

Back to School: Reaching out to College Students

For November 2013

Opportunity for Guidance:

APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

- ✓ How did you engage with your community when you were in college? What issues moved you?
- ✓ What issues in your community are most relevant to students?
- ✓ Which departments at the local university/college would be interested in the issues you are working on?
- ✓ Consider your League's goals this year. How could student volunteers have a meaningful impact and be involved in helping you advance those goals?
- ✓ What is one concrete activity/event your League is doing where you could involve student volunteers?

GUIDANCE

With millions of students across the county active in the civic life of their campuses and communities Leagues may want to consider ways to build relationships with students and young volunteers as a way of invigorating League and strengthening our democracy.

Young people volunteer more than any other generation before them. They are passionate about a variety of issues and are driven to serve their communities. Schools and some employers encourage students and employees to get involved in their communities. Students and young professionals also volunteer to help strengthen their resume and gain experience. The workforce is becoming increasingly competitive and today's job market demands job seekers compete for positions with resumes that are written to impress. Volunteer positions are a great way for students and young professionals to enhance their experience level and get noticed by employers.

What better organization than the respected League of Women Voters to be part of that life experience! The League can offer young people an excellent opportunity to volunteer in their communities, learn valuable skills that are necessary for their careers and it's fun! With so many organizations competing for the time and money of these young people it is critical that the League is making a concerted effort to reach out. The recruitment of younger members takes time and effort but intentional efforts to welcome and involve them in League activities can leave an important and lasting impression

College campuses, high schools, young professional groups, parent clubs, community festivals, career fairs and farmers' markets are all great places to engage young people with the League. Community colleges are a great place to consider building relationships as community college students tend to be more connected to their communities and less likely to leave when their finished with their education. This could be a great source of more long term members.

Consistency on Campus

Young people, particularly college students tend to be very mobile and may not remain in one community long term. It is good to consider partnering with on campus organizations or professors/staff to ensure that the League has an advocate on campus that will last. If you depend too heavily on a small number of students, when those students graduate and move away, you could be left starting back at square one. By partnering with someone on staff, the League ensures more of a stable presence on campus. Additionally, many campuses have service clubs or departments that are dedicated primarily to



connecting students with volunteer opportunities. Creating a connection with such a department is a great way to start a consistent on-campus presence. Consider including some of the following ideas in your calendar to maximize visibility and create a consistent presence on campus.

- Plan and execute winning voter service and volunteer opportunities at local colleges. This will make you visible and interesting to students and faculty alike.
- Recruit a college political science professor for your board, or make certain teachers and professors honorary members:
 - Offer membership to educators in return for cooperation to reach students and network with on campus activities.
- Make a permanent position on committees for a nonpartisan political student group—keep open communication for future projects and students’ perspectives.
- Show a film during class or during student hour.
 - Promote a LWV student membership fee or have information about upcoming events students can volunteer at.
- Work with university/college departments on relevant issues (e.g. doing a forum on water quality? Why not reach out to an environmental science professor?)
- Host a candidate debate or meet and greet in collaboration on a local college campus. Involve students in creating/asking questions, welcoming candidates or the public to the event, etc.

Volunteer vs. Member

Students are likely not going to be a huge source of new members right away. Often they are involved in many different activities and organizations on and off campus so they may not be willing or able to commit to full membership. This doesn’t mean that students can’t be a valuable part of the League. Consider the impact that just a few young, enthusiastic volunteers could have on your next event.

Start with a “first date:”

- Ask someone for help on a specific day/time on a specific project of their choosing, based on their interest. Let the prospect get to know LWV.
- Ask them to help again if they seem to enjoy it. Share what LWV is and see if they are interested in volunteering more.
- On the second volunteer experience, or “second date,” talk about how LWV work is possible because of its members’ support and their membership dues.
 - The point is to ease the person into the membership and not scare them away with the commitment, array of issues we cover, and the membership fee. Many organizations do not ask for a fee upfront, so young people are surprised when we ask them for their money.

By engaging student volunteers, you are familiarizing a whole new generation with the League of Women Voters and our mission. While some students may only be in your communities for a few years, an impactful experience with your League may lead them to join another local League in the future.

For more information you can contact the LWV Young People’s Taskforce Co-chairs:

Amy Hjerstedt at amy.hjerstedt@gmail.com

Melissa Currence at currencem@gmail.com