

Opportunity for Guidance: Membership Renewal For December 2013

APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

- ✓ What is it about the League that makes you willing to renew your membership each year?
- ✓ What about the League provides personal satisfaction or fulfillment? What impact does the League have in your community or state?
- ✓ What if we had more members?
- ✓ What if you had a larger budget? What exciting new or continuing programs and projects could more money help to fund?

GUIDANCE

While it is perhaps not the reason that anyone joins the League, record keeping (i.e., whose membership is current and whose is not) is a vital part of an effective and efficient organization. We need to know and understand what our resources are.

Whether you are asking people to join the League for the first time or to renew their membership, a lot of the same principles apply. The difference is that when you are asking someone to renew their membership, they usually have a general understanding of what it is the League does, so you have the ability to focus on the specific projects that have been made possible by your members and their dues.

Renewal notices are a simple way to make sure that your League is retaining the members you've worked so hard to recruit by utilizing timely best practices in renewing members. When creating your renewal notices (or using other mechanisms such as calls or emails), you want to keep the following principles in mind:

- **Speak to Values.** What value has your League provided this year? Values can be tangible (i.e., people living longer, healthier lives) or emotional (i.e., making people feel good about providing opportunity). Don't just list your services or ideology—focus on outcomes and impact. The League has a lot to offer members through a wide range of committees, programs and events; be sure to identify why the League is valuable.
- **Show Your Passion!** Perhaps the most important part of a good membership ask is the gusto, enthusiasm and commitment to the work it expresses. This is still important when you are asking current members to renew. Don't be afraid to demonstrate the passion and drive you feel for the work. Remind people of the reasons they joined in the first place.
- **Visualize the Next Steps.** Use this as an opportunity to celebrate the great things the League did this year with the help of such great members but also be sure to include specifics about upcoming events. Remember that membership renewal is only partially about the collection of dues; it is also critical to retain great volunteers that are the backbone of the League nationwide.
- **Get to the Action Point.** Be sure to make a direct ask. You want to leave them with specific instructions on HOW to renew their membership. How can he/she make sure that they remain informed about League events and activities? This might be asking them to join or some interim step leading to membership, such as coming with you to a meeting or helping out at a voter registration booth. The key is to provide the opportunity.

One Touch Usually Isn't Enough

Don't get discouraged if you don't get a response the first time you reach out. It can typically take up to three separate notices through the mail to get a response. Things like providing a simple to fill out renewal form and a return envelope for convenience will increase the response rate. Where email addresses are also available, renewal notices should also be sent with concurrent email notifications to help encourage a response. Additionally, research shows that giving a deadline for donations/dues renewal is a highly effective way to motivate people. And, of course, the personal ask is important – phone calls or face-to-face communication are highly effective!

Consider the Extra Ask

Once a person has already committed to writing a dues check to the League, it is quite possible that they will be willing to give a bit more to the organization. This is a really simple way for your League to fundraise above and beyond the basic dues. Adding a simple paragraph to your renewal, like the sample below, is a great way to give members an option to give more.

*“With our dues remaining at \$XX annually to encourage maximum participation from our community, we hope with your renewal you may be able to give an additional gift of \$10, \$50, \$100 or more to provide much needed funding for LWV (**your League name**) programs.”*

Leagues might consider asking for a specific amount for a specific purpose (such as to provide scholarships for other members or to defray the costs of a specific program). Or, Leagues could suggest offering a membership to a friend or family member.

Personalize!

The more your renewal letter can be tailored to each individual member the better. While it may not be realistic to send each person a personalized letter, customized content does help a member feel as if their efforts are meaningful and recognized. Could you include a personalized greeting (e.g., Dear NAME vs. Dear Friend)? Or, could you add a handwritten line or two to the letter recalling something about them or their involvement (e.g., “Great to see you at last month's forum. Thanks for your continued involvement!”) This is an opportunity to be a true cheerleader for your members. Furthermore, be sure your renewal notices include the full name and contact information of the President (or designated Board member) of your League in case people have questions. And, it is essential to include a few specific examples of your League's work/impact this year.

NOTE:

In addition to utilizing the good practices above, it is also important that someone in your League is **entering new people or updating those renewals in the national database**. If your League needs help to do that, please email Membership@lww.org and staff is happy to assist. We've seen good growth in many Leagues over the last year – one of the only ways we can really measure this is through the information in national database! Together let's keep this trend going!

RESOURCES:

The Welcoming League (Chapter 6) of the binder

[Sample renewal letter](#)

[Fundraising 101: The League Way](#) (for case studies and information about acknowledging gifts)