

Media Outreach

Media outreach is a big component that combines direct and ongoing outreach. It is perhaps the most difficult area to achieve some level of success as building relationships with the media take time. However, media outreach has the biggest potential "pay off" in terms of gaining visibility for the League. Local Leagues should conduct media outreach all of the time – in addition to other ongoing outreach activities. It is important to include League membership messages, when and where appropriate. This section provides some tips on how to strengthen media outreach efforts and consequently, strengthen results.

Make sure it's newsworthy

Reporters are busy, so make sure it's timely and newsworthy. Reporters do not want to cover the same old story that everyone else is covering, or that they themselves have already covered. Track the work of the reporter you are targeting, gauge his or her interests, and note the stories he or she has done recently. Your story should either be something entirely new, or introduce a fresh angle on an existing issue.

Know your audience

Your pitch will only be successful if you deliver it to the right person. This depends on the medium, as well as the kind of story you are pitching.

Television - For a feature story such as one about the League and its local activities, you need to identify the right reporter or producer who will be interested in your pitch. The easiest way to do this is to watch the news. Pay attention to the beats that reporters cover. Then you can pitch that reporter, or his or her producer, directly. Highlighting the unique benefits of LWV membership around a particular event or speaking engagement is an excellent opportunity to garner free broadcast media coverage.

Radio - For a public radio station, you may want to target a specific reporter who covers a feature or lifestyle beat. Some stations may have an assignment editor, and you can always go to the news editor. If there is a particular show that you want to target, direct your pitch to the show's producer. Again, it's useful to listen to the program that you are pitching so that you have a good sense of the kinds of stories they do and what they've already covered.

Newspaper - Small newspapers tend to have small staffs. If the paper you are contacting is very small, the best person to receive your pitch may be the news editor. At larger papers, you will want to find the reporter covering the appropriate beat for your story, or even consider a columnist. Again, the easiest way to do this is to read the paper and track the coverage – after a few days or weeks, it will be easy to know who covers what stories.

Craft a creative pitch

Reporters are constantly besieged by phone calls, e-mails and faxes from people trying to convince them to write stories. You need to stand out from the crowd. This means deciding on

the best means of contact – usually e-mail or phone – and developing a pitch that is attention-grabbing and brief.

Phone - If you're going to pitch by phone, plan what you will say in advance. Most reporters will give you 15 seconds – maybe 30 – to make your case. Make those seconds count. Avoid overwhelming them with jargon and over-rehearsed talking points. Use a striking fact, or mention the name of a prominent person available for an interview. If they're interested, they'll keep listening. But if you can't capture their interest quickly, you'll lose them, and the story.

E-mail - The same rules apply for an e-mail pitch – except that reporters can delete it without ever reading it. Create an interesting subject line and make sure the first few sentences of your e-mail are attention grabbing. And don't write a novel – one to three brief paragraphs will do it. Let the reporter know that you will call to follow up – don't leave it up to a reporter to contact you.

Note - Many e-mail addresses are set up to block e-mails with attachments, therefore its best not to send any documents as attachments. Instead copy and paste into the body of the e-mail. Or alternatively, if you are trying to share a lengthy document with a reporter, post the document online and provide the reporter with a Web address to view the piece.

Strong delivery will make or break your pitch.

Whether you're pitching the reporter by phone, or following up on your e-mail pitch, consider your timing. Do not call a reporter in the late afternoon when he or she is likely to be on deadline. If you reach a reporter who sounds harried, ask when would be a better time for you to call back. Plan and practice your pitch and deliver it with confidence – but don't read it. Ask if the reporter is interested, and offer to share additional information. A reporter will rarely agree to do a story during your first call, so your goal should be to start the conversation. Be prepared to leave a brief, to-the-point voice-mail (30 seconds or less) if you do not reach a live person.

Follow up...but don't pester.

You've spoken to the reporter, shared additional resources and haven't heard anything. Give a call, or send a follow-up e-mail. Ask if the reporter thinks he or she is going to do the story, or if he or she needs anything else to make a decision. If the reporter says no, ask if you can stay in touch as things develop. Your efforts now may pay dividends later. If the reporter says yes, offer to help in any way that you can (identifying spokespeople, providing background information, etc.). After the story runs, send an e-mail or note thanking the report for his or her efforts.

Media Outreach - Messaging and Interview Tips & Techniques

People need to hear the same message as many as eight times before it sinks in according to some researchers. With this in mind, LWVUS, state, and local Leagues alike can have an opportunity to increase awareness about the value of League membership simply by working on some ways to deliver concise and consistent messages for potential members about the unique value of League membership. Remember, the most important thing to remember is let potential members know that League membership is a great opportunity and to ASK them to join!

