

Opportunity for Guidance: Collaboration For September 2013

APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

Sometimes there are partnerships that might not be obvious, but can create a new buzz, engage other people and produce new results.



For example, a few years ago, the League and Oxfam America (a group working to address hunger issues) found common ground of concern about the impact of global climate change. We entered into a partnership called Sisters of the Planet to build support for federal public policies to reverse the dangerous trajectory of global climate change affecting our nation and the planet.



Thinking about partnerships for impact beyond what Leagues traditionally might do, can yield powerful results.

- ✓ What would excite another organization about our activity?
- ✓ Who will benefit?
- ✓ Who do we know (or who else) might have a connection?
- ✓ What opportunity exists to connect with them?

GUIDANCE

As we look especially at our elections, issue and educational work, for many Leagues, creating partnerships with organizations serving diverse constituencies may be an appropriate way to have a broader impact in the community. Being in partnership can increase each organization's clout and visibility: crucial ingredients for boosting membership and developing new civic leaders. From researching your community and getting to know community members, you will be able to identify potential allies or partners and the issues they consider compelling.

Before entering into a partnership with any organization it is important to consider what the partnership could mean for both organizations:

- Consider the organization's previous experience with partnerships and coalitions. Be sensitive to the League's nonpartisan policy but don't let that prohibit a potentially strong partnership if those concerns can be addressed, e.g. partner with newspaper on candidate forum before they announce their support for a particular candidate.
- Work from a place of shared vision for outcome and create shared expectations between the partner organizations.
- Share the power. The League knows the importance of grassroots democracy, and this approach can be taken with coalition partners. Rather than make the decisions and ask others to help, build a true partnership by mutually deciding on goals and sharing power and responsibility.
- Share the work. All members of the partnership must have important contributions to make. Check in with each partner frequently to ensure that work is progressing.

- Share openly how each partner seeks to benefit from being part of the collaborative. Partners won't stay partners unless each expects to benefit from the relationship. By sharing expectations, partners can help each other achieve both separate and mutual goals.
- Provide opportunities for socializing and celebrating. Develop the personal side of the work relationships.
- Support each partner's independence. Accept that each partner will want to discuss issues separately from the coalition at times. Each coalition partner will maintain their own independent identity even while working mutually with others.
- Plan on constant give and take. Recognize that coalition work involves ongoing negotiation. Accept that partners won't agree on every point at all times. Strive to maintain open and frank dialogue.
- Commit for the long haul. Consistency and continuity are critical: many groups have seen well intentioned people offer help only to quickly leave. Once a joint project is finished, stay in touch. Find new ways to cooperate.

Steps to Forming Partnerships:

Every partnership is different and presents different challenges and opportunities. Despite these differences, there are some basic steps to keep in mind when engaging in a partnership.

- **Assess**
Talk to other members of community organizations and with other League members. Consider some of the following questions:
 - What groups and individuals are taking action on pressing local issues?
 - What are the compelling issues with which they are concerned?
 - What unique contributions could the League make?
 - What strengths and contributions can the other organizations offer the League in terms of our work and organizational growth/development?
- **Plan**
Ask representatives of local groups, respected community leaders and capable people who are not well known to meet with the League to discuss potentially working together to address community concerns. Together with your partners, some questions you might want to consider discuss:
 - What is currently being done, and not being done, regarding significant issues?
 - What can the various partners do together to address the issues that each could not do alone?
 - What benefits will each partner receive by working together?
 - Is each potential partner willing to commit to a collaborative effort?
 - Based on answers to the above questions, determine what the partnership intends to accomplish. Write clear goals and objectives for the collaborative effort.
 - Decide now what measures the partnership will use to evaluate success.
 - Create a clear action plan detailing who will do what by when. Include details of how decisions will be made. Distribute the actions plan to all partners.
- **Act**
 - Keep notes of meetings and distribute them promptly.
 - Keep records of all events and partnership activities. This information is critical for the partnership to conduct an evaluation of its efforts.



- Gather regularly to review progress and troubleshoot.
- Keep lines of communication open. Discuss issues as they arise and engage in problem solving right away.
- Celebrate successes and share the credit broadly.
- **Assess again**
 - Return to assessment by evaluating as a group what has worked, what can be improved and what the work of the collaborative should be in the future.

Information in more detail can be found in your MLD Binder - Chapter 3, starting on page 25.

You can use the “Local League Asset Survey” as another method to assess your community for potential avenues of outreach.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LWV_State_Coaches_Group/files/1.%20MLD%20Handbook%20%28CURRENT%29/Tools%20You%20Can%20Use/

Additional resources can be found on LWVUS website, including working in partnership on voter registration in high schools:

<http://www.lwv.org/content/high-school-voter-registration-training-manual-2nd-edition>