

## Membership Retention Best Practices

Recruitment and retention; many League members think of them as two separate practices. However, good retention practices begin as soon as a new member is recruited and never stop. Retention is a continuous activity to which League time and resources should be devoted - just like membership recruitment! Below is a list of suggested best practices that Leagues can use to welcome new members, keep members engaged, and reach out to members considering leaving LWV.

### **Welcome New Members**

The first step is making new members feel welcome and a part of their League. We all know that first impressions mean a lot, so make new members' initial experiences with League great ones. Here are some ideas to make welcoming new members a consistent and customary practice.

*Welcome Packet* - Every new member of your League should receive a Welcome Packet. Ideally, this would be a kit that is full of information about your League, including a welcome letter from the president, a calendar of activities planned, a member contact list, and a small League item (i.e. pin, lanyard, button, or bumper sticker). Some Leagues' resources might not permit creating something as elaborate as this, but new members need to know the basics of how the League works and how they can get involved. This is the first official communication from the League so make a good impression and think about what goes into the packet. Include the most critical pieces of information that they will need to get started, not everything. Overwhelming a new member is not a good strategy.

*Orientation* - Many Leagues have had success hosting new member orientations at the beginning of a new League year or twice a year (in the fall and spring). These orientations should be a fun way to familiarize new members with League process, programs, and activities. Make it a casual experience by having a lunch or reception orientation. Don't be afraid to try new things and make sure there is time for them to ask their questions about the League. Provide concrete examples of the League's work/successes, and share individual, personal stories about the League.

*Mentoring Program* - Start a mentoring program by pairing new members with seasoned members of the League. Mentors can give new members first-hand insight and advice about League practices and actions and provide them with valuable history. Consider pairing people based on similar backgrounds or interests. The bond between new members and their mentors is irreplaceable, and many stay close throughout their years in League together.

*Introduction* - It is always intimidating to be the new person in the group. New members should be introduced at their first meetings to the whole membership and recognized at annual meetings. Having the League president say, "Please welcome, our new members Jane Smith and John Doe," is simple and an easy way to open the door for other members to welcome them to the League and makes the new members feel welcomed. Leagues might also consider asking those



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gathered at an event to wear nametags. This will help the new member get to know the names of League members, too.

*President Outreach* - The local League president (or his/her designee) should make a point to reach out to new members by calling them when they join and thanking them for becoming a member. This is a good time to ask new members what their interests are and to inform them about upcoming events. The personal welcome, interest, and invitation will mean a lot.

*New Member Ambassador/Committee* - Designate one member as the new member ambassador or create an entire committee of new member ambassadors. The ambassador(s) should be responsible for welcoming new members, sending them their packet of information, setting them up with their mentor, answering any questions they have, and keeping track of their interests.

### **Keep Members Engaged**

The best way to retain members is to never have them consider dropping in the first place. League members who are engaged, are having fun, and fulfilled by the time they spend with the League will be the ones who stick with the League for the long haul.

*Have an Agenda* - Nothing frustrates people more than not knowing what is going on. People don't want to waste their time. Try to have an agenda for every League meeting. It doesn't have to be fancy, simply list the items of business and an estimated timeframe in which things will be addressed. Members, new and old, will appreciate the organization and consideration for their time. Less time will be wasted, leaving more to connect with fellow League members.

*Create a Calendar* - Just like an agenda, people want to know what is going on in the upcoming year. At the beginning of the year send all members a tentative calendar. Nothing is set in stone, but giving members an idea of what will be happening in the coming year will allow them to plan accordingly and set aside dates when appropriate. It will also help your Board and committees organizing your League events maximize the media, community visibility, and recruitment opportunities in advance. LWVUS/EF has a national calendar that lists many important dates that your League may want to consider placing on its calendar. The LWVUS/EF calendar is located in the "Tools for Leaders" section in the "For Members" area of [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).

