

2012 – LWVUS: Gain New Members and Visibility During Election Season

Election season should not only be a time to make a difference in your community but to make a difference in your League, as well! Election season is a period of natural visibility for the League, and we can maximize on that opportunity. If we put as much emphasis on and effort into publicizing our work, engaging those that benefit from it, and underscoring the value of membership in the League as we do on conducting the citizen education/engagement activities themselves—the League can be as strong and as vibrant as the democracy we fight to protect! Membership recruitment is something that can and should be done around your League's voters service efforts.

To help maximize this opportunity, incorporate membership recruitment messages and employ other outreach "best practices" into your election activities. These efforts are not burdensome—the key is to be intentional about growing the League by "adding to" what your League already has planned.

Look for opportunities

What is the membership message?

How should MY League use the message?

What else can MY League do to attract new members?

Using membership messages at election events

Look for Opportunities

Assess what opportunities are already planned in your community to reach out to potential new League members.

Existing LWV Opportunities –Review your voters service calendar and identify scheduled events (i.e. candidate forums), [communications](#) (i.e. Web site, voters guides, fliers), and other relevant activities that will reach an external audience.

Opportunities Presented by Other Groups –Consult community calendars (often on the local media's Web site) to see the events and activities that are being sponsored by other organizations including area universities, local media outlets and potential allied organizations, and generate a list of the opportunities that may exist for your League to disseminate relevant election-related materials and the membership message.

Always be ready for an impromptu opportunity to talk to someone about the League this election season and ASK them to join the League or come with you to a

meeting. Download and print out your own election-themed [Give and Take Business Cards](#) and carry them with you wherever you go. Make enough for League members to take with them to all election season opportunities!

What is the Membership Message?

Once you have identified opportunities, promote the benefits of membership and invite potential members to participate in additional election activities. Different situations may call for some changes, but the membership message will tap into a core value held by potential League members: *wanting your community to be fair, vibrant and strong*. This will resonate in communities across the country, especially among women ages 50-65, who have been politically active and are transitioning into a new phase of life.

The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join LWV and be directly involved in shaping the issues that keep our community fair, vibrant and strong.

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How Should MY League Use the Message?

Make your membership messaging consistent and constant. Include a membership message in as many of your media statements, election materials and voters service activities as possible. According to marketing experts, it often takes hearing something about 7 – 8 times before someone is "spurred to action," and in an election season, this statistic can be even greater!

Therefore, be persistent and utilize every opportunity to talk about the value of being a member of the League and how individuals can join.

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What Else Can MY League do to Attract New Members?

The answer is simple. Your League members should ASK individuals to join. Don't just assume your community knows how to join or that they can! When asking individuals to join, personalize your invitation by telling potential members why you joined the League and why you continue to be a part of this great organization. Need help collecting your thoughts and creating your story? Share our [elevator speech activity](#) with your League.

Create easy opportunities to join, such as:

- Include a highly visible and easy option for people to join on the home page of your League's Web site.
- Have forms and sign-up sheets at events/forums.

- Have greeters who can talk about League membership and invite individuals to join at candidate forums or other events.
- Bring membership brochures and invite people to join when addressing allied groups.
- Put a "Join the League" ad in your voters guide (paid for by your operating fund).

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Using Membership Messages at Election Events

It is not always easy to make two very distinct subjects (voters service and League membership) fit together in a cohesive way. Below are some suggestions about how to do so this election season. The exact words are not critical but communicating the value of League membership is!

- *Candidate Forums.* From the podium, the moderator can include the following message in his/her opening remarks: "The League of Women Voters is a trusted, nonpartisan political organization. Our members do the hands-on work to safeguard democracy. While we never endorse a candidate, we are directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong. As an LWV member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I encourage you to pick up some of the League's information available here tonight or visit our web site at [YOUR URL]."
- *Issue Forum.* From the podium, the moderator can include the following message in his/her opening remarks: "The League of Women Voters is a trusted, nonpartisan political organization. Our members do the hands-on work that safeguard democracy and lead to civic improvement. As an LWV member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I encourage you to pick up some of the League's information available here tonight or visit our web site at [YOUR URL]."
- *Voters Guide. Place an ad for membership* – "The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join the League and be directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community fair, vibrant and strong. As an LWV member, you are a part of an organization where thoughtful, active leaders work to create change in their

communities. To join us please visit: [YOUR LEAGUE'S CONTACT INFO/WEB SITE HERE](#). A [sample ad](#) to tailor to your League is available.

An ad like this must be paid for with your League's operating funds; NOT education fund monies

- At all events: remember to make it easy for an individual to join! Have League materials, such as membership brochures and your League's *Vote*, available. Offer to do follow-up and engage people by telling your own personal League success story (i.e., why you joined the League and what it has meant to you). Most importantly, remember to *ASK* people to join the League.

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Using the Media to Reach Out to Your Community

The following are suggested activities for your League to use to draw attention to your efforts/activities, drive traffic to your League's Web site and deliver direct membership recruitment messages through the media during the election season. Don't be afraid to use the election as the media "hook" and wrap up all media contacts with a "plug" for the League that emphasizes membership.

- *Membership language.* Include a membership message underscoring the value of being a member in all media communications (media advisories, press releases, press statements, etc). [Sample press templates](#) for all aspects of the election (voter registration, getting out the vote on election day, and post-election) will be available for you to tailor to your League and community and send to local media outlets. Remember to always follow-up with the news sources to which you provide the template and to try to make relationships with the news sources in the process. Even if your press template is not printed this time, it could be an important stepping stone for a future media opportunity.
- *Tip Sheets.* Release a tip sheet with story ideas related to the election to local and regional media outlets. The tip sheet should include a brief story idea and relevant League contact information for the reporter to follow up. Reporters will be looking for ideas beyond the "horse race" story, and your League can provide those ideas. (Please refer to [Election 2008: A Broadcaster's Guide to Getting Out the Vote](#), a publication of the National Association of Broadcasters and LWV for ideas. LWVUS also has compiled a list of possible story ideas.)

- *FAQ's* - Develop a list of the top 5 questions for journalists to pose to local officials/election commissioners regarding steps that are being/have been taken to ensure voters are enfranchised in all elections.
- *Talk Radio/Public Television.* Talk with local radio shows and public television programs about hosting key League members to discuss the status of the area's election system and issues around voter access or participation. Consider recruiting/recommending additional participants from allied organizations. Include a membership message and refer individuals to your Leagues web site for more information when you prepare talking points for a radio and/or TV appearance. You may also want to inquire about how to air [PSAs](#).
- *Opinion Pieces.* Draft an opinion piece that highlights key issues around the voting process this election. Special consideration should be given to the signer of the op-ed, and you League may consider whether co-signing the piece with an allied organization would elevate League visibility.
- *Rapid response.* Leagues should scan media coverage on an ongoing basis through the election season to identify opportunities for the League to insert messages on voter participation (and the League's role in increasing it) through letters to the editor.