

## February 2013 Guidance on Opportunities: Annual Meetings that Attract & Energize!

### APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

Answer the following questions:

- *What adjectives would you use to describe a thriving organization?*
- *What do you look for in an organization before you join or give your time?*
- *What attracts you to a particular group or organization – moves you to action with them?*
- *What keeps you with that organization (after the “honeymoon”)?*

Use this discussion to identify some common elements of thriving organizations – of organizations that are attracting, engaging and retaining members.

- Does the League have those elements?
- If not, how do we get them? If so, how are we showcasing them?
- In either case, what opportunities does the annual meeting offer?

### GUIDANCE

**First and foremost, annual meetings should not just be about “League business.”**

The annual meeting provides local Leagues the opportunity to:

- celebrate the League’s accomplishments from the past year;
- recognize League volunteers for their great work;
- share the value of being a League member with the community and ASK them to join;
- show the community how important and effective an organization the League is;
- energize your members around a community issue;
- engage current members and highlight leadership opportunities;
- connect with allied groups and/or do media outreach; and
- have FUN!

*How do we avail ourselves of these opportunities?*

Plan this meeting like any other: **use the event planning checklist**. Consider the opportunities for direct, allied and media outreach and for leadership development. These might include:

- Welcome prospective new members by asking each member to bring a friend to this event. Are there leaders of other community organizations that you might invite? How about donors or elected officials? Have name tags for everyone, along with membership ambassadors to welcome all attendees at the door. Encourage long-time members to serve as “tour guides” through the internal business areas of the annual meeting. Be sure to track who is there with a sign-in sheet. (Of course, don’t forget to follow up with prospective members on the sign-in sheet!) This may be a good time to introduce them to a League “buddy” or mentor.
- Be sure that there are some social aspects of the meeting. Consider an outside speaker. A speaker is a great way to get your members and guests thinking about an important community issue. Build in time for food and conversation. Everyone loves to network!
- Be ready to share some scalable ways to serve. Let new members or prospective members know that it is fine for brand new members to be part of committees, take on tasks, and move toward leadership. Don’t make “filling in holes” in the board slate the only opportunity available! What are the local League’s plans for the coming year? What are the discrete tasks that might be broken off and filled on the spot? Can you have sign-up sheets for people to express general

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interest in a topic/program (without committing to running it)? Try passing around a clipboard with some tasks already needed that they can volunteer to do. That might even include finding more individuals to serve on a local MLD committee! Or, how about engaging people on the spot – what about a membership ambassador training at the annual meeting? After the meeting, follow up and connect the dots between what they are interested in and some of those small tasks .

- Tell the press about the League. Before the event, be sure to put ads inviting individuals to the meeting in local community papers, online community blogs and calendars, and newsletters of allied organizations.

After the meeting, let the press know what happened at it and share a picture from the event with them. (Be sure to assign someone to take pictures throughout the meeting!) Did you elect new leaders? Was someone honored? Was there a keynote speaker? Were priorities for the next year identified and adopted? Write up a press release and circulate it.

Be sure to follow up with calls to some targeted reporters. If it doesn't result in an immediate story, it lets the local media know the League's plans for the future; it starts to set the League up as a resource.

- Celebrate successes! Everyone wants to be part of a winning team. Be sure to highlight the League's achievements. What may seem "obvious" to you may not be to other members. Does everyone know about the great work of the League's observer corps program? Do they know about the League's role in promoting recycling or registering 18-year-olds to vote or other local priority issues? Do they know what the state League has been doing? How about LWVUS? Share and celebrate these successes!
- Thank and appreciate League volunteers publicly! Everyone likes to be thanked and appreciated. Shower some praise on those that have and continue to serve in leadership roles. Create certificates and/or give League leaders a small token of appreciation. Ask outgoing Board members/leaders to share "points of pride" from their term. Is there a project that they are particularly proud of? Did they get a chance to meet someone important or special? Is there a funny story that underscores the range of opportunities available to League leaders? This sews the seeds for future leaders!
- Share personal stories about the League. Can you have a place for individuals to share their personal stories – on paper, online, or on video? Personal stories help to "put a face" on the great work that the League does and they are our best marketing tool! Member stories also can be shared throughout the meeting. Make a Power Point presentation with pictures and quotes from League members to use during breaks or have a League member share a moving story of impacting the community to the group.

### RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- Circulate the "Little Things" from Chapter 3 of the binder to get all members involved in using the best practices. Maybe lay out a challenge or ask members to pledge to do X number of these by the end of the summer.
- Just like we recommend with every event, use the Event Planning Checklist (available on the Yahoo! Group in the "Tools You Can Use" section of the MLD handbook to help you plan before, at and after the annual meeting!

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- Utilize the Storytelling materials in the binder.
- If you have the capacity to share video at your annual meeting – consider showing a short piece that may interest you from the [LWVUS video library](#)