

Activities around Historic Milestones for Women

While League has always been more than a “women’s organization,” our founding and our history make it only natural that we should acknowledge and mark certain milestones for women. This document contains a list of suggested activities that Leagues could implement anytime, but might be planned around one of these milestones as the “hook” to spark wider interest.

Recommended Milestones:

- Carrie Chapman Catt’s Birthday (January 9)
- The League’s Birthday (February 14)
- Women’s History Month (March)
- Anniversary of the Enactment of Title IX (June 23)
- Anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention (July 19-20)
- Women Equality Day/ Anniversary of the Passage of the 19th Amendment (August 26)
- Anniversary of Local Leagues Founding (Based on Your Local League)

These activities were selected because they provide opportunities to raise the League’s visibility among community members, draw attention to the League’s work, showcase the value of membership in the League, and ultimately generate new members. These activities, while different in content, share some common threads in how they should be implemented based on the best practices of the membership/leadership program.



A SPECIAL NOTE ON WOMEN’S EQUALITY DAY...

Given our history as an organization, LWV should be synonymous with Women’s Equality Day on August 26. Leagues are especially encouraged to take advantage of this milestone to generate visibility for the organization. It is a great way to “kick off” the League year and to put a spotlight on the great programmatic work that League does/will do.



Common Components to Implementation

The success of the Membership and Leadership Development program has shown us that there are some key components (i.e., best practices) that should be included in every activity to make it truly successful (i.e. one that engages the community and attracts new members). These include:

Using the Message - Communicating concisely and consistently is critical. Leagues should incorporate messages about the value of membership in the League when communicating with potential members. Leagues should appeal to the values of their target audience or demographic. In addition, Leagues are encouraged to underscore the following benefits of League membership—

1. League members make their communities healthy, vibrant and strong.
2. League offers leadership or personal growth opportunities.

Asking People to Join - Asking is crucial. Leagues that explicitly invite individuals to join the League see results. Every interaction with a potential member is an opportunity to extend an invitation to join the League. It is so simple that it is often overlooked. Don't assume that it is implied; ask everywhere and every time. Obtain Membership Brochures from LWVUS at www.lwv.org or by contacting the MLD support staff.

Reaching Out to Allied Organizations - Forming partnerships with organizations in your community will elevate the League's visibility within the community and expose the League to pools of potential members. Ask an organization to partner with your League on one of the suggested activities below or on other events on your League's calendar.

Developing Relationships with the Media – Reporters receive many phone calls, emails, and press releases daily. Building relationships with members of the media and regularly sharing information about the League's work is very important. It will increase the likelihood of the League's message getting “covered” by the media, which increases the League's visibility and in turn brings in more members. (See Chapter 3 for more information.)

Sharing Personal Stories – There is no better way to explain the benefits of membership than to share stories from current LWV members. These stories should profile League members and demonstrate the value of belonging to League. Visit the LWV Storybank on www.lwv.org for stories from members across the country and ideas about how to use them. (See Chapter 5 for more information.)

Suggested Activities

Conduct Media Outreach

Any of the milestones (especially if the League is holding an event) are newsworthy. There are several ways that the media might be approached:

- The League president could approach the local paper about submitting an opinion piece.
- Leagues could reach out to the appropriate columnist at their local paper and/or host of a local radio program to pitch a piece that commemorates the day and acknowledges the many profound achievements of women in government over the past 90+ years.
- Leagues could “pitch” a feature story about an individual League member about how her League experience has helped to make the community healthy, vibrant and strong.
- League members could submit a letter to the editor calling attention to the milestone and relating it to the League’s work and a current community issue/topic.
- League could “localize” a sample press template from LWVUS. (LWVUS produces sample press templates/statements for Women’s Equality Day, the League’s birthday, and Women’s History Month.)

Regardless of which option is pursued, Leagues must be persistent! Build relationships with reporters and follow up consistently. When you finally do get an interview or issue a release, be sure to remember that in addition to the milestone being celebrated or promotion of the event that is being hosted to mark it, you want to include the messages (outlined above), stress the importance and value of the League’s work, and (whenever possible) remind people how they can join the League.

Partner with a Library

Partner with the local library and **develop an exhibit** that documents the history of women’s role in government. The League could contact their local library and propose working together to develop an exhibit that demonstrates the profound achievements of women throughout the past 90+ years.

Leagues could draft a press release on the day of the exhibition opening and if resources allow, host a launch event at the library. Leagues could invite members of the local press, community leaders, elected officials and members/friends of the League.

In conjunction with this or as its own event, Leagues could sponsor a **“democracy storytime”** at their local library. Besides using the library’s own public relations network, Leagues could advertise the event to homeschool groups, Girl and Boy Scout troops, and other organizations. While the children are unlikely to join League, the parents, grandparents, and aunts who accompany them will. While the children are working on an activity, make a plug for the League’s upcoming events and why people would want to join the League.



Host a Women’s Leadership Luncheon – Longest League Member Keynote

Leagues may host a luncheon or other social event (e.g., dessert, tea) for community leaders, celebrating the role of women’s leadership in their community over the past 90+ years. The keynote speaker could be the woman who has been a League member for the longest period of time, who has a personal story to tell about membership in the League. This League member could prepare a speech, telling her story and the story/history of the League. Leagues could invite other outstanding women leaders in the community, members/friends of the League, as well as select members of the local press.

Leagues should distribute a press release to members of the local media and place follow-up calls to select reporters, inviting them to the event or soliciting an interview with the League member and/or League president for inclusion in a potential feature or news article. Leagues should leverage this event to offer information about the League, the value and benefits of a membership, as well as information about the issues the organization represents and is *presently* working on to make the community and our democracy stronger.

This type of event is also a good opportunity to encourage the League members in attendance to submit their own stories about what their involvement in League has meant to them. Stories can be entered online at www.lwv.org. These “testimonials” are wonderful recruiting tools and can be used at future events or in other League communications.

Leagues also may consider holding a “Suffrage Anniversary Event,” a breakfast that features an elected official (or several elected officials). In particular, Leagues may want to spotlight women who hold public office. Planning materials for such an event, including a sample agenda and media advisory, are available from LWVUS.

SUCCESS STORY:

The LWVs of Manistee County and Grand Traverse (MI) packed the State Theatre for a screening of the HBO Film “Iron Jawed Angels” to celebrate the anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Over 100 people attended the benefit reception at the Park Place Hotel before the screening to welcome Michigan’s former First Lady Helen Milliken. After the reception, guests walked from the hotel to the State Theatre where they were greeted by filmmaker Michael Moore. Prior to the screening Moore spoke to the group and praised “Iron Jawed Angels” as a “story that needs to be told, retold and above all, remembered!” The event was described as electrifying and emotional, and at the end of the film, guests stood, cheered, and cried. Many people even pulled out their wallets to support the LWV and all the good work it does. The event generated great visibility for the local Leagues.