One important step towards coordinating communications about membership is to have designated spokespeople. Spokespeople serve as the "go to" persons for inquiries from the media and other organizations. While many Leagues traditionally have had only their president (or their designee) serve as their spokesperson, and it's important to retain the practice of all policy related communication continue to be done by the President or their designee, each League should have a specially trained group to effectively and consistently communicate the value of membership. Board member and others off board, can serve as "membership ambassadors" in communicating the value of League membership to non-members. While all members serve as membership ambassadors and are responsible for asking potential members to join, "membership spokespeople" are called upon to speak to the media and other organizations.

League members should be briefed on membership messages and think about ways to deliver the messages and to share the stories of specific League members, the reasons they've joined, the value of membership and the personal and League successes that they have enjoyed. The main job of the spokesperson is to communicate these messages clearly and consistently, but also, and most importantly, to ASK others to join the League!

Below are a few tips both for the League spokespersons that will help ensure that a consistent message on membership is being disseminated in your community during a media interview/interaction.

PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

Know the Message

LWVUS has worked to develop some messages on membership that are uniquely designed to reach women between the ages of 50-65 to talk to them about the value of membership, though none of the messages deter other groups from joining.

The tailored messages are outlined in the "Message and Values" section. Each message is designed to make a connection between the work of LWV and the interests of a potential member. Leagues can combine the messages outlines in any combination to target your message to the audience.

In every interaction it will be important for you to communicate the unique benefits a League membership provides. As a member, you already know, a League membership offers one-of-a-

kind opportunities to serve as a leader; it allows women to make a difference in the areas which they live; and as a member of the LWV, you are part of an organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. The worksheets on the following pages are tools to help local League with these steps.

Do Research

The more knowledge you have, the more equipped you will be. There are several questions you want answered before an interview. Some to consider are:

- What's the interview about?
- What's your organization's role in the piece being proposed?
- Are you the focus or just a supporting player?
- Who else are they interviewing?
- What is the interview format?
- What outlet is it for? Is it one that reaches one of your target audiences? If it is not one you are familiar with, ask about their format: Is it a weekly, a daily, a conservative radio talk show?
- What's the format of the outlet?

Get Prepared

- **Know who you are talking to when you are being interviewed.**
You are talking to the audience that reads the story or sees it on TV. You are not talking to the reporter who is interviewing you.
- **Speak up!**
If an interviewer mis-states something or has a fact wrong, correct him/her politely.
- **Be concise.**
Keep your answers between 10-20 seconds.
- **Repeat, Repeat, Repeat.**
Try your best to repeat the information most important and relevant (Web site address, organization name and location, contact information, key benefits of membership, etc.)
- **Have a fact sheet handy.**
To the extent possible, always have current, up-to-date information available about the League and its membership. You can refer to it also to help stay "on message."

- **Tell a story.**
People remember points much more if they are illustrated with a story. By forming a good story as part of your presentation, your delivery skills will automatically improve as well.
- **Know what you want to say in advance.**
Your expertise might enable you to discuss endless aspects about League membership but only one, *maybe two*, points will make it into a story and even then a consumer of the story may only remember bits and pieces. Don't let an audience member or a journalist decide what the most important point is on this issue. Review the messages in this handbook and evaluate the topic on which you're speaking. Select one or two key points to make and make them well.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

You may be nervous, but the most important thing is to be calm and confident. Feel free to keep notes in front of you during a phone or radio interview. The following tips will help you deliver your messages effectively:

- **Collect your thoughts.**
If a journalist calls and wants to conduct an on-the-spot interview, ask if you can call him/her back in five minutes. Use that time to gather your thoughts and review your key points.
- **Keep it simple!**
Use clear language and avoid jargon. You don't want to bore your audience or make them feel stupid.
- **Use numbers, but sparingly.**
Memorize one or two precise statistics that will give weight to your messages and bring your information to life.
- **Be honest!**
Don't stretch the truth. If you don't know the answer, say so and suggest an alternative source. Anything less than factual and honest answers can seriously damage your credibility as well as the credibility of your cause.
- **Provide other sources that will back you up.**
Independent experts can help to provide support for your position. "National League President stated..."
- **Everything is on the record.**
Don't give in to the temptation to tell the reporter something "off the record." If you say it aloud, or put it in an e-mail, assume that it will appear in the reporter's story.

- **Stay calm.**
Getting flustered can convey a host of things – none positive! Prepare in advance, stick to your messages and you'll ace any interview.

THIS ISN'T JUST FOR INTERVIEWS!

The tips and suggestions mentioned above will also be helpful in other speaking opportunities and outreach activities, not just your interaction with the media. Many of these techniques will be valuable and useful when you reach out to potential allied groups, like Chambers of Commerce or the YWCA. Remember to ask people to join, stay on message, be concise, and tell your story or others' success stories about the League, and you'll do well.

