

THE LITTLE GREEN BOOK

...Everything you need to know about the
Job of the Nominating Committee



This handbook will address aspects of a League Nominating Committee including, Finding Leaders, FAQs, Job Description, Process, Work Plan, Succession Planning, Templates and More!

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Introduction

"I owe it all to the League of Women Voters", Mrs. Margaret Bradburn. Shady Grove, Oregon

I spent most of my adult life in the "boonies," hours from the nearest city. It was a sheltered existence and most residents there did not have a concept of the real world. As a local activist, my dream was to someday join the League of Women Voters. When my husband retired, we moved to Shady Cove on the Rogue River. Our first month in Oregon, now four years ago, I joined the Rogue Valley LWV. I was in awe of the accomplishments of the women I met at that meeting. I felt like a little kid who was allowed to play with the big kids.

Before long, I participated in two studies. One was Citizen Involvement in Land Use Decisions and the other was the two-year Homeless Youth Study. I spent months interviewing city officials about Citizen Advisory Committees and school officials, counselors and youth on homelessness. My eyes were finally opened to the real world.

Late last summer, I decided to run for city council because I knew the issues from League programs and from reporting. I won the election. Reflecting back, I remembered sitting on the dais interviewing the Shady Cove City Administrator for the League, never dreaming I would one day sit there in an official capacity. Without the League of Women Voters, I would not be where I am today. I can't say enough about the importance of the League especially with the complex issues facing this country today such as education, immigration and more. Thank you League!

We all know how powerful the League can be in impacting our personal lives, how important it can be to strengthening our leadership skills and how vital it is in making a genuine difference in our communities on the issues we care about! It is with that spirit and pride, that we encourage Nominating Committees to offer the opportunities for leadership service within the League to candidates for board positions!

Another Story....

We are a small, poor local League. No one good will want to sit on our board. So we will take who we can get. Once those people are on the Board, we can't demand much of them, because they are just volunteers. We can't ask them for a letter of commitment, for example, or require that they be at meetings, because they are busy people. And we certainly would never demand that they read their board materials and be prepared before meetings!

We are having board problems. Many board members don't show up for meetings. When they do show up, they are not prepared. They have nothing to add except criticize.

We're losing a lot of our board members. Sometimes we can't even get a quorum. Where can we recruit that we can get good board members this time?

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone, and there are solutions! Solutions are found in reframing how we offer League leadership (from a "chore" to an "opportunity") and in incorporating succession planning into the work of the League. They include four important steps:

1. The Board must relearn what it means to be a board and relearn what their job is within that role.
2. The Board must institute a strong recruitment and orientation process. Replacing the "woe is me" approach with an approach that shares enthusiasm for all the great developmental opportunities for new leaders, as this will help strengthen their League's ability to do great things.
3. Build a strong Nominating Committee that remembers how much the League has meant to their own personal lives and brings people in with that energy.
4. Be clear with candidates about the expectations and time commitments for serving on a League board. And be flexible enough to create opportunities for people to serve who have limited time and offer differing talents to the Board team.

All of us have been told that the Nominating Committee is the most powerful committee of any board. Annually, this committee selects directors and, usually, officers as well. Yet, within many organizations, a closer examination of the Nominating Committee and its operations suggests that its power is not well used.

A recent election at a local League...

- *The Nominating Committee met once, six weeks before the annual meeting, in order to identify good people for the Board.*
- *A handful of individuals were discussed, including: the next door neighbor of one committee member ("She's very nice."); the office mate of another committee member ("I'll bet I can get him to join."); someone's mother-in-law ("She's a good worker and has lots of friends."); and a man who had expressed interest to the executive director at a United Way luncheon.*
- *At the meeting, the Nominating Committee agreed to recruit these individuals. They were contacted by telephone over the next month and asked to join the Board of directors. All but one agreed and they were duly elected.*

This unsatisfactory approach to board development can be altered with the intervention of a better nominations process.

What it Means to Be a Board Member

The Board is at the top of your League chart. They are ultimately responsible and accountable for everything the League does and doesn't do. They are responsible for providing benefit to the community. They are responsible for determining what acceptable and/or unacceptable behavior in League is. They are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate funds to provide that benefit to the community. In all these areas and more, the ultimate buck stops with the Board.

There is no more important position in the League than to sit on the Board. We aren't used to thinking of boards like that, but look at the top of that League chart. Look at the bylaws. Look at our state's law - in the eyes of the state the local League IS the Board. The Board is the permanence of the League - the enduring part.

Ironically, boards have spent so much time coddling their boards with words like "they're just volunteers, we can't ask them to do that," that we have failed to realize a critical error in that thinking: A board that is doing its job well is more likely to be excited about that job. And a board that is jazzed about the job is the best recruiting tool of all!

And so we need to have a process for finding those board members who want to do this job. We need a process that allows the best candidates to surface, rather than resigning ourselves to taking what we can get. A recruitment process should mirror the processes we are so used to with employees. First we determine what qualities we are seeking. We create a job description. We advertise the position, use word of mouth, and see if there are already good candidates in our midst. We look for a pool of people as applicants, not just accepting the first one who says "yes." We have them fill out applications. We interview prospects. We check their references.

These are all the things we do when hiring employees. These are also the things a good League does to recruit its board.

And then, last but certainly not least, we train them. And in strong League, that training is ongoing, just as it is in the corporate world.

Board members should learn all they can about the League itself. They should have ongoing training about their job as board member. And they must be trained to understand the financials, as so many of their decisions will have something to do with money. They should learn about “marketing” the League, as well as how to manage League policies. They should fulfill their roles as “frontline ambassadors” for the organization, inviting people to join, creating a welcoming presence for new members and a dynamic organization that attracts new leaders.

