

Activities around Historic Milestones for Women

While League has always been more than a “women’s organization,” our founding and our history make it only natural that we should acknowledge and mark certain milestones for women, such as Women Equality Day (the anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment/August 26); the League’s birthday (February 14); or Women’s History Month (March). This document contains a list of suggested activities that Leagues could implement anytime, but might be planned around one of these milestones as the “hook” to spark wider interest

These activities were selected because they provide opportunities to raise the League’s visibility among community members, draw attention to the League’s work, showcase the value of membership in the League, and ultimately generate new members. These activities, while different in content, share some common threads in how they should be implemented using outreach tactics prescribed by the membership recruitment initiative.

Suggested Activities

Screen Iron-Jawed Angels - Leagues could host a viewing of the HBO film, Iron-Jawed Angels, which chronicles “the struggle of suffragists who fought for the passage of the 19th Amendment.” Leagues could partner with an allied organization in the community that will help to reach members of the League’s target audience. Available on DVD, the screening could be held in a living room or a local theater; the important element is to ensure the presence of potential new members.

Following the film, Leagues may host a discussion about the power of the women’s vote (especially as it relates to the upcoming 2008 elections). The League president could facilitate the discussion in partnership with the allied organization’s president and/or spokesperson. Leagues should also be sure to incorporate messages about the value of League membership and issue an invitation to join the League.

When the film originally aired, LWVUS created some viewing materials including some pointers on hosting a viewing party and some sample discussion questions. While slightly dated, these materials may be useful in framing the event and are available in this handbook.

Educate about DC Voting Rights - Women (and men) who live in our nation’s capital are still disenfranchised! Leagues could host a program or event that educates the public about how residents of the District of Columbia do not have a vote in Congress. It is estimated that close to 80 percent of Americans do not even know that this discriminatory practice still exists. The League has created some excellent educational materials (including numerous fact sheets, talking points, a sample meeting agenda, and a short video) about this issue. Visit the “Projects” section of www.lwv.org to download these materials. A curriculum is also available, which Leagues can share with schools in their area.



Membership Recruitment Initiative - Year Two

Regardless of what type of DC Voting Rights activity is undertaken, remember that it is an opportunity to showcase the League's work and an opportunity to invite others to join the organization. Think of allied groups that share the League's interest in promoting democracy and ask them to cosponsor a forum. Provide teachers with materials about this topic and remind them that they can make a difference by not only educating their students but by joining the League. Schedule a "deskside" chat with a reporter to educate him/her about this important civil rights issue and stress how the League members have been safeguarding democracy for decades.

Partner with a Library - In partnership with the local library, develop an exhibit that documents the history of women's role in government. The League could contact their local library and propose working together to develop an exhibit with effects that demonstrate the profound achievements of women throughout the past 80+ years.

Leagues could draft a press release on the day of the exhibition opening and if resources allow, host a launch event at the library. Leagues could invite members of the local press, community leaders, elected officials and members/friends of the League.

In conjunction with this or as its own event, Leagues could sponsor a "democracy story time" at their local library. To obtain a sample agenda, bibliography and hands-on activities, please visit www.youngsuffragists.org, an organization co-founded by a California League member. Besides using the library's own public relations network, Leagues could advertise the event to home school groups, Girl and Boy Scout troops, and other organizations. While the children are unlikely to join League, the parents, grandparents, and aunts who accompany them will. While the children are working on an activity, make a plug for the League's upcoming events and why people would want to join the League.

Host a Congressional Breakfast - Leagues could invite their local member(s) of Congress to attend a breakfast to celebrate and commemorate women's role in government/democracy. Be sure to check how your member of Congress has voted on League priority issues as there may be a way to thank them for something current they've just done, such as ethics reform, that is also important to our the health or our democracy. If the member of Congress is unavailable, Leagues could reach out to their local State Representative or State Senator and ask for his/her attendance. Leagues could work with the U.S. or State congressional member's staff to prepare a short speech, which commemorates the historic milestone and acknowledges the League's work.

Leagues should conduct outreach to members of the press in advance, and invite them to attend the event. Leagues should also invite community leaders, local citizens and members/friends of the League to attend and participate. Event information should be posted on the League Web site and in the calendar sections of the local newspapers. Outreach should begin two weeks prior to the day; however Leagues should begin reaching out to Congressional offices as early as possible to secure the member's attendance.

Materials for planning this type of event is included.

Host a Women's Leadership Luncheon – Longest League Member Keynote - Leagues may host a luncheon for community leaders, celebrating the role of women's leadership in their community over the past 80+ years. The keynote speaker could be the woman who has been a League member for the longest period of time, who has a personal story to tell about membership in the League. This League member could prepare a speech, telling her story and the story/history of the League. Leagues could invite other outstanding women leaders in the community, members/friends of the League, as well as select members of the local press.

Leagues should distribute a press release to members of the local media and place follow-up calls to select reporters, inviting them to the event or soliciting an interview with the League member and/or League president for inclusion in a potential feature or news article. Leagues should leverage this event to offer information about the League, the value and benefits of a membership, as well as information about the issues the organization represents.

This type of event is also a good opportunity to encourage the League members in attendance to submit their own stories about what their involvement in League has meant to them. Stories can be entered online at www.lwv.org/storybank. These "testimonials" are wonderful recruiting tools and can be used at future events or in other League communications.

Conduct Media Outreach

Any of the milestones (especially if the League is holding an event) are newsworthy. There are several ways that the media might be approached:

- The League president could approach the local paper about submitting an opinion piece.
- Leagues could reach out to the appropriate columnist at their local paper and/or host of a local radio program to pitch a piece that commemorates the day and acknowledges the many profound achievements of women in government over the past 80+ years.
- Leagues could "pitch" a feature story about an individual League member that through her League experience has helped to make the community healthy, vibrant and strong.
- League members could submit a letter to the editor calling attention to the milestone and relating it to the League's work and a current community issue/topic.
- League could "localize" a sample press template from LWVUS. (LWVUS will produce sample press templates/statements prior to Women's Equality Day, the League's birthday, and Women's History Month.)

Regardless of which option is pursued, Leagues must be persistent! Build relationships with reporters and follow up consistently. When you finally do get an interview or issue a release, be sure to remember that in addition to the milestone being celebrated or promotion of the event that is being hosted to mark it, you want to include the messages, stress the importance and value of the League's work, and (whenever possible) remind people how they can join the League.