

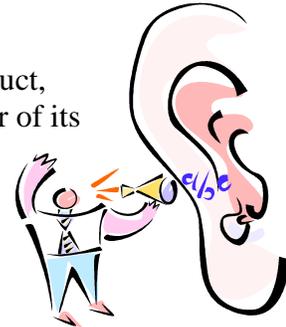
Overview of Reaching Out to Your Community

In addition to developing a strong support network for local Leagues through the coaching structure, the Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) program provides local Leagues with a framework of tried-and-true best practices in outreach and leadership development.

As local Leagues know their communities best, the MLD best practices are designed to enhance the effectiveness of already-planned events and activities.

Through the program, local Leagues and their coach work together to identify key organizations, media outlets and events that will likely attract interested individuals to the League. There is no one way to reach everyone and there is no *magic bullet* to automatically make people join the League. However, by employing some basic techniques that intentionally and consistently focus efforts and engage current members, Leagues will become stronger, larger, and more vibrant.

The average American receives around *3,000 messages* from competing voices about different products and services *each day*. The greatest product, service or idea is worthless if consumers are not aware of its existence or of its value to them. With this in mind, how on earth does League make sure that its message stands out? We need to employ marketing techniques.



Marketing is the strategy a business or organization uses to make sure the right audience hears their message. It is built on repetition and consistency.

As an organization, one of our greatest assets is the time and energy that our members and leaders donate to the League. One of the goals of the MLD program is maximize how we use this precious resource. In other words, how do we most effectively and efficiently promote the organization while simultaneously carrying out the work related to our mission? How do we serve ourselves as we serve the larger community and ultimately our democracy?

The simple answer is: outreach. The three outreach methods outlined in this section are designed to help the League look outside itself to help engage the community and build its membership and leadership base. In order to maximize the League's continuous presence in the community *all three must be done in coordination with the League's activities*.

The Main Methods of Reaching Your Community are:

1. **Direct outreach** – outreach on a one-to-one basis or directly to a group of people
2. **Allied outreach** - reaching out to partner with groups or allied organizations
3. **Media outreach** – building relationships with print, television, online and radio outlets

Choosing a Target Audience

While all three of these outreach “nets” must be cast in order to build the League’s visibility and presence, Leagues should do so with a focused and intentional way. In other words, Leagues need to identify and focus on a **target audience** with their outreach efforts.



By casting nets that attempt to reach everyone, we won’t reach anyone.

As a society, we have come to expect customization. For survival (to be able to navigate the 3,000 messages referenced above), we have developed great filtering systems. We know within a matter of seconds whether something is of interest to us or not. If someone or something isn’t “speaking to us,” then we tune it out. It is because of this that it is so important for Leagues to think about who they are trying to speak to as they conduct outreach. What does that audience care about? What are their key values and how do they relate to the work of the League?

This last part is especially critical: How does it relate to the League? In other words, Leagues may identify what they believe is an ideal target audience (e.g., mothers of young children), but it’s important for Leagues to think through all the steps to successfully attract and engage them. What possible modifications to how the League is currently “doing business” may need to be in place to speak to this target demographic? For example, in keeping with mothers of young children, is the League willing to have babysitting available? Are there opportunities for families to participate in League events? Are there opportunities for mothers to take on roles from home and/or at “off hours” (when kids are asleep)?

These kinds of considerations are important for Leagues to think about BEFORE embarking on any work to attract a specific demographic. If we are not prepared to embrace the changes needed to “catch” these individuals, then our outreach efforts will prove to be ineffective; we won’t attract or engage our target.



If one imagines the possible modifications that will resonate with a target audience on a dial or continuum, there are some target audience choices that might require a slight shift (e.g., one “click” on the dial – meet on weekends to accommodate working people). But, there are others that might require many more changes (e.g., 7 “clicks” on the dial – information/meetings in Spanish to accommodate Latinos). Leagues know their communities, their membership, their capacity, and commitment to pursuing a given audience. It is important for Leagues to be honest about what changes they can and will make and how quickly they can achieve them.

In looking at League nationally, the easiest group for most Leagues to approach is women ages 50-65 with past engagement in civic issues. Many of them are at a transition time in their lives (e.g., becoming empty nesters, moving toward retirement), and many of the core values that they hold are strongly aligned with those of the League. They also are a large demographic pool and

one that is relatively easy to identify and engage without big changes to how most Leagues are currently operating.

