

Shur Fellow Guidance
June 2018
Student Involvement: Tips for Bridging the Age Gap

As discussed in last month's guidance the LWVUS Board of Directors has recently decided to waive national PMP for student members in the hope that these students will not just join but become active members now and for years to come. While this overcomes one potential hurdle, there is still work to be done on promoting positive student engagement and a League environment that is welcoming and productive to members of all ages.

Near constant changes to technology and culture equal generational differences in what it means to be an engager and what form that engagement takes. More traditional grassroots activism has found a new home and new tools in the world of social media. The drive to enact the League's mission of empowering voters and defending democracy crosses all generational lines and can best be fulfilled by all of us working together.

A recent example of this is the League's participation in student-run marches and rallies around gun safety. We recently launched a survey to capture data from Leagues about their engagement in the student movement for gun safety. Results are still coming in but two weeks after the survey went out we learned that:



Working together is rewarding and can lead to great things but generational differences aren't always easy to overcome and can cause awkwardness, misunderstandings, and halt the process of building a healthy relationship between people. However, there are steps that can be taken to promote healthier and more beneficial relationships.

- **Keep an open mind.** When speaking with each other it is essential that both parties have an open mind to the others' thoughts, ideas, and actions. Both sides have different perspectives on issues to offer, and despite age all are important to the conversation.
- **Open dialogue** is another important quality to hold. Being able to speak freely with one another will build trust and understanding on both sides of the relationship as well as an understanding

that you may use different slang terms and interpret tone and language differently. It is crucial that neither person feels uncomfortable, otherwise, it will not be a productive bond.

- **Cross-generational mentorship** are exciting learning opportunities. Everyone has unique qualities to share, so both sides should learn from one another. For example, younger people tend to be more tech-savvy, therefore, they could teach others about new and different ways of organizing. Older people with more experience in volunteer and professional work can offer guidance and skills to promote more impactful volunteer work.
- **Ask questions** about one another. When having a conversation, keep a flowing dialogue. Asking questions shows compassion and interest which makes the other feel more relaxed. This can also give you a better understanding of the person and their ideas. For example, if talking about issues that are important to the student activist, ask them why that issue is important to them. This can give you a better insight into the person and the issue, and possibly help find ways to work on that issue in the future.
- **Find simple solutions to bridge differences.** Examples include varying meeting and event times so those with less flexible schedules have more opportunities to attend and communications that meet the needs of those who prefer virtual and print copies.
- **Give good reasons.** Doing something the way it's always been done comes with pluses and minuses. In some cases, it makes sense to continue with a time-honored tradition or process but it's important to consider and potentially enact change. Be open to the suggestion of new ideas and prepared to provide reasons beyond it just being the way it's always been done.
- **Assume good intent.** New members may appear over eager or over ambitious to take responsibility or leadership roles especially if this is their first time joining a formal organization. Their eagerness to participate should be embraced and funneled into a more appropriate role that will let them learn and be guided by a more experienced member.

As mentioned above we recently launched a survey to capture data from Leagues about their engagement in the student movement for gun safety. Below is a small sampling of the comments we received regarding their participation with student led or highly attended events:

"I was inspired by the students I met and their determination to help make a change. I met a high school junior who was planning an April 20th high school walkout and demonstration. She asked the League to register voters on the steps of City Hall where all the students are going to meet. We agreed to come and register voters."

"The state League gave us stickers to hand out which had info about online Voter Registration. We gave them all out and they were a great idea for promoting Voter Registration. The young High School Student who planned the event in our area was inspiring and she will be coming to one of our meetings to share her experience."

"One of the student co-organizers for the March for Our Lives spoke about the march at our Program Planning session. She was passionate and engaging and asked for our help with her first-ever organizing project. Though other organizations in our area provided her with more direction than we did, she left a lasting impression on our members. We have been honored to participate in the March for Our Lives events."

"The senior who organized this rally was enthusiastic. She approached us to co-sponsor the event and encouraged us to register students."