

Opportunities during Election Season

While the previous section underscored the importance of Leagues to be visible all year to help debunk the myth that we are an elections-time *only* organization, it is equally important that we capitalize on what the public wants from us and the most widely known aspect of our reputation: our elections work and the fact-based, nonpartisan information we provide. Election season is a period of natural visibility for the League, and we must maximize that opportunity to both provide the most voters with the authentic solutions they crave and also build our organization.

During a time of increased visibility, such as an election, it is critical that we are able to concisely articulate the benefits of League membership and to invite people to join. Quite simply, membership recruitment is something that can and should be done around your League's voters service efforts.

We need to put as much emphasis on and effort into publicizing our work, engaging those who benefit from it, and promoting the value of membership in the League as we do on conducting the citizen education and engagement activities.

To help maximize this visibility, Leagues should incorporate membership recruitment messages and employ other outreach best practices into election activities that are planned. While extremely important, these efforts need not be burdensome. The key is to be intentional about growing the League by adding to what Leagues already have planned.

Please note: Resources about how to conduct voters service work, such as voter registration drives, candidate forums, and voters guides, are available in Member Section of www.lwv.org.

Assessing the Opportunities

To best leverage existing outreach opportunities, Leagues should assess how to be most visible within what is already planned in order to communicate with potential new members.

Existing LWV Opportunities – Leagues should review their voters service calendar and identify scheduled events (such as candidate forums), communications (such as the League website, press materials, voters guide, or fliers), and other relevant activities that will reach an external audience.

Opportunities Presented by Other Groups – Similarly, Leagues should reach out to partner organizations or consult community calendars (often on local media websites) to see the events and activities that are being sponsored locally, and generate a list of the opportunities that may exist for Leagues to disseminate relevant election-related materials and the membership message.



Key Election Activities

In a major election year, every League should strive to:

- Host at least 5 registration events
- Host at least 1 candidate forum/debate
- Pursue an online voters guide - hopefully on VOTE411.org
- Meet with local elections officials to discuss their plans and yours
- Identify 5 key media contacts and communicate at least once monthly
- Conduct get-out-the-vote with registrants, volunteers, and online networks
- Consider a poll watching/poll worker recruitment program
- Take advantage of related LWVUS and state trainings, materials, etc.

Messaging

Once opportunities have been identified, invite potential members or members of partner organizations to participate in your election activities. While different contexts will necessitate refining your message, you always want to be speaking to your target audience. (See previous chapter.) A core theme or value that you may want to highlight (as it cuts across many groups) is: *wanting the community to be fair, vibrant and strong.*

Membership messaging should be consistent and constant. Include a membership or “get involved” message in as many of your League’s media statements, election materials and voters service activities as possible. As mentioned previously, it often takes hearing about something 7 – 8 times before someone is spurred to action. In an election season, this statistic can be even greater because of the constant bombardment of political ads! Therefore, Leagues must be persistent and utilize every opportunity to talk about the value of being a League member and how individuals can join.

The Key Step

There is a step that League leaders must take at all voters service activities:

You must ASK individuals to join.

Don’t assume that it is implied.

Create easy opportunities to join by:

- Including a highly visible and easy option for people to join on the home page of your League’s website.
- Having forms and sign-up sheets at all League events.
- Having greeters who talk about League membership and invite individuals to join at all League events.
- Bringing membership brochures and inviting people to join when addressing allied groups.
- Putting a “Join the League” ad in your voters guide (paid for by your operating fund).



Membership Messages at League-sponsored Election Events

There are many opportunities at League-sponsored events to weave in a membership message. Below are some possible suggestions about how to do so this election season.

- **Candidate Forums.** From the podium, the moderator could include the following message in his or her opening remarks: “The League of Women Voters is a trusted grassroots organization whose members do the hands-on work to safeguard democracy. While we never endorse or oppose a candidate, we are directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong. As a League 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 would 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 could include the following message in his or her opening remarks: “The League of Women Voters is a trusted grassroots organization whose members do the hands-on work that safeguards democracy and leads to civic improvement. As a League 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 would encourage you to pick up some of the League’s information available here tonight or visit our web site at [YOUR URL].”
- **Voters Guide.** You may place an ad for membership in the Guide: “ Join the League and play a hands-on role in keeping our community fair, vibrant and strong. As a League 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.” An ad like this must be paid for with your League’s operating funds. *You may NOT use education fund monies for membership ads.* See next page for a sample Voters Guide ad.



	LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF <i>INSERT YOUR COMMUNITY</i>
Join us in making our communities Fair, Vibrant and Strong.	
<p>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 in our community.</p> <p>Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. With more than 90 years of experience and over 800 local and state affiliates in all 50 states, the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations.</p> <hr/> <p>Call us at:</p> <p>Email us at:</p> <p>Visit our Web site:</p>	

Above is a sample Voters Guide ad to join the League! Remember every election opportunity is also an opportunity to grow the League. You may not use Education Fund monies to pay for membership ads.

Remember to make it easy for an individual to join. Have League materials (such as membership brochures and copies of your League's *Voter*) available at all League events. Offer to do follow up and engage people by telling your own personal League story (such as why you joined the League and what it has meant to you).

Most importantly, remember to ASK people to join the League.