*Continuously Promote Member Benefits* - Why are you a member of the League? Mentioning the benefits of membership, both tangible and intangible, in member communications like your League's monthly newsletter will remind people what they are getting out of all the hands-on work they do. Members join for a variety of reasons - from shaping the important issues in their community to getting the *National Voter*. Remind people of the benefits of being a League member wherever possible.

*Remind Members* - Send out e-mail reminders the week of an event (in addition to listing events in your newsletter). Very simply, people are busy and may forget about events that were announced weeks or months before.. Reminders can be quick and easy. Assign a person



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working on the event to e-mail the entire membership when the event approaches. A quick reminder will get more people at events and will remedy any "I meant to go to that!" laments.

*Create Small Opportunities* - Not everyone has a lot of time to contribute to the League. Many people want to help but are afraid that will get assigned to be a chair of a committee if they speak up. In all League undertakings, make sure that there are small opportunities for members to help out with and be sure to announce that these small opportunities exist. Whether it be sending out the reminders or delivering voters guides to the library, small tasks make people feel like they are contributing without being overwhelmed.

*Make Members Feel Special* - Always, always, always make members aware that they are special and appreciated. Send thank you e-mails or notes to the committee or members that helped put together an event. Recognize League members who have give 15, 25, 35 or even 50 years of service to the organization. Recognizing birthdays with a cake at one meeting a month is a nice addition to the business at hand. Whatever way your League chooses to express appreciation, just be sure that members know that they are extraordinary for all that they do in the service of the League.

*Survey Member Interests* - Try surveying member interests at the beginning of the year after you create your calendar. This will give event leaders a better feel for who may want to assist with their event. Interest surveys also provide you with an opportunity to ask what sort of tasks members would be willing to undertake throughout the year. You can plan events accordingly when you know who is going to be available to help. You will also see if there are any topics of interest to your members that may not be being covered during the year. This can be remedied early in the year, before their interest in the League drops. Knowing what people like to do and discuss is very important in keeping interest in the League high.

*Have Fun* - Above all else, make sure your members enjoy the League and are having fun. Just because we take on the important issues facing our communities does not mean we have to be serious all the time. Bring a bottle of wine or have a potluck at your next meeting. Have educational reception events - combining the League with some hors d'oeuvres or finger food. Strictly social events can lift the spirits of League members and are just as important in creating change in the community. The League is a social network by nature and League friendships often last a life time. Why not make the time we spend together as enjoyable as possible!

### **Don't Give Up on Members**

It's always discouraging when members drop from League rosters. However, your League doesn't have to be passive when members decide not to renew. Reach out with the tactics below to ensure you have done everything possible to keep that person a member of the League.

*Ask* - When a member doesn't renew their membership, make sure that someone is assigned to reach out to them. First, send out an e-mail reminding them that they have not renewed (some people just need a reminder). If they don't renew, call the member and ask why they are not renewing. Listen to their concerns and make note of them to take to the Board, but also be sure to ask them to reconsider. Have your local League president send a note or call the lapsed



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member and ask them to reconsider again and address their concerns. Additionally, be sure to let them know that the League values their membership and wants them to continue to grow with the League. Make sure you exhaust all three of these methods before giving up. The personal ask always has tremendous power in recruitment and retention.

*Follow Up* - Whether a member does or does not rejoin after asking, make sure someone is responsible for following up with either a "Thank you" or a "We'll miss you" note or e-mail. Again, making the member feel wanted and valued (whether they renew or not) is crucial to future interactions. Sincere follow-up leaves the member with a good impression of the League, and the former member will be more likely to reconnect with the League at a later date or perhaps support the organization in some other way.

*Reconnect* - Revisit your old member lists and reconnect with members who have dropped in the past five years. Send them "We miss you" post cards or e-mails, an invitation to an event, or a discounted membership rate if they reestablish their membership. Former members know the importance of the League and are more likely to rejoin the League than those not familiar with the organization.