The End Result

The Board is the least understood and most important function in the whole League. If we look at our boards from this position of strength, recruitment is no longer a chore, but an opportunity. Board meetings are no longer an hour of dread, but a time for moving the League forward.

And that’s the blessing of a board that understands its role of ultimate accountability. They can make the difference between a League that is always trying to make it from day to day, vs. a League that soars.

Most of us agree that the board of directors is fundamental to League’s success. Successful fund raising, for example, often depends upon board leadership and experience. Because the Board is so important, the way you develop it is critical. The best tool for this development is your nominating committee.

How do you build a strong board?

The excitement and energy generated by enthusiastic League members and the communities where they live are palpable. Your League is has gained momentum. How do you harness this momentum? How do you find the path within your state and local Leagues to build League leadership? And so you need to have a process for finding those board members who want to do this job. You need a process that allows the best candidates to surface, rather than resigning yourself to taking what you can get.

- You determine what qualities you are seeking.
- You create a job description.
- You advertise the position - use word of mouth to see if there are already good candidates in your midst.

Dear League Member:

Interesting and interested people
Doing interesting work and
Having interesting dialog...
Does this sound like a group that might interest you?

An experience to remember: demanding, rewarding, challenging, satisfying...join the LWVNJ Board of Directors to be part of a dynamic, fun group of people.

You will be able to:

- share your League successes with other Leagues,
- build your leadership skills,
- learn to use your skills to make things happen for the League and for your community,
- help to set the direction for the LWVNJ,
- expand your commitment to the League,
- raise your visibility.

If this sounds like an opportunity you or someone you know might want to pursue, please contact Barbara Belasco, Nominating Committee Chair at bbelasco@aol.com

You look for a pool of people as applicants, not just accepting the first one who says “yes.”

These are all the things that are done when hiring employees. These are also the things a good League does to recruit its board. This is the task of the Nominating Committee.

Steps In The Process

1. Establish the Goals

Each year, the Nominating Committee defines the context for its work. The committee reviews the organization's mission, current year's goals and objectives, and management resources. New initiatives and challenges might require skills not currently found among board members.

The Nominating Committee also reviews the job description of the Board of directors to ensure its continued relevance. If a job description does not exist, the committee drafts it and presents it to the Board for acceptance. The job description summarizes the governance functions of the Board as a whole (e.g., develop policy, hire the executive, director, hold property, etc.) and also notes expectations of the Board members (e.g., regular attendance at board meetings, serve on at least one committee give an annual contribution, etc.).

2. Identify League's needs

Based on the organization's current goals, the Nominating Committee identifies the skills and representation necessary within board membership to achieve the goals and fulfill the mission. Some of these skills are general to any board and may include financial management, advocacy, membership, PR, etc.

In addition to skills, it is important that the Nominating Committee determine what kind of representation is necessary. Certainly skills and representation which contribute to fundraising success are vital.

For incumbents, performance criteria should also be listed. These criteria might include attending board meetings, giving contributions, helping fund raise, etc.

3. Evaluate incumbents

It is useful to prepare a grid for evaluation purposes (see appendix for a sample). Skills, representation and performance criteria can be listed vertically on the left and the incumbent names are noted across the top. A check is made under the name of each incumbent if she/he possesses the specific skill, represents a particular community, and meets performance criteria. The resulting empty spaces on the grid show what is missing within the Board of directors. These gaps are reviewed and then serve as the guide for the committee to identify candidates for nomination.

Sometimes the evaluation of incumbents shows problems. These performance problems must be addressed by the Nominating Committee. If the incumbent's term is expiring, the committee may choose not to "re-nominate" the individual. If the individual's term is continuing, a committee member meets with the incumbent to discuss performance.

This dialogue encourages the incumbent to express why she/he has not been sufficiently active on behalf of the organization. There is opportunity to reinforce the job description of the Board and clarify expectations. The Nominating Committee member must communicate the organization's need for renewed commitment by the individual director.

As a result of this discussion, an inactive board member may find new ways to help the organization. Sometimes this dialogue affords the individual trustee the opportunity to gracefully resign from the Board.

4. Finding Leaders

Only after steps 1-3 have been successfully completed does the Nominating Committee begin to name individuals for consideration. Suggested names are tested against the list of needs generated by the evaluation grid. Individuals who do not meet these priority needs, or who have skills already fairly represented among board incumbents, are not considered until needs are met.

For less established Leagues, it may be difficult to generate a list of qualified candidates. Instead, the committee first identifies community people who might make recommendations. Nominating committee members meet with these community people in order to discuss the League, the Board job description and the priority needs. The community resources are asked to suggest possible candidates. From these referrals, the Nominating Committee develops its list.

As candidates are listed, the committee brainstorms a specific role(s) for each individual. For example, there might be two individuals on the list who fulfill a skill gap that's been identified for fund-raising purposes, or to enhance the League's marketing and visibility, or have expertise in technology use.

5. Conduct personal interview

Once the Nominating Committee has generated a list of candidates who fulfill the priority needs, these individuals are personally interviewed. The interview is conducted by one or two members of the Nominating Committee. If the committee is responsible for nominating officers, personal interviews must be conducted with these candidates, too. The personal interview is critical to the success of this nominations process. The process assumes that no individual is confirmed as a candidate for nomination until after the interview results are reviewed by the Nominating Committee.

During the interview, League's representatives and the candidate determine if the match would be mutually beneficial. Perhaps a scheduling conflict would prohibit the individual from attending any board meetings.

If it is apparent that the individual cannot meet the organization's articulated needs or is not interested, the interview can conclude by mutual agreement. If appropriate, keep the individual on your mailing list and cultivate him/her for some future involvement.

