

Best Practices: Fundraising

“The League must meet its financial obligations to the state and national levels of the League.” This is one of the official requirements for local Leagues as revised and adopted by the 1994 LWVUS convention, and it serves as a measure of a League’s financial strength. Requirements must be met for a League to be officially recognized and are to serve as a continuing gauge of a League’s health and well-being.

In 1993, the LWVUS Membership Committee recognized that fulfilling the requirements alone does not assure a smooth-running and viable League. The committee developed a list of “Best Practices” that have proven to enhance the overall operation of the more successful Leagues, particularly in membership development.

The following “Best Practices: Fundraising” is offered by the LWVUS Development Committee for use by Leagues as they organize their work plan for the year or current fundraising efforts. In order to do the work of the League, we will all have to raise money beyond membership dues for the support of significant activities at all levels.

This list is neither comprehensive nor is it a “to-do” list with guilt assigned to non-practitioners. The term “Best Practices” means methods that have proven to be successful over time for many Leagues. The list is simply a way of sharing League successes.

Official Requirement: The League must meet its financial obligations to the state and national levels of the League.

Overview: Fundraising is one of the ways local Leagues meet this requirement. In addition, a successful League has sound fiscal management; it promptly pays Per Member Payment obligations in a timely way to the state and national levels of the League; its budgets are set to provide adequately for the implementation of League program and activities.

The League has regular fiscal reporting by the treasurer to the board in addition to an annual treasurer’s report to the membership and review of financial records.

The League’s dues are set realistically to cover annual state and national Per Member Payments, plus income for the League itself. In addition, the League aggressively pursues outside income through a finance drive and/or other fundraisers in order to achieve the mission of the League. Ten best practices for fundraising follow.

1. The League has an annual fundraising plan.

Best practices: *At an organization meeting before the League's official year of activity begins, the board approves the fundraising committee's plans for fundraising and schedules the events or solicitations in its calendar. A variety of appeals throughout the year, appropriate to the target audience, has proven more effective than a single effort. Fundraising activities are evaluated annually so that improvements can be made and ineffective efforts dropped.*

2. The League has a Fundraising Committee.

Best practices: *The League board recruits a member who is supportive and enthusiastic about the organization to lead the fundraising committee and gives that person both monetary support (it takes money to raise money!) and personal support through participation.*

Board members, while not necessarily committee members, participate in the fundraising efforts in initial planning discussions, presence at events and monetary contributions.

3. The committee chair divides the task of fundraising, whether an event or a solicitation, into manageable short-term tasks for committee members.

Best practices: *The chair assigns small pieces of the effort to volunteers who have specific skills (e.g., the writer handles the word content; the artist or graphics person deals with the print design; the person-about-town makes personal contacts for League contributions of money or in-kind services; the person with limited time provides a place and coffee for the envelope-stuffing, or writes thank-you notes at home alone; the record keeper maintains the database).*

4. The League takes advantage of community events to market League products, services and events.

Best practices: *The League sells lobster bibs at a Seaport Festival, American flags and balloons at the Fourth of July parade and special all-American foods at a community gathering such as a town meeting, arts fair or soccer tournament. The League regularly administers elections for membership organizations such as condominiums or health care co-ops.*

5. The League provides training for members in fundraising and leadership.

Best practices: *The League uses the best professional information available on how to raise dollars without overburdening volunteers.*

Training sessions are held for members who help with phonathons or personal solicitation. Solicitors understand that the more personal the appeals, the more likely the gift.

League leaders attend fundraising workshops held at state and/or national League meetings and bring the information back to the local League for discussion and implementation.

6. The League cultivates major donors (individual, corporation or foundation).

Best practices: *Board members, using their knowledge of the community, provide information on potential contacts for major giving and help in the solicitation or in securing the appointment for the League solicitor.*

Cultivation includes research, outreach, asking and acknowledging. An ongoing effort involves keeping records of fundraising efforts and their successes over the years. The plan targets a variety of donors so that the League is not too heavily dependent on any one source of income.

7. The League board evaluates the pros and cons of fundraising ideas before approving them.

Best practices: *Evaluation of proposals includes goals, costs, when the bills have to be paid (before or after the income arrives), number of members needed to help, how much time they have to give, timing relative to other things people will be busy doing, etc. The most cost-effective method of raising funds is chosen unless there is compelling reason to go another way (such as increased visibility or providing camaraderie).*

8. The League is known for a periodic special event that raises money, visibility and support for the organization.

Best practices: *A special event such as a roast of a local personality, a state-of-the-community luncheon, a lecture series on local issues, a banquet or silent auction creates interest in the League beyond its usual parameters and can become an expected annual or biennial event supported by the community.*

9. The League knows how to raise and receive tax-deductible donations.

Best practices: *The League raises both 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(3) money, working with the state or national League Education Fund. The League's acknowledgment of tax-deductible contributions meets IRS requirements.*

10. The League receives financial support from its members in addition to the community.

Best practices: *The League provides an opportunity for members to make an additional contribution when sending in their annual dues, by making a special annual appeal, or by buying tickets to League events.*

The League explains the financial necessity of making an annual donation to support the on-going work of the League in the community. The League thanks in its bulletin those members who support the League beyond dues.