Media Outreach - Messaging Three Steps Worksheet

Before any outreach, it is good practice to go through these three steps to ensure you are sending out the right message.

Step 1 - What is my GOAL?

Step 2 - Who is my AUDIENCE?

Step 3 - What is my MESSAGE?

Media Outreach – Interview Planning Worksheet

This is a sample planning sheet to help you in preparing for an interview – use this to jot down notes, ideas, and message points – practice makes perfect!

Prepare for an Interview: Key Points

Use this space to jot down the one or two key points that you will use in your interview.

Point #1: _____ **Point #2:** _____

Anticipate the questions you might be asked and prepare *brief* responses that deliver your key points. There is a difference between answering a question and responding to one. You can respond to nearly any question in a way that incorporates your key messages.

Prepare for an Interview: Anticipate Questions

Use this space to brainstorm questions that you might be asked (especially difficult or inappropriate ones). Then practice responding by staying calm and on message.

Media Outreach - Writing Successful Op/Eds

Op/Eds are short essays that appear next to the editorial pages of newspapers. They are a fantastic tool for Leagues working to influence local or regional policies, bring a new perspective to an issue, or react to developments in their communities.

Here are a few tips for writing successful Op/Eds, adapted from PNN Online, a leading nonprofit newsletter:

- Introduce yourself to your newspaper's op-ed page editor by telephone or e-mail and request the publication's op-ed guidelines. Then follow them.
- Determine your goal. What do you want to achieve through your op-ed? Do you want people to behave differently or take a specific action? Keep this goal in mind as you write.
- Select one message to communicate. Op-eds are short - typically around 800 words - so you have room to make just one good point.
- Be controversial or thought provoking. Editors like essays with strong opinions that will spark conversation.
- Illustrate how the topic or issue affects readers. Put a face on the issue by starting your essay with the story of somebody who has been affected or begin with an attention-getting statistic.
- Describe the problem and why it exists. This is often where you can address the opposing viewpoint and explain your group's perspective.
- Offer your solution to the problem and explain why it's the best option.
- Conclude on a strong note by repeating your message or stating a call to action.
- Add one or two sentences at the end that describe your name, title, and credentials as they relate to the topic.

Media Outreach - Examples from MRI Year One**Great Success Story - Oakland, CA**

Since the Oakland League could not depend on regular coverage in the widely read and huge metropolitan *Oakland Tribune*, the coordinator and League president explored different avenues to get more regular coverage of their activities. They decided to reach out to neighborhood association newsletters and had success getting many of their events covered and/or on monthly community calendars through this different media avenue.

In addition to alternative media outreach, phone invitations to members of the media to participate in one of Oakland's Sunshine Week activities were delivered. A very popular columnist with the *San Francisco Chronicle* agreed to be on a panel with the City Attorney to talk about Oakland's Sunshine Ordinance, and to be on a panel of journalists at their Making Democracy Work Award/Annual Luncheon. They have developed a great relationship with this contact for future media outreach.

Additional Examples of Media OutreachGreater Omaha, NE

- The project coordinators reached out asked and met with the *Omaha Reader* (a weekly paper) and hoped to get story in their newspaper. Not only did they get an article, they were also provided venues where they could distribute Voters Guides and the paper published information about voter registration locations that the League provided. Additionally they were offered an ad in *Today's Omaha Women* (local magazine) at a significant discount. Omaha decided to purchase the ad and got their money's worth as they ran it in the *Omaha Reader* for no additional charge several times up until the election.
- One of Omaha's main goals was to get coverage from the *Omaha World Herald*, the major newspaper in their community that had not given them any coverage in the past. Through persistent contact the League got noticed and had a meeting with the paper. The paper has warmed to the organization and has begun covering their events more regularly. They had a full article about their Making Democracy Work Award in the *Omaha World Herald* and they published an announcement to participate in the League's community poll.

Palm Beach County, FL

- Palm Beach County worked with many different media outlets throughout the year. They consistently reached out and sent press releases and media advisories for each and every



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Membership Recruitment Initiative - Year Two

event they held. They built on their rapport with their contacts and have successfully developed longstanding relationships. The League feels very comfortable with the inroads to both major newspapers, the PBS radio and television stations, and the county government channel. The League has appeared on all at least once in the past year and multiple times on and in many of them.

Saginaw County, MI

As an overall result of media outreach spurred by the MRI, the Saginaw County League has been covered by two local papers and had radio and TV PSAs aired. Throughout the year the project coordinator (who also served as the president) has done four radio interviews, and the League received about 12 mentions in their local pap