While the Nominating Committee may, initially, be uncomfortable interviewing people for volunteer positions, this reluctance can be overcome with training. A nominating committee interview is set up on the following premise:

"Our League is seeking qualified individuals for future positions as committee and board members. We are interviewing a number of people and believe that you may have the skills we seek. We would like to meet with you to determine if you might be interested in our organization at some point in the future, and to determine if there is a good match between your skills and interests and our needs."

Before any interviews are conducted, the committee reviews the key points to cover. Specifically: League history, mission and program; financing and current goals; job description of the Board of directors; role of board and management; performance expectations of board members; the nominations process itself and the skill/representation gaps which the Nominating Committee seeks to fill this year; and specific skill that you would expect this individual to use on the League's behalf.

6. Confirm the slate

After the interviews are conducted, the Nominating Committee reconvenes and reviews the results. Not all individuals will be appropriate for board membership. Those individuals who are recommended for nomination are contacted and confirmed. Those individuals who are not recommended for nomination are contacted and asked if they would like to work on a committee or particular project during the coming year.

The Nominating Committee works for the members – not the current board or president. Some still think that the current board "approves" the candidates when the Nominating Committee, as a courtesy out of respect for the sitting board, informs the Board of the slate prior to Convention (annual meeting) but does not seek any approval. Only members approve the slate.

7. Recommend committee chairs and members to the president

Through its deliberations, the Nominating Committee has acquired substantial information about the skills and interests of incumbent board members and nominees. The committee assists the president by recommending possible committee chairs and members.

8. Develop the annual orientation for the incoming board

Annually, following the election, the Board of directors should participate in an orientation. Both newly-elected and incumbent trustees attend. Leadership staff is also invited. The Nominating Committee, in conjunction with the new president and the chief executive, outlines the orientation. A good orientation sets the tone for the year's activities. Key elements include a discussion of board and staff roles and League's purpose and programs.

9. Finding Candidates

The nominations process is an ongoing effort of leadership. Throughout the year, volunteers and staff monitor the community, identifying influential individuals and good workers. Ongoing cultivation builds relationships with these individuals, bringing them closer to your League. Then, when the Nominating Committee begins to prepare the election slate, the League's networks and contacts will be adequate to meet its needs.

An effective nominations process is fundamental to the health of the League. Yet, sometimes leadership is reluctant to pursue this process fully. Concern is expressed about giving job descriptions and performance expectations to volunteers; volunteers are afraid to ask that other volunteers step down; and people worry about interviewing individuals and then choosing not to nominate them for board membership.

Nonetheless, all this can be done graciously and professionally without alienation. It has worked in other Leagues and it can work in yours.

By describing the process and its value to the health of the League, no one can, in good conscience, reject the premise. By carrying out the process carefully, on an annual basis, its effectiveness will become apparent. The Board of directors will become stronger. Volunteers will be more effective and hence feel more successful. The organization will have the resources necessary to face the challenges of each new year.

Another Good Leadership Story

My Metamorphosis on the League's Learning Ladder, Lois Chaney - LWV Bakersfield, CA

For me the League is an endless learning ladder.

After retiring in 1995, I started sampling Bakersfield's smorgasbord of volunteer opportunities. This included attending a local League general meeting. Surprised that the League did so much more than register voters, provide education on ballot issues and conduct candidate forums, I joined on the spot.

Within two months I was happily editing the Voter. I loved it and knew that because I was giving this service to my League in this spot, I'd never have to assume leadership...WRONG!!!

As 2YK approached, a hot local land use issue was attracting new members. But the president, who'd served for 12 years, was not able to stand for re-election and she nominated me from the floor.

During my first year as president the LWVB decided to dampen the influence of special interests on elected county representatives. We wrote a campaign finance reform ordinance and obtained—without paid help—the 20,000 signatures needed to get it on the ballot. In November 2002 Kern County voters passed the ordinance into law. Not having to face incumbents' formidable campaign war chests, more and better qualified candidates are running for county offices. By 2003 the membership had increased from 90 to 178. I, too, had grown personally. I'm comfortable with elected officials and the media. I've developed innumerable friendships across our county's diverse population. Today I mentor others who possess the same leadership potential that in 1996 I never guessed lay latent within me.

JOB DESCRIPTION: NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIR

OBJECTIVES: To provide a slate of nominees for officers and directors for approval at the annual meeting.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Chair the Nominating Committee – including setting an open and honest tone for committee work.
2. Be familiar with League job descriptions, board responsibilities and the League's nonpartisan policy.
3. Provide opportunities for League members to suggest possible nominees. With other members of the committee, solicit additional suggestions through personal contacts and attendance at League functions.
4. With other members of the committee, review names provided and obtain additional information regarding possible candidates, if necessary.
5. Oversee the preparation of a slate of possible nominees.
6. As a courtesy, report proposed slate of nominees to the Board; the Board does not act on the proposed slate.
7. Report proposed slate to the members, meeting the deadlines imposed by the bylaws.
8. Present proposed slate of nominees to the annual meeting.
9. Maintain records to be used in the filling of board vacancies as they occur and to be passed on to the succeeding nominating committee.

COMPOSITION OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The committee is responsible to the League membership as a whole rather than to the Board. The size and composition is set forth in the local League bylaws. The majority of the members, including the chair, are elected by the membership at the annual meeting and the remaining members are appointed from the Board after the annual meeting.

- The Committee chair is an off-board position. The League president is not a member of the Nominating Committee, even in an ex-officio capacity.
- Members of the Nominating Committee should be objective, realistic but persuasive, and have the ability to analyze people and their talents.
- They should understand and be able to explain the responsibilities of a board member and how the League functions.
- They should be clear about the local League's nonpartisan policy and League positions.
- It is each member's responsibility to attend some board meetings, all committee meetings, to accept responsibilities requested by the chair and
- ABOVE ALL, to respect the confidential nature of the committee's business.

