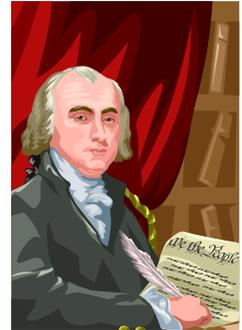


## Sunshine Week

Sunshine Week, held the week of James Madison's birthday (March 16), is a nationwide effort to open up dialogue on the importance of transparency in government and freedom of information. During this week, the League of Women Voters and other "good government" groups can encourage citizens to play an active role in promoting open government at all levels. This section contains recommendations and tools for maximizing outreach efforts around Sunshine Week.



As in all communications activities, the intent of this outreach is to reach more members of your community and ultimately garner new membership for the League. *Leagues will need to tailor recommendations to fit the needs in their communities.*

### Background

Journalists, civic groups, libraries, schools and others interested in the public's right to know have banded together to help promote this nonpartisan effort to enlighten and empower individuals to play an active role in their government at all levels, and to give them access to information that makes their lives better and their communities stronger. The Sunshine Week initiative originated from the work of several newspapers, and it has grown, in large part, because of the media's continued support. Journalists around the country are encouraged to report on government transparency issues during this week, and as such, it is a great opportunity for Leagues to engage reporters in their area. More information about the history of Sunshine Week is available at [www.sunshineweek.org](http://www.sunshineweek.org).

### Recommended Activities

Below is a list of possible activities for Sunshine Week. The first part of the list contains activities to directly engage members of the community (i.e., potential new members of the League). The second part of the list deals with media outreach. These *are only suggested activities*. As always, we encourage each League to brainstorm ideas based on local events/activities/issues that may be taking place in your community and what is already on your League calendar. *However, all Leagues are encouraged to take advantage of the media opportunities around this week.*

**Program/Community Discussion** – For the past several years, LWVEF has cosponsored a national panel discussion of experts from inside and outside government to discuss different aspects of federal openness policies and opportunities for people to use government information to make a difference in their communities. These events were webcast live, and Leagues are encouraged to host "viewing parties" in their communities and/or set up their own panel discussion on this important topic with local experts/officials. These events are announced via the Leaders' Update beginning in January of each year.



## Chapter 4: Being Visible All Year

**Tour of City Hall** -Tours of City or Town Halls are easy to schedule and are a great way to symbolize openness in government. During Sunshine Week, Leagues might encourage the citizens of their community to visit City/Town Hall and take a tour to learn more about how their local government works. Leagues could contact their City Hall and inquire about setting up tours. Leagues can then schedule 1-2 tours during Sunshine Week and show non-members what being engaged in government can mean. Information about the tours could go on the League's Web site, be shared with other organizations/individuals in their community, and personal invitations could go to "hot" prospects. Some Leagues also have had success in organizing tours of the local courts.

**Observe a Meeting** - League members could offer to be "guides" to local government meetings that week. For the uninitiated, attending a City or Town Council meeting can be an overwhelming experience. League members can encourage individuals to attend and offer to show them how the process works – how they can make their voice heard. Of course, have membership materials available too!

### Other Ideas

- Observer Corps Activities (see LWVEF publication "Observing Your Government in Action: Protecting Your Right to Know" available on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) for more information and ideas.)
- Conduct a FOIA Audit (see LWVEF publication "Looking for the Sunshine: Protecting You Right to Know" available on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) for more information and ideas.)
- Have a proclamation issued about Sunshine Week from a local government body (sample language is available from LWVUS)

### SUCCESS STORIES:

The **LWV of Palm Beach County (FL)** hosted a "Go See" trip, an organized tour of the county and federal courts. Despite being the same week as local municipal elections, the League got radio press coverage of Sunshine Week and two letters to the editor were picked up by both major area papers - the *Palm Beach Post* and the *Sun Sentinel*.

The **LWV of Oakland (CA)** hosted a discussion about the city's Sunshine Ordinance at City Hall. The speakers included the city attorney and a columnist from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The discussion focused on why Oakland needs its Sunshine Ordinance, how it's working and what more needs to be done in this area. The presentation was picked up by a local government access channel.

## Media Outreach

To garner visibility for Sunshine Week and specifically for the League's activities during the week, Leagues should conduct media outreach in advance of and during Sunshine Week.



**Schedule a “deskside chat” with a reporter**– Openness in government is always a “hot topic” now especially among journalists. Call your local political/government reporter two – three weeks in advance of Sunshine Week to discuss the issue and any of your League's upcoming event(s) that they might find interesting. Be prepared to provide the reporter with key details about Sunshine Week and include as many local specifics as you can in order to make it relevant – examples of local government getting it right or wrong can be helpful to a reporter preparing a story.

**Draft an op-ed for submission** - Op-ed is an abbreviation for “opposite the editorial page” and can denote both the page itself and the opinion pieces that a newspaper publishes on the page facing the editorial page. Newspapers generally have a stable of op-ed columnists and regular contributors but most will also print op-eds written by outside authors. Op-eds are often selected for their unique or fresh perspective on a recent event or news story. Please see Chapter 3 for tips on drafting and submitting op-eds.

**Write a letter** - Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials or op-eds published in your local paper. During Sunshine Week there is likely to be some coverage (hopefully generated by your League!) and you should be prepared to submit a letter to amplify a positive editorial, or highlight key information left out of an article. The key to getting your letter published is making sure that it is timely. Ideally, you would submit a letter to the editor within 24 hours that the piece you're responding to appeared. Watch the LWVUS' weekly Leaders' Update for sample letters to the editor and other press templates for Sunshine Week.

**Publicize all League events** - Leagues should draft a **media advisory** that provides the important details of the community event(s) planned for Sunshine Week and distribute it one week in advance. Remember that an advisory is short; it gives the *who, what, where, and when* of an event. Each League should also be prepared to make follow up phone calls to select members of the local media to gauge if there is interest in writing a story about the LWV event and/or the LWV involvement with Sunshine Week. Having reporters attend the event is the most effective way to get a story written. Some sample talking points are included on the following page.



## Talking Points

- The League of Women Voters is an organization dedicated to improving our systems of government and impacting public policies through education and advocacy – it's truly the organization where leaders volunteer to make democracy work.
- League members are passionate about safeguarding democracy and are directly involved in shaping the community in which we live – Sunshine Week is a week to get involved and to discuss the issues that matter greatly to the members of our community.
- League members provide fact-based information. The League is non-partisan; we don't endorse any political parties. And, we don't support or oppose candidates for office. We are one of America's most trusted organizations.
- We want government to work for all. The League of Women Voters is dedicated to expanding public awareness about accountability and transparency in government; Sunshine Week presents an ideal forum to discuss these issues and learn more about the community in which we live.
- Since 1920, the work of our members keeps our democracy healthy. We observe government meetings, we provide facts about issues (not spin or "sound bites") to the public, and we encourage everyone to make their voices heard on the decisions that impact our families and our community.
- We extend an invitation to all those who want to join our efforts to participate in [EVENT or ACTIVITY NAME] during Sunshine Week to learn more about how openness in government impacts us all and what we can do to uphold our right to know.

