

## June 2015 Guidance on Opportunities: Fostering Change in League

### Appreciative Icebreaker

Think about your League and discuss the differences in the following ways of thinking:

- How does your local League react to leadership/program/policy changes?
- How well do you personally react to change?
- What leadership changes will your League soon have?
- What are some positive ways to embrace change?
- What changes are you looking forward to in your local League?

### Guidance

Change is often uncomfortable as it removes us from familiar territory and forces us to face the unknown. Additionally, it can be daunting because new ideas can be regarded as coming at the expense of the old way of doing things. Long standing leaders can unintentionally be made to feel that they are no longer wanted or that they are being unceremoniously replaced. New ideas and new members do not imply that the past ways are bad or unappreciated. Rather, they can be a way of building on the great work that has already been done.

*Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up.*

– James Belasco and  
Ralph Stayer



As the political and nonprofit environments continue to change and evolve nationwide, the League can adjust to the changing landscape. Change is not something that can be avoided, so it is important for Leagues to ensure that they have the tools to manage it. It is important to reevaluate

and refresh to make sure that the ways we are doing things match the current environment so that we are the most successful in fulfilling the mission of the League.

### **Expectations Must Be Clear**

While the specific change itself may not be that difficult to make, it's often the transition that is daunting. Clarity is critical to negotiating these transitional periods. Ensure that you are acknowledging that the transition is happening and what that transition might mean to individuals. Not everyone is going to be happy about the change at first and having open and honest conversations about what is happening (and what isn't happening) will mitigate negative feelings.

#### Change is "Situational"

- New Program
- New Team Roles
- New Policy
- New Leaders

#### Transition is "Psychological"

- The process people go through to come to terms with the new situation

*Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*

– John F. Kennedy

The more that we are willing to recognize the kinds of emotions that transitions bring up, the better equipped we are to deal with them. When dealing with a change in League it is important to:

- **Define what is or what is not over:** Be clear about what is changing and, equally importantly, what isn't. If your League's voter guide is moving online, this doesn't mean that there is no longer a voter guide, it just means that it will take a different form. Be sure that the way you are discussing the change doesn't make it feel like more of a loss than it actually is.
- **Identify what you are losing:** Be honest about what it is you are losing. Yes, if the voter guide is online, those without internet access may not get it. Even if you agree that the loss is a necessary one, before you move on, it should be addressed.
- **Seek information:** Don't sit back and wait for the change to happen. Even if you have reservations about the change, actively engage with it. Ensure that you have all the information before you form an opinion on whether or not this change is negative for you.
- **Take a piece with you:** If you are strongly attached to a program or job that is going away, see what parts of it you can bring on into the new situation. Can you still work on the voter guide, even if it's online now?
- **Mark the ending:** Be sure to celebrate what is no longer happening. Have a party to mark 35 years of delivering paper voter guides and to celebrate the new online format. The more you can put the change in a positive light, the less difficult the transition will be.
- **Accept your own feelings:** Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you may not be able to support the change, but that doesn't mean it won't or shouldn't happen. Make sure you are really honest with yourself about why you don't like it and consider what options you have for accepting the change and finding a space in the new environment.
- **Try and find out what you may be gaining:** It is very tempting when going through a large change to focus solely on what is being lost, so much so that it becomes difficult to see what is being gained. It is important to take a step back and look at each change in League as a new opportunity. Maybe you've never worked with an online platform to create a voter guide and you can use this opportunity to familiarize yourself with this new technology.

### Acknowledge All Contributions

No matter how small a change might seem to one League member, it could feel enormous to another, particularly if suddenly that person feels that the way that they were contributing to League has been diminished or eliminated altogether. Everyone's contribution must be acknowledged and celebrated. Simply saying 'thank you' goes a long way in making transitions less uncomfortable.

*There are so many men and women  
who hold no distinctive positions but  
whose contribution towards the  
development of society has been  
enormous.*  
--Nelson Mandela

### Additional Resources

- [Chapter 8](#) of the MLD Handbook
- Membership Forum Group: <http://forum.lwv.org/group/membership>
- [Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, ...](#) (Paperback)  
by [William Bridges](#)
- [Positive Change Presentation: Who Moved My Cheese?](#)