Preliminary Responsibilities of the Chair:

Prior to the calling of the first committee meeting, the chair should:

1. Obtain the list of offices to be filled from the president. The expiration dates of each position are important, especially where unexpired terms are to be filled.
2. Draw up a time line for the committee's work, starting with your annual meeting and working backwards. Be sure to check your local League bylaws for deadlines.
3. Get the portfolio from your predecessor to learn whom the committee considered last year, who said, "wait one more year," suggestions (positive/negative). Remember, all information is confidential.
4. Be familiar with local League bylaws, job descriptions, current/past board lists, League membership roster. Lists of leadership persons from schools, local church groups, clubs and civic organizations can be helpful. Share these resources with committee members before the first meeting.

5. Speak with the president and membership chair to learn as much as possible about the persons with whom they've worked, the membership chair is an asset to the Nominating Committee because of her knowledge about the current members and her many contacts in the community.

6. Attend board meetings; become familiar with board responsibilities, individual capabilities and the way the board works as a whole.

7. Request suggestions from the general membership at meetings, through the bulletin; give names, telephone numbers of all committee members so they may be contacted about potential candidates.

Suggested Steps and Timetable

At the committee's initial meeting:

1. Establish guidelines; i.e., confidentiality of information, the protection of the nonpartisanship of the League, goals of leadership development, diversity.

2. Set the timetable for the committee's work and restate the expectations for participation of all members.

3. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current board.

4. Discuss characteristics the committee should look for to compliment the current board profile; i.e., strong leadership/less controlling leadership, balance between younger, more experienced members, diversity, etc.

Above all, do some dreaming; set your goals on dynamic, creative community leaders who can enhance the League with their abilities: set high expectations for the Board of the future League.

The selection process:

1. List all the individuals the committee would like to consider for board positions and their possible roles. Although the Nominating Committee doesn't select persons to fill portfolios, it is essential to have key individuals capable of handling the most vital League positions; i.e., issues, voters' service, membership. (These may, traditionally, be vice presidential roles in some Leagues.)

2. Pragmatically, start at the top if you must find a new president or with an executive position which will be most difficult to fill.

3. Discuss strategies for approaching a series of candidates in a sequence which will not unduly impede the ongoing work of the committee.

4. Decide how prospects will be approached and which committee member might be the strongest advocate. The chair does not have to ask each prospect to serve.

When offering a position to a candidate, outline the duties; don't undersell the responsibilities but be positive.

- Stress the fact that each position can offer a good learning experience, that the League is fun and is the basis of lasting friendships.
- Remain positive, upbeat; don't let a candidate flatly say "no."
- Offer to meet with them; suggest they talk with the current president or a board member
- Give them time to think it over and plan a return call.
- You may disclose the names of individuals who have agreed to serve but don't discuss potential prospects.
- Candidates who have refused to serve should be urged to keep the offer and their refusal confidential.
- Proceed working until the committee has a completed balance slate.

Presentation of the Slate

The completed slate is announced by the chair at the Board meeting prior to its publication in the bulletin. Local League bylaws establish the timing for publication of the slate, in relation to the date of the annual meeting.

The committee chair presents the slate to the membership at the annual meeting. Alternate candidates/slate may be nominated from the floor at the annual meeting according to the process described in the local Leagues bylaws.

Maintaining Committee Records

An annual record should be maintained containing:

- list of positions to be filled and dates of terms;
- names of the committee members;
- the League bulletins soliciting names of potential candidates and the announcement of the proposed slate;
- a listing of those candidates approached and their reasons for refusal; and
- do not record confidential information.

Following the annual meeting, the Nominating Committee files should be completed and turned over to the new chair to be used throughout the coming year, at the president's request, to suggest names of vacancies due to resignation or reassignments.

When Asking People to Serve as League Leader – Remember Stories Like This!

I'll Always Belong to the League - Diane Sheridan, LWV-Bay Area, Texas

I'll always belong to the League - for what it does to make democracy work in our ever more complex world. For seeing the gray of issues too often viewed as black or white. For helping me grow in confidence and knowledge.

The League trained me in consensus-building and instilled the conviction that face-to-face dialogue among those with divergent views allows communities to address issues constructively. These opportunities gave me a profession in environmental facilitation I've enjoyed for 20 years.

Service as the LWV-Texas president and on the LWVUS board offered opportunities I would otherwise never have had. To meet Ann Richards and Barbara Jordan. To celebrate the passage of Motor Voter laws in the Rose Garden and sit next to First Lady Hilary Clinton at a League convention. To stand on a busy street corner at noon with Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head, encouraging passersby to register and vote!

Voters' service brought me to the League. Program keeps me interested. The people are what make it fun. Where else would a dozen people spend a Saturday morning discussing proposed constitutional amendments? The League is where I have found some of my best friends. I believe I always will.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE PROCESS

What are the responsibilities of the Nominating Committee?

The work of the Nominating Committee is the most important job in the local League. Your committee's recommendations can:

- Determine your League's future - for the next several years to come
- Introduce new faces, new ideas, a spirit of creativity and diversity
- Confirm a system of leadership development
- Send a message - "This board is open, vital, moving forward"
- Announce - "There is no ownership here"
- And say - "We want you, the membership, to participate."

How should the Nominating Committee showcase the benefits of being a League board member?

Refer to the LWVUS Storybank or tell your own story!

One local League produces a document annually called "*The Yardstick*". This document encapsulates the past year including reports of key portfolios, studies, advocacy, visibility efforts (newspaper clips, recognitions, etc.) current bylaws, budget, etc. so that they can toot their horn and non board members have some idea of what it is all about!