Opportunities for Media Outreach

The following are suggested activities that Leagues are encouraged to undertake to draw attention to their activities, drive traffic to their League's website and, as appropriate, deliver direct membership recruitment messages through the media during the election season. Use the election as the "media hook" and wrap up all media contacts (e.g., phone conversations, interviews, press releases) with a plug for the League that emphasizes membership.

- **Membership language.** Include a membership message underscoring the grassroots nature of the League and the value of being a member in all media communications (media advisories, press releases, press statements, etc).
- **Regular media outreach.** Identify and reach out to at least five top local reporters (TV, radio, print or online) at least once monthly. Your communications need not always be formal or lengthy; in the very least you can provide a quick update on the League's work and reiterate your willingness to be a resource should questions arise. Become a trusted source, and your League will reap the benefits!

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 where the reporter can follow up. Reporters will be looking for ideas beyond the "horse race" story, and your League can provide those ideas. Possible ideas include: voter information and especially any local candidate information available on www.vote411.org, or the impact of any new voter identification or other election rules in your state.

- **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. Leagues also may consider recruiting and recommending additional participants from allied organizations. Any talking points prepared for a radio and/or TV appearance should include a membership message and refer individuals to the League's website for more information. Leagues 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. Leagues may consider whether co-signing the piece with an allied organization would elevate League visibility and increase its chance for publication.
- **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.





Elections Checklist

Now that you know how to gain visibility around the election, use this election checklist to help you remember what to do to maximize the opportunity surrounding each election activity!

Voters' Guides

- ✓ Does the Voters' Guide include an ad to join the League? Does it have the League's contact information? (Remember: This ad must be paid for with operating fund or (c)(4) resources.
- ✓ Does your League follow up with a membership appeal to individuals who request copies of the Voters' Guide?
- ✓ Does your League put membership materials out near/with Voters' Guides that are in public places (such as at libraries, in apartment buildings, etc.)?
- ✓ Are there allied groups that could help to promote your Voters' Guides?
- ✓ Have you explored developing an online Voters' Guide through www.VOTE411.org?
- ✓ Have you done consistent (and persistent!) media outreach to promote the Voters' Guide (including the value of membership and/or a member's personal story in each media release)?



Candidate or Issue Forums and Events

- ✓ Have you sought co-sponsors for the event or advertised it among allied organizations?
- ✓ Have you persistently followed up with local media outlets to get the event promoted in advance and covered when it happens?
- ✓ Are all of the moderators scripted to invite members of the audience to join?
- ✓ Is there someone present to provide more information about League, make an additional ask to join, and accept membership forms?
- ✓ Do televised events include a "crawler" or "screen shot" about how to join the League (such as telling viewers to go to the League's website)?
- ✓ Are you ready to collect contact information through sign-in sheets from attendees for additional follow up later?
- ✓ Do you have League members at the event to welcome in the public and serve as "membership ambassadors"?
- ✓ Is the League logo and name visible (on podium signs, League mugs for water, a League pin worn by the moderator)?



Overall Election Season

- ✓ What are the visibility or membership opportunities around your League’s Election Day activities (participating in voter registration drives, staffing a voter hotline or serving as election monitors)? For example, are volunteers wearing League buttons or stickers? Are they ready to talk about the League and/or provide contact information?
- ✓ Have you worked with the media to draw attention to election issues beyond the “horse race” (such as voter information on www.vote411.org, voter ID issues, etc.) and what League members are doing to address these issues? (NB: Story ideas are available from LWVUS.)
- ✓ Do you have membership information available at voter registration events? Are you collecting contact information for the individuals you help register, in order to remind them about upcoming election-related events* and ask them to engage with the League in other ways, including joining?
- ✓ Do you have members ready to talk about their personal experiences with League and the value of being a member?
- ✓ As more and more individuals come to your League’s website for information about the election, do you have a prominent “join us” message? Do you have an easy mechanism to join? Do you have personal messages from League leaders or members?
- ✓ Are your Leagues members (or at least leaders) tooled to be “ambassadors” during this time of increased visibility and interest? Do they have membership brochures to hand out? Have they practiced asking individuals to join? Are there mechanisms to capture the contact information for interested individuals for later follow up?

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MAXIMIZE the OPPORTUNITY!*

*Rules governing collection of contact information from voter registration forms vary by state. Check with your statewide elections official. Follow-up communications to new registrants may only include election-related information (invitation to attend an election-related event, promotion of an online voters’ guide, reminder about election day/polling places, etc.) but should include a link to your League website, VOTE411.org, etc.



Voters Service = Leadership Development Opportunities



While the checklist above focuses on using election season as a time to recruit new members, it holds equally true that voter engagement and education activities also are a wonderful way to engage current members and move individuals into positions of leadership. Think about every voters service event or activity as a chance to introduce some aspect of League to someone new. Are there small tasks that can be given out to engage members and let them “try on” planning or leading an event? Are there individuals that could shadow some of the key League “doers” in the area of voters service? Are we looking to the next generation of leaders – building our own legacy by helping to groom our successors?

See chapters 7-9 for more information about leadership development. Remember that just as every event and activity is a chance to attract new members, these events are ripe with leadership development opportunities as well. And, like in membership recruitment, the critical piece is to ask!