage Leagues to identify ways that they can incorporate membership outreach efforts into the unique activities that are already planned.

There are three main methods for outreach: direct outreach, allied outreach, and ongoing outreach. Year one taught us everything is a membership opportunity. This includes incorporating the messages into MRI program components (see next section), existing League sponsored events, and work with the media. The key is to be intentional and consistent in using the messages.

### Direct Outreach

Communicating the membership messages to the target audience is direct outreach. To deliver the message successfully to the target audience, each and every League event needs to be done with an emphasis on direct outreach.

Examples of direct outreach opportunities during program components:

- Having a local League president ask audience members at a candidate or issue forum to join the League and to visit the League information table for additional material.
- Adding a membership ad to a League Voters' Guide.
- Adding a message and "an ask" to join to all press releases and media advisories announcing events.

These are just a sample of the many ways to directly communicate the initiative message to potential new members. Messages must be consistently and confidently communicated and added onto every event/activity.

### Allied Outreach

There are many organizations in your local community that interact with the target audience every day. If you establish strong partnerships with allied organizations, especially local organizations – from the retired teachers to local Chambers of Commerce – you can expose the League to potential members and find opportunities to plug your message into ready-made events. A worksheet is included to help Leagues identify potential partnerships. Leagues should prioritize their outreach efforts to organizations that will be the best at helping them reach members of the target audience.

For example, potential outreach opportunities in the Seattle region might include:

- The Seattle Chamber of Commerce has an annual Regional Leadership conference in October that draws 200-250 business, government and community leaders from throughout the Puget Sound region to address an issue of importance to the region.
- A company called Moore and Associates, located in Washington State and serving Seattle, is a leading industrial psychology firm that has introduced a post-career transition planning program for senior corporate executives.
- Other community and volunteer groups, such as the AARP, retired teachers, librarians, union workers, AAUW, and the YWCA of Greater Seattle provide excellent opportunities for LWV to interact with other civic-minded individuals who might be interested in learning more about LWV.

There are a variety of additional state and local allies to tap for this effort, including local health care associations, academic institutions, local political organizations, and adult education providers/programs.

### **Ongoing Outreach**

Ongoing outreach is the way Leagues incorporate the membership messages into everything they do (i.e. beyond the big program components). These are the on-going “little things” that Leagues will need to do to help maximize their impact. These are just as important as the big components and outreach strategies outlined in this handbook.

The handbook gives you tools on how to craft messages that resonate with the target audience and how to welcome new members continuously. You’ll learn the best ways to equip current members by giving the tools and information needed to reach out to the community and recruit new members. To be successful, local board members and active non-board members should be dubbed a "membership ambassador" to help with the initiative throughout the year.

For example, ongoing outreach opportunities include:

- Updating your League’s membership brochure to reflect the messages and be more inviting to non-members.
- Continuously inviting a member of the press to cover or participate in League events in order to develop a relationship over time.
- Updating your League’s Web site to include the membership message and ask to join.

### **INITIATIVE COMPONENTS**

The Membership Recruitment Initiative has several project components designed to recruit new members from the target demographic. While LWVUS believes that all of these components are

useful, we realize that Leagues will be doing these *in addition* to already planned/existing League activities. We also know that local Leagues know their own communities best; in other words, there is not a "one size fits all" approach. Therefore, we will work with state League coordinators to establish an "a la carte" menu of activities from which local Leagues can focus their efforts. Our aim is to have Leagues visible each month if possible. This overview lists some *sample* activities to provide a sense of the type and scope of possible activities.

Our goals in creating the "menu" of activities were threefold:

- Ensure that Leagues have a consistent presence and visibility in the community throughout the year (debunk the myth that we are an elections only organization)
- Enhance what the Leagues are already doing and play up its local successes/assets
- Make this a sustainable and successful endeavor for Leagues

The project activities or components are divided to three categories: major, intermediate, and continuous. Local Leagues will need to select 2 major and 3-4 intermediate components to complete during the year. The level of "intensity" of the components is determined by the amount of time and resources that will be needed to accomplish the activity. All local Leagues must undertake the "continuous" activities throughout the year.

LWVUS has designed numerous tools and resources to help Leagues succeed in undertaking these activities. These are also compiled in this handbook.

### **Sample Major Program Components**

To raise the League's profile, the initiative calls on Leagues to execute two major programs throughout the year. These components offer valuable media hooks for local Leagues to raise awareness about the LWV, strengthen the way the LWV is defined both internally and externally, and recruit new members. The following represent some of these activities; other local or national opportunities may also be incorporated as the pilot Leagues plan out their specific activities for the year.