How many terms can a president serve?

While there are no hard and fast rules to this question, there should be a thoughtful conversation about it among the Nominating Committee itself. On the one hand, the League in general does not publicly advocate for term limits as we believe the election process offers the chance to affirm or change leaders. On the other hand, we want to create an environment where new leaders are being fostered, mentored and included in opportunities to serve as President. So the Nominating Committee should look with a balanced eye toward the current leadership needs of the League and its Board and opportunities to elevate and promote new leaders.

If the president is not fulfilling her responsibilities does the Nominating Committee serve in an oversight position?

Once the president is elected the task of the Nominating Committee is over. However, as mentioned earlier, the Nominating Committee chair or members may offer a board orientation at the first retreat of the new board. The Board itself should have policies in place that can address how to proceed in the event that a President (or other Board member) needs to step down or are not fulfilling their duties.

What is the minimum number of members that can make-up a Nominating Committee?

The committee is responsible to the League membership as a whole rather than to the Board. The size and composition is set forth in the local League bylaws. (See examples in Appendix) The majority of the members, including the chair, are elected by the membership at the annual meeting (or convention) and the remaining members are appointed from the Board after the annual meeting. The Committee chair is an off-board position. The League president is not a member of the Nominating Committee, even in an ex-officio capacity.

Members of the Nominating Committee should be objective, realistic but persuasive, and have the ability to analyze people and their talents. They should understand and be able to explain the responsibilities of a board member and how the League functions. They should be clear about the local League's nonpartisan policy and League positions. It is each member's responsibility to attend some board meetings, all committee meetings, to accept responsibilities requested by the chair and, above all, to respect the confidential nature of the committee's business.

How do you build a good nominating committee?

The Nominating Committee works for membership and its members must be capable of taking on that charge. At least one member of the Nominating Committee should have experience on a previous nominating committee. The ideal member has broad League experience and at least one member should have board experience. The committee should include a member who is newer to League to bring a different perspective to the table. The chair needs to have strong managerial and organizational skills and should help foster an inclusive, open and honest environment within the committee.

How do you change the culture or attitude of the Nominating Committee job?

This should come from the top. The President should express her/his and the Boards respect for the importance of the work of the Nominating Committee at every opportunity – starting with the President's message in the Voter newsletter. Many members do not understand what the Nominating Committee does. An article in your local newsletter or Voter, discussion on a listserv, posting on your website can all assist in building member understanding and describing the responsibilities and/or process involved.

It's also important to keep reminding ourselves, how powerful the League can be in impacting our personal lives and in developing/strengthening leadership skills. What the Nominating Committee is doing, is really sharing this great opportunity with others!

Seasoned League Members Show New Member the Ropes!

My League Life, Marilyn Garrett - League of Women Voters of East Alabama, AL

My League life began when a friend ran for the local school board and she encouraged me to join the League of Women Voters. I was amazed that League members knew so much about local government. I learned more in a year in the LWV than one would expect to learn in many political science classes. Of course, League work is hands on. I went with seasoned League members to officials in city government or those in charge of agencies to get information first hand. I learned that if you wanted to know what was going on in a community, you join the League.

I learned that League members are the kind of persons I enjoy being with. League members care about their community, state, nation and world by putting that concern into action. Working together with other members in planning events, working on projects and studies, and lobbying has allowed me to know the most wonderful friends. The camaraderie is wonderful.

The League gives me a satisfaction that many working together can really make a difference. I have been a member so long and have helped with so many Candidates Nights, Voter Registration Drives, Lobbying Legislators and City Council members, I see how the League as an organization influences government. Now that I am retired, I have more time for meetings, writing letters, and encouraging more people to join the League. I see the League making a difference locally, statewide and at the national levels.

SUCCESSION PLANNING ...*The Elephant in the Room*

“The more I talk to long time local League presidents, the more I find that the thing stopping their retirement is the fear that the Board will ‘replace me with someone who doesn't have a passion for the League as I do’”, discovered LWVUS Board member Marcia Merrins. If you can address that core issue, you will be taking huge strides in moving the organization to its next level, even if your current president stays on for another 20 years.

How can you be sure that your League will be in good hands when you go off board? It's important that our leaders and leadership teams, build this question into their board work so your League will be prepared!

The key is, to create a succession plan that proactively deals with all the things you (or the Board) are scared might happen when you leave.

- Are they afraid that you have been the link to the community, the public image of the League? Then determine a way to proactively deal with that, perhaps creating a speakers bureau or PR committee, or have prospective leaders join current leaders in meetings with community officials and prove training to be good spokespeople for the organization.
- Are they afraid that most of the institutional memory of the League resides inside your head? Then find a way to proactively deal with that - perhaps having you take time off to commit some of that knowledge to paper, or have a fun gathering, with some food and where some of your League's history is shared in a storing telling way with newer members and leaders.
- Are they afraid that you have been the best fund-raiser they could dream of? Then find a proactive way to deal with that - perhaps by developing an army of development volunteers with a passion for the mission and/or identifying people with fundraising skills to be invited to work with your League.
- Are they afraid that you are THE expert in an issue area affiliated with your League? Then find a proactive way to deal with that – create a small team to develop the issue expertise you have and maybe have someone shadow you in meetings so that they see how you address the issue with the public or policy makers.
- Are they afraid because they think only YOU (current President) can help manage a passionate Board with differing ideas? Then find a proactive way to deal with that - perhaps seek some leadership and board management skills development for new leaders or perhaps offer to let other board members “chair” a section of the Board meeting to get practice and comfort in this area.
- Are they afraid because they fear that they will somehow destroy or ruin the reputation of the League? Then find a proactive way to deal with that – by ensuring they are familiar with and follow League policies and practices (e.g. non-partisanship), creating a leadership team to support them, and helping them understand that they can delegate some activities or functions to others – ideas like these and others will help ensure that the League's reputation through their leadership will be just fine!

