

March 2012 Guidance on Opportunities: Power the League to Power the Vote!

Communities across the country equate the League of Women Voters with “elections.” And there’s a reason: we are *the* organization for voter education, voter registration, voter protection, and voter mobilization! Plus, we are different than a lot of organizations out there because we are connected with our communities through our network of 800 state and local Leagues across the country and because we never oppose or support candidates for office.

You already know this, but this year we are adding a twist to our work. . .

This election season, let’s power the League as we power the vote! NOW is the perfect time to capitalize on our added visibility and heightened level of activity. NOW is the time to promote League membership to the community, engage current members, and develop the skills of our emerging leaders.

How Do We Power the League?

We face real and unprecedented challenges this election season. It is becoming increasingly hard to find nonpartisan, factual information, and voters are craving *authentic* solutions. The League is needed more than ever! We can leverage our League voice and promote focused, quality work. As we capitalize on this critical year in a unified way, the voters win and so does the League. Imagine a well informed electorate and a vibrant, growing League!

Focus group research has demonstrated just how important it is for all Leagues to redouble their efforts to get people registered to vote, host candidate debates and create voters’ guides where the information is visible and accessible to our communities. When we provide the public with the information they’re looking for, not only does our work speak for itself, but we also have great tangible resources to talk with people about to increase their interest in the League’s work and getting involved. As you look at your 2012 voter service activities, ask yourselves how can my League best:

- Emphasize the role of the League in educating and informing voters?
- Emphasize the League’s commitment to providing nonpartisan, fact-based information about candidates and issues to help voters make their own decisions?
- Always include a “Join Us” message in your voter education/registration efforts?
- Think about the allied organizations with whom to partner and the media outlets to

promote and advertise events and good work?

- Engage members in volunteering at your events and starting to hone their leadership skills?

Connecting with the Community:

- **Get the most bang for your buck** (and for the community's!). Reach out to underrepresented populations, such as young people, minorities, low-income individuals, and new citizens as they are most likely to need help registration, getting informed about candidates, and navigating Election Day—especially in places where new barriers have been erected that will make it harder for them to participate. You'll be helping those most in need while registering more voters and providing needed information and assistance to those who can't find it elsewhere. Think about *who* in your community might be the most passionate about joining a group who cares about their engagement in these important elections and invite them to participate in League events!
- **Remember to use the Event/Activity Planning Checklist** to plan every elections-related activity to put on this year. Now more than ever it is important to be intentional about reaching out to the community and engaging members to participate and lead. Even if you and your Board can fill in one or two ideas for each square in the grid (and actually follow them!), it will make a big impact.
- **Engage young people to volunteer** and be a part of the democratic process. We can engage people to volunteer without asking them for a check and without needing them to become a member right away. Want to do more great work but are strapped for volunteers? See if college kids or young professionals are interested in helping. These individuals thrive off of easy, one-time only volunteer opportunities and we CAN provide them! In the long run, we'll become more visible, we'll be able to do more of our great work, and we'll have a slew of potential future members on our hands.
- **Speak in terms your community will actually understand.** Focus groups let us know that sometimes when we talk, our community doesn't understand us. Phrases like “nonpartisan but political” don't resonate with the community. Use plain language which someone with a seventh-grade reading level can understand (such as “The League does not support or oppose any candidate”).
 - Voters crave SOLUTIONS to our problems (not just vicious partisan rhetoric) – the League, through our debates and voters guides, offers candidates the opportunity to share factual information about themselves and their positions/solutions on the

issues facing the day. Remind the public of this!

- Opinions of candidates who refuse to participate in League debates tend to be quite negative. People feel these candidates may be dishonest, have something to hide, or are scared to debate. Some wonder aloud why anyone running for office would refuse. They agree that refusing to debate cheats the voters. Take advantage of this! If someone won't participate, write a letter to the editor about it.
- **Focus your efforts to Power the Vote in 2012:**
 - How many of these activities are already in part of your calendar? How many can be built into it?
 - Host at least 5 registration events (including 9/25 National Voter Registration Day)
 - Host at least 1 candidate forum/debate
 - Pursue an online voters guide - hopefully on VOTE411.org
 - Meet with local elections officials
 - Identify 5 key media contacts and communicate at least once monthly with each of them – become a resource
 - Conduct get-out-the-vote with registrants, volunteers, and online networks
 - Consider a poll watching/poll worker recruitment program
 - Take advantage of LWVUS and state trainings, materials, etc.

Resources Available to You:

- Event/Activity Planning Checklist
- Elections Checklist (in Chapter 4 of the Handbook)
- [Voter Registration Best Practices Webinar](#)
- www.Vote411.org
- LWVUS Elections Team:
 - Maggie Duncan (Manager, High School Voter Registration Project) at MDuncan@lwv.org
 - Jeanette Senecal (Director, Elections Team) at JSenecal@lwv.org