Regardless of which target demographic is selected, outreach takes time and patience. If Leagues are persistent and proactive in all outreach efforts, the rewards will be great. A longtime friend may finally decide to join the League after being asked; an organization in your community may see the mutual benefits to hosting an event together; or a reporter may attend and cover an event because he or she received multiple invitations from the League.

What about reaching out to young people?

When we talk about focusing outreach on a specific group of potential new members, local Leagues always want to know: how do we get young people to join the League?

Young professionals, college students, and young parents are all potential groups which local Leagues *can* choose to recruit to assist in League activities, recruit as interns, volunteers, or members, and help develop into leaders. However, just like any group, each local League should consider the necessary steps to attract and engage them and the modifications the League will need to make in order to do so.

After speaking with a focus group of young professionals who volunteered to have a conversation, we found that many wanted local Leagues:

- To offer easy, convenient, one-time-only type volunteer opportunities (such as registering voters at a high school on a Saturday afternoon)
- To be understanding and welcoming when they volunteer. Young professionals have full-time jobs and lots of activities and organizations vying for their time. Be thankful for the time given and non-judgmental if a young professional attends many events one year and then has to take a break from League the next. If young professionals are welcomed to participate when and how they can, and in meaningful ways, they are more likely to come back.
- To not expect dues right away. Young professionals are used to “trying on” an organization without being expected to pay a fee. Let young professionals offer their volunteer services to you before they become full-fledged members.





Chapter 3: Outreach Best Practices

- To have more fun, informative, and networking events with less focus on meetings and League-only functions. Young professionals want to meet people. Give them the opportunity to network with other individuals including other young professionals and important people in the community.
- To show them why they should be interested in the League. What is the value of the League to their lives? Why they should be interested? Young professionals are passionate about issues that affect them, such as jobs and schools. . Get them involved by speaking to what matters to them.
- To make the League more accessible. If you are meeting at 11am on a Tuesday in a retirement community or someone's home, don't expect to find too many young professional banging at the door to get in. Make sure your meeting times and locations will attract young professionals. Consider meeting in the evening at a public place. Think about having wine, soda or snacks available.
- To have reasonable expectations on their time commitment. Just like most individuals, young professionals don't want to join and then immediately be asked to be the Voters Service Chair, the newsletter editor, or (even worse) the President. Be willing to streamline traditional leadership positions like board members to accommodate their lives. They will be more willing to participate if they can do it easily and guilt free. Young professionals want the ability to "earn" these types of positions after working up their skills by volunteering at League events in other, smaller capacities first. Be mindful of how it would feel to walk into a new place and immediately be asked to take the lead. Young parents will appreciate opportunities to volunteer as a family, too!
- To provide mentoring. Young professionals are definitely looking to build their experience, resumes and networks. This should not be looked at as a negative. It is great that young men and women are trying to learn new skills and go up the career ladder. The League can help! Since our founding, many women have made their start with the League. From being an observer of government to becoming an elected official – the League has produced many fine leaders over our history. Promote the fact that the League gives individuals the chance to meet prominent community figures and hone skills they couldn't learn elsewhere. Mentor young professionals and they may become League leaders one day.

Reaching out to young professionals can be a very fulfilling process for your local League. Young professionals can bring new perspectives, fresh energy, and technological savvy to your group. Being mindful of how to appeal to young professionals in a way that makes your League approachable and fun is important. Your League may need to make some changes to make the League appealing to young professionals, including how open your League is to new ideas and how welcoming you are to different people. Really consider if this is the best group for your League's outreach.



Please note that we recommend that when considering work with college and high school students that you may invite them to be volunteers with us in our activities, but that you do not put lots of time into creating student chapters or expect them to be full time, full-fledged members of the League in the traditional sense. However, reaching out to students in non-conventional ways can really build up the League in your community and help you become more visible. You may even attract other volunteers who would like to work with students.

Here are a few ideas:

- Invite students to volunteer for a one-time event (such as manning a voter registration table or attending a candidates forum) for school credit
- Partner with a college group on campus for voter registration and voter engagement work. Many times school clubs formulate around election time to do just that.
- Hold events on campus and invite college staff, family, and students to attend.
- Partner with a college professor and talk about ways to engage the students in the political discourse of your community. Local Leagues can leverage their connections to help students gain first-hand knowledge of community organizing and local government. For example, some Leagues let the students submit a few questions for a candidates forum or serve on a panel of questioners.



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