Whatever the fear, make sure your succession plan deals with it proactively to ensure the viability of the organization for the long term. While the main focus of this plan will be succession, the ancillary benefit is that you will be building organizational infrastructure. And that will provide benefit immediately.

As part of your succession plan, train someone now who could replace you, even temporarily, in the event something happens to you. This doesn't mean you are going anywhere soon. You may not be leaving for several years! But if the whole League relies on you for its survival, and you really are hit by a meteor tomorrow, then what will happen? Find someone you can share your institutional knowledge with, and train them to share the load now, while you still can.

We have to replace our reliance of individuals with reliance on an established plan. We have watched many local League presidents step down over the years. And we have seen both great successes and horrible failures in the succession process. In the case of your League, succession planning means "building our bench strength" and developing a pipeline of leaders who are strong and capable.

Leadership development in local Leagues can be difficult due to scarcity of resources, time, and money. Nevertheless, the intention to develop and maintain strong leadership is a strong determining factor in your League's future viability.

Moreover, practicing ongoing succession planning keeps a League prepared in the event that there should be a leadership vacancy. A successful pipeline includes both members of your League and the Board of directors: people who are able to take on a variety of leadership roles within your League at a time of need.

Strategies to develop these leaders need to fit with your League's overall strategic planning process and need to be occasionally reviewed and updated - just like all other goals and objectives of your League.

This type of succession planning, when incorporated into all practices of an organization, helps to strengthen your League's capacity for long term sustainability.

When can this work begin?

The answer is now. Succession planning is something to consider when your League does its annual budget preparation. Take a look at how many resources can be dedicated to board leadership development.

Another important reason to do succession planning is that it directly impacts the effectiveness of the next president, since it allows your League to remain as healthy as possible during a transition and gives a new president director a clear map of where your League needs to go. Succession planning is really about ensuring continuity in your League's functions over time. This process has long been overlooked in Leagues, but organizations of all kinds are beginning to implement succession strategies into their planning processes. The development of internal leadership benefits every organization and often cultivates new visions to help your League fulfill its mission.

Encourage and provide opportunities for board members (or if you have them – staff) to attend conferences and workshops. It also sends a strong message of how valuable they are.

Assign responsibilities to some board members will help them demonstrate their leadership skills. This will help them to gain confidence and demonstrate their ability. Make sure that these opportunities are creative, motivational and even inspirational.

The Operational Pieces

Succession planning sounds like it's hard - like it takes a lot of time, a lot of "planning" time. In fact, in most organizations, succession planning is just a matter of making sure there are some key pieces in place, to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. The following are some of the more critical of those pieces.

Note: These pieces relate not just to the Board, but also if you have them to staff. If there is a mission-critical position that would cause serious problems if suddenly left vacant, you will want to be sure to have these pieces in place for those key positions. We suggest the Board and staff if you have them, work together to determine which positions should be included when the Board talks about "key positions" or "key employees."

Current Job Description

Are the job descriptions for your board and staff current? Part of the annual evaluation process should be the update of board or staff job descriptions.. This is a critical part of doing an effective evaluation anyway - having that tool as one among a handful against which to measure performance. By making this step a part of the regular evaluation process, there is no stress that a request to update the job description, might be coming from distress over an individual's performance.

What Do You Do?

Different from a job description;

- What do you do regularly? (and when)?
- What do you do monthly? Quarterly? Annually?

Calendar

Stemming from that task list, fill out an annual calendar, where the Board can quickly see all those things that happen regularly throughout the year, as it relates to "keeping the doors open". Take a large sheet of paper - flip chart sized if you like, but certainly 11" x 17" at the smallest. Turn it horizontally, and create a calendar like the one below, labeling the first box with the month that starts your fiscal year.

JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN

Fill in the critical things that have to happen each month - reporting dates, filing dates, event dates. For example, - Every August, we prepare for the audit...)

Combined with the task list, the calendar makes it less likely that something will fall through the cracks during the transition.

Where is Everything?

One of the most confounding things to happen when someone leaves suddenly is the reality that you have no idea where they keep the checkbook, or where to find the files in the computer, or any one of the hundreds of critical "things" we take for granted until we cannot find them. No matter how large or how small your facility, not knowing where stuff is can be one of the most frustrating aspects of the sudden departure. Be sure to keep that list updated.

The easiest way to start the list is to have it stem from the Task List above. What do you do regularly, and what do you need, that might not be readily obvious, to do that? Clearly we don't want them listing every pencil in the place. But if they understand the purpose, they will be able to tell you that they keep the key to the drawer with the check book hidden in the 3rd envelope in the file marked, "Birthdays."

As an aside, this "search for stuff" often reveals other issues you may not have been aware of. For example, if the only key to the storage unit is on the key ring of the president she says, "I have the only key, because I don't trust anyone else with it," then that is probably a conversation worth pursuing for a whole number of reasons having nothing to do with succession planning.

Critical Relationships

For the people making your League work smoothly, there are probably a number of outside people who help make that work happen. For the bookkeeper, it may be the CPA. For a program person, it may be a group of 6 other off board specialists, to whom she turns when specific issues arise.

Will someone new immediately know the relationships that are critical to getting the job done?

This will be another listing activity. For every task, program, or function of the job description have the Board make a list of who he/she absolutely relies on for ensuring that function gets done. This may be staff, volunteers, or key community partners.