*Election Activities* – The 2007 and certainly 2008 elections will be an important period around which local Leagues can incorporate new membership messages into the existing activities that are planned. Every public event/activity (e.g. candidate forums and voters guides) should incorporate messages about the value of membership in the League and a request for individuals to join.

*Making Democracy Work Award* – By sponsoring a community award with specific criteria for receipt, the League can identify a small pool of potential members, begin to interact with award nominees to open the door to full membership, and provide potential members with a key example of the type of work/activities that LWV supports. To heighten visibility around this effort, LWVUS will work with the five states to develop and implement local League strategies for maximizing media coverage for award activities. The local Leagues will raise their profile



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through this public event, recognize the work of a target audience member, and have the opportunity to showcase upcoming activities in which potential new members might meaningfully contribute.

*Community Poll* – Leagues have an opportunity to do a unique program component and field a poll that details what individuals who have recently retired/those approaching retirement age plan do with their free time. Interest in the population approaching retirement is spiking on a national level, and local data could be an excellent hook for a local media blitz. LWVUS will assist state Leagues in their work with local Leagues, especially in providing advice about partnering with their local newspapers to conduct a reader poll. The key will be to release the poll findings along with quotes that highlight the opportunities offered by membership in League.

### Sample Intermediate Program Components

There is a wide variety of intermediate activities. In general, these are programs or projects that are “very familiar” to Leagues (such as a community forum on an issue), but these activities will have an added or intentional membership component. These might include events/activities planned around a community issue or recognized date. Some examples include:

*“Sunshine Week”* – March 16-22, 2008 is Sunshine Week - a national event to increase public awareness of the importance of government transparency. Pilot Leagues can bolster their profiles by getting involved in leading the conversation in their respective areas. All League-sponsored activities should include requests for new members.

*LWV Birthday* - February 14, 2008 is the 88<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League of Women Voters’ founding and should be celebrated! Host a birthday party, an informational session, or a showing of *Ironed Jawed Angels* to celebrate our history with members of the community. Press releases, proclamations, and other materials will be available from LWVUS.

*Women's History Month* - March is Women's History Month. Leagues can capitalize on this media hook by sending out press releases, writing an Op-Ed or letter to the editor, and hosting events and educational forums. LWVUS will have press releases, a sample Op-Ed, and additional materials available.

*Bill of Rights Day* - Bill of Rights Day is December 15, but Leagues may celebrate it throughout the month of December. This celebration of the Bill of Rights is a great opportunity to educate the community about governmental issues and how members of the public can get involved. Leagues can design their own events around Bill of Rights Day and can easily incorporate the techniques of the Membership Recruitment Initiative. Sample press releases and materials from LWVUS are available. Other milestones, such as Constitution Day (September 17) and Law Day (May 1), offer similar opportunities. Check the LWV National Calendar for a list of important dates and milestones. (see Web site)



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*Many, Many More!* - Local Leagues have their own events that they could adapt to be an intermediate component. Leagues know their communities best and can judge what activities and events will be the most compelling for their community members to attend.

### **Sample Continuous Program Components**

These are the on-going outreach “little things” that Leagues will need to weave into all of their activities – existing ones as well as programs specifically associated with the initiative. Tips on implementing continuous program components are found throughout this handbook.

*Using the Message* - Communicating concisely and consistently is crucial to the success of this initiative. Each pilot League will need to regularly incorporate messages about the League and the value of membership in the League when communicating with potential members.

*Asking People to Join* - Asking is crucial. Leagues that explicitly invite people of the target audience to join the League see results. Every interaction with a potential member is an opportunity to extend an invitation to join the League. It is so simple that it is often overlooked. Ask everywhere and every time.

*Reaching Out to Allied Organizations* - Forming partnerships with organizations in your community will elevate the League's visibility within the community and expose the League to pools of potential members.

*Developing Relationships with the Media* – Reporters receive many phone calls, e-mails, and press releases daily. Building relationships with members of the media and persistently sharing information about the League's work is very important. It will increase the likelihood of the League's message getting “covered” by the media, which increases the League's visibility and in turn brings in more members.

*Submitting Stories to the Storybank* – There is no better way to explain the benefits of membership than to share stories from current LWV members. These stories should profile League members who reflect values similar to those identified for members of the target audience. The stories that LWVUS collects will have multiple uses at all levels of League.