Depending on the complexity of the relationships, it is sometimes easier to depict the more complicated relationships graphically, rather than in a list. (And it is often easier for the new person, as well as the Board, to understand that complexity of relationships if it is done graphically.) Whether that is done by bubble chart, by program flow chart, or however makes sense, getting those relationships down on paper is often one of the most overlooked steps in the succession planning process.

Redundancy

Humans have 2 kidneys. Hospitals have back-up generators. TV stations have extra cameras.

Does every critical position in your League have that kind of redundancy? Because redundancy is one of the surest approaches to short term stability in the face of loss.

There are 2 steps every board should take to ensure there is organizational redundancy, in the event of an emergency.

The first is to have a policy in place that provides for the following:

The Voter Service Chair will ensure that no fewer than 2 other key people are familiar enough with the critical duties performed by the Voter Service Chair that those people could ensure those duties are accomplished in the event of that Chair's sudden or extended absence.

The Board may want to re-word this kind of policy language to better fit your League.

Whether the key position is that of a volunteer or a staff person, or a board member, there should be the requirement that someone else knows how to do the job. If the critical position is complex, there may be one person who can do one aspect, and another who knows other parts of the job. The goal is not that the job be duplicated in the body of one person, but that someone - or a group of someones - can get the job done until a replacement can be found.

Your critical systems need back-up. And with the vast majority of Leagues, the most critical systems are people. Make sure there is enough redundancy to ensure a smooth transition.

Ask the Board

Finally, ask the Board for input. Retreats offer a great place to do this! So plan time at a board meeting, and have board members list their answers to " *If the (insert the right word -- President, Board member, volunteer or staff) took their vacation this year and never came back, what would worry you about having to ensure the operation keeps going?*

By selectively and annually going through the activities noted for key positions, and especially asking what we would do without the person there, you will easily be able to build a plan for ensuring the smooth operations of the organization in the event that board member does leave.

APPENDIX

Sample Work Plan from Trudy Jarratt, 2005 LWVUS Nominating Committee Chair

Jan 27 – 31, 2005: First meeting of committee at LWVUS board meeting

- Review calendar to identify meetings and conventions we would like to observe, who might observe them and what outreach might be undertaken there
- Discuss retreat
- Review budget and determine most effective use of funds
- Develop budget input for FY 2006 (Carol, Stephanie)
- Elected members interview president
- Develop theme or slogan, if desired
- Outline National Voter article for May issue, depending on publication schedule
- Plan letters to state Leagues from their committee liaisons introducing themselves
- Create nominating forms
- Discuss Council outreach options—workshop, drop-by table, informal gathering?
- Observe LWVUS board and committee meetings Friday, Saturday and Sunday

Spring, 2005:

- Attend state conventions (to extent that time and budget allow)
- Continue perusing sources for potential national leaders
- Finalize Voter article – June Issue (Carol DeVille)
- Develop Council action plan including talk
- Start developing questions for nominee forms and interviews

Jun 10-13, 2005: LWVUS Council

- Elected members interview current board members, starting with experienced ones
- Elected members interview Executive Director
- Discuss what is needed on board—use this info in recruiting
- Discuss recruitment strategies and skills
- Conduct outreach to all attendees via workshop, etc.
- Address Council during plenary session (Chair)
- Observe Council attendees and be available for questions
- Check website for corrections, additions, etc.

Summer, 2005:

- Determine content of letter to nominees requesting information from them (questionnaires/resumes) and what information to provide them regarding expectations of the position they are nominated for
- Finish formulating questions for LWVUS board member interviews
- Call Leaders encouraging applications (prior to application deadline)

Oct 1 - 3 2005: LWVUS Board meeting (budget permitting)

- Elected members interview LWVUS board members and senior staff managers
- Distribute copies of all nominee applications received to Committee members
- Assign follow-up interviews
- Finalize interview questions for references and candidates if required

January 2006: Interview candidates and references; make them aware of time, financial commitments and other pertinent expectations

February 2006: Retreat

- Fill slate to be elected at Convention, 2006
- Call all members of new slate; inform them of role at Convention 2006 if they are not official delegates
- Request biographical info and photos from slate
- Call current board members not on slate
- Write thank you letters to current board members not returning
- Draft letter of regret to candidates not selected

Spring 2006: LWVUS board meeting:

- Chair or chair representative submits report (in person, or in writing, depending on budget)

June 2006: LWVUS Convention:

- Chair and nominees for Nominating Committee, 2006-08 attend
- Chair submits oral report to Convention
- Committee Hosts Meet The Slate

SAMPLE LWV BOARD OBSERVATION FORM

Observer _____ Meeting _____ Date _____

Board Member	Preparedness for Meeting	Performance in Meeting	Personality/Style
_____ Other notes:			
_____ Other notes:			
_____ Other notes:			

Board Member	Preparation for Meeting	Performance at Meeting	Personality/Style
<hr/> Other notes:			
<hr/> Other notes:			
<hr/> Other notes:			

THINGS TO CONSIDER IN THE ABOVE CATEGORIES

Preparedness:

Read material in Board Book, advance preparation of notes/questions. Chair: prepared agenda, time management.

Performance at Meeting:

Relationships with other members – is a team player. Treatment of staff. Volunteers for assignments. Participates, is engaged during meeting, pulls his/her weight. Thinks about effects on local Leagues. Moves discussion forward vs. speaks to promote a personal interest. Builds consensus. Translates ideas into effective action. View of nominating committee. Chair: Solicits views of all members.

Personality/Style:

Dominant or submissive? Detail oriented, visionary, historian, obstructionist, innovator? Is his/her passion organizational, issue-oriented, something else?

Other Notes: Special skills, knowledge, misc.

Nominating Committee Candidate Interviews

Sample Script Outline for Telephone Interview

The applicant interview scenario should be flexible in the flow, in order for the interviewer to gather the necessary information. In some ways, though, it is more about “the listening”, than “the asking.”

The first goal is to see if the words the individual wrote in the application matches the person in real life...not easy on the phone and do not recommend just “going down the list,” but there is a need to verify areas regarding the person’s experience...

(Add things to listen for – directness, clarity, etc. communication style, indicators of how she works as a team member, how she sees herself)

The second goal is to make sure the candidate understands the commitment of time and financial, both in a personal donation and responsibility to make calls to major donors.

Outline for calls to candidates:

***** **Ask the “Why”**...Why do you want to serve on the National Board?

***** **Ask the “What”**.. What kind of experience/skills do you think you have that will help you be an effective member of the Board?

This is a good place to add any comments about experience listed in the application that the candidate has not mentioned or ask for clarification about others.

***** **Reinforce the personal/professional qualities the Nominating Committee looks for in Board Selection.**

Board member who is able to:

- Be a good problem solver
- Make decisions and follow through
- Be a full participant in discussions
- Be a team player
- Respond to telephone and email messages

*******State the time and financial commitment expected and ask for comments of understanding.**

Time commitment involves more than attending the three day meetings of the Board quarterly.

Areas of focus include: Committee assignment

Liaison Role to State Leagues

Quarterly calls to Major Donors

Financial commitment statement: each individual make a significant financial contribution
(defined: significant to the individual)

*******List the timeframes of the remainder of the process**

The Nominating Committee meets (e.g. the weekend of Feb 1 - 3). Calls will be made to candidates throughout Sat. and Sun. (Clarify a telephone number where the candidate can be reached during that time)

Announcement of the state will be on or before ???

*******Provide your phone number and email in** case the candidate would like to make further comments.

SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions. Feel free to take all the space you need.

1. What are the biggest challenges in the next decade for the League? What are the opportunities?
2. What skills and experience would enable you to meet those challenges and opportunities? Use examples from your past experience.
3. Tell us about a time where you provided leadership to solve a difficult situation.
4. Describe the kinds of fundraising efforts you have been involved in.

SAMPLE Candidate Reference Interviews

Start by introducing yourself and explaining the purpose of the call.

1 - How do you know the candidate?

A - If the candidate is known through League work, ask about their work together and obtain League history that way.

B- If the candidate is known thorough other organizational work, go to question 2.

2 - Based on your observations and interactions, describe the candidate's strengths and weaknesses. What assets would she bring to the Board (work experience, budgetary skills, influential connections, etc.) Does she follow through on commitments? (Skip this one if you already have adequate information.)

3 - Give an example where you thought the candidate was particularly effective in working through a difficult situation. Describe the situation, how it was resolved and what pitfalls were avoided (Skip this part if no response is forthcoming.) Overall, on a scale of 1 – 10 (10 is highest) how would you describe the candidate's effectiveness?

4 - What has the candidate accomplished for a state or local league, or other organization, in such areas as fundraising, strategic plan development, gaining visibility for the organization, etc?

5 - Describe the candidate's communication style and relationship building skills.

6 - What is the candidate's reputation among her peers in the community or in her profession?

7 - Tell us 3 words that describe the candidate

8 - Is there anything else you would like us to know about the candidate?

Finish with a thank you. Provide your contact information, in case they think of anything else they would like to tell you.

Sample Bylaws

Note: A good suggestion for Bylaws is that the Nominating Committee should include 2 (or three depending on the size) appointed board members from the *sitting board* to the committee. Their input is invaluable as they provide information (board dynamics, specific skills required to be successful and sitting director abilities and weaknesses) that the elected committee members would otherwise not be privy to. It really helps to have that information to put the right person into the right position.

FROM LWVNYS BYLAWS ARTICLE X **Nominations and Elections**

Sec. 1 Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee shall consist of five members, two of whom shall be members of the Board. The chair and two members who shall not be members of the Board shall be elected by the convention. Nomination for these offices shall be made by the current nominating committee. Further nominations may be made from the floor of the convention. The other members of the committee shall be appointed by the Board immediately after the convention. Vacancies occurring in the Nominating Committee shall be filled by the Board.

Sec. 2 Suggestions by Local Leagues and MAL Units. The Nominating Committee chair shall solicit from the president of each local League, ILO, and the chair of each MAL unit, suggestions for nominations for the offices to be filled.

Sec. 3 Suggestions for Nominations. Suggestions for nominations shall be sent to the chair of the Nominating Committee at least six months before convention. Any member may send suggestions to the chair of the Nominating Committee.

Sec. 4 Decisions of the Committee. Decisions of the committee shall be by the concurrence of the majority of the full committee.

Sec. 5 Report of the Nominating Committee and Nominations from the Floor. The report of the Nominating Committee of its nominations for officers, directors, and the chair and two members of the succeeding nominating committee shall be sent to the president of each local League and ILO, and to the chair of each MAL unit, six weeks before the convention. The report shall be presented on the first day of the convention. Immediately following the presentation of this report, nominations may be made from the floor by any member of the convention, provided that the consent of the nominee has been secured.

Sec. 6 Election. The election shall be under the direction of an election committee appointed by the president on the first day of the convention. The election shall be by ballot, except that when there is but one nominee for each office, it may be by voice vote. A majority vote of those present and qualified to vote and voting shall constitute an election.

RESOURCES:

- *League Basics (In League)* (LWVUS): An essential tool for League leaders. <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm>
- *In League in New York State* (LWVNYS): Contains job descriptions and policies for local League boards. <http://www.lwvny.org/LLresources.html>

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- Local League bylaws.
- Local League nonpartisan policy.
- Current membership list/membership profile.
- Committee files for previous years.