

Opportunity for Guidance: MLD Best Practices & LWV's 95th Birthday
January 2015

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY ICEBREAKER:

Think about a highly successful event/meeting that you recently attended (League or other).

- ✓ What elements made it successful? Why did it come to mind?
- ✓ How do you think those elements came about?
- ✓ What connections can you see between the successful elements and MLD best practices?
- ✓ How do these successful elements fit with your MLD goals (e.g., GROW ME)?

Guidance

In 2015, the League of Women Voters is celebrating 95 years of defending democracy. This huge milestone is a perfect opportunity to remind ourselves of the MLD best practices and the ways in which we can be integrating them into our League work so that we ensure the strength of the League for the next 95 years.

The MLD Best Practices can be used in every aspect of League. The MLD program is not meant to be an extra burden on Leagues that are already busy doing important things in their communities. Rather, it is intended to help make the League's work an opportunity for growth by adding tried-and-true organizational development "best practices"- that hopefully don't require a lot of extra effort- to the work already being done.

Think about the opportunities for outreach (direct, allied and media) as well as for leadership development at all League events. How can we capitalize on these opportunities? One tool to do this is the Event Planning Checklist (EPC). The EPC helps Leagues organize their efforts around a specific meeting or event so that tasks are broken down into manageable pieces and are *intentionally* planned and implemented.

As we start the New Year, consider planning an event/meeting in 2015 to celebrate the organization's 95 years of rich history and your local achievements. What local success can you champion? What local issue are you pursuing that would be a place for engagement and for showcasing our talents as an organization? How can the EPC help to ensure that the event is one that helps to build capacity as well as celebrate what we already have?

Before the event:

- **Evaluate the opportunity.** Consider all of the various opportunities that exist when we think about 95 years of "making democracy work." What organizations has your League partnered with in the past that should be part of the celebration? What specific opportunities can we pursue to talk about the value of League membership (i.e. a linked Web site, a brochure distributed at the event, banners, and one-on-one conversations)? What is the size of an event? What visibility options can be explored? Think about your goals. How does this event fit?
- **Who else?** Consider adding ways to engage all individuals, especially non-members, to your event. In what ways can you involve a new member or potential new member? Go beyond asking members to "bring a friend;" ask potential members to help you plan some aspect of the event. If he/she isn't ready for a big task, ask them to take on something small. Have new members partner with a seasoned leader to work on various aspects of the party. Working together can be fun and can be a learning experience for both people!
- **Be open to new ideas.** One of the great things about new members or volunteers is that they bring fresh eyes to long-standing processes and new perspectives to the group. Telling someone "that's not how we do it" can be deflating. Encourage new ideas and allow new volunteers to take on projects that

excite them. How can we leverage this new creativity to celebrate the Leagues past and inspire members to look to the future? Think about the leadership development opportunities!

- **Be thoughtful about language.** Remember that sometimes the League can be intimidating particularly when we speak in the myriad of acronyms that are a part of the League's work. Remind people that they don't need to know anything about the issues to be part of the anniversary event; joining the League in a fun setting is a great, no pressure way to get acquainted with the League!

At the event:

- **Have greeters welcoming all participants** to an event. Make everyone feel welcome. Think back to your first League meeting. What made you feel welcome?
- **A sign-in sheet** is a great way to collect information from individuals so you can contact them in the future and welcome them to join the League for more formal events and volunteer opportunities.
- **Mingle!** League members or a designated ambassador team can mingle with non-members. This will show potential members that the League is a friendly group that loves to meet new people. Encourage long time members to introduce themselves and get to know the people.
- **Check in on your new leaders** in a friendly, helpful, and nonjudgmental way. Have a seasoned leader ask the new leaders how they are doing and if they need any help.
- **Share beyond the walls of the event** by using social media. Tweet out photos or quotes. Post images from the event on personal and League Facebook pages. Connect with traditional media at the event/meeting, too.

After the event:

- **Say Thank You!** Remember all the members and leaders who helped make your League birthday party a success! A simple thank you (e.g., e-card, phone call or acknowledgement in your newsletter) goes a long way to making people feel appreciated and excited to be a part of your next event.
- **Always Follow-Up** with individuals who signed the sign-in sheet. Ask someone to call or email everyone on the list, thanking them for attending and inviting them to join the League. Remember to do this in a timely manner - a potential member will feel more welcomed if an email comes a few days after the event, rather than a few weeks.
- **Note for next time** the names of those who helped out with the event. Make a spreadsheet of who did what so that they can be called upon again.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON BUILDING LEADERS: Set them up to Succeed

Orient new members and train new leaders. Teaching new members and leaders about the League in a fun and welcoming way will help your League create informed, confident leaders from the beginning. Give them a brief history of the League, explain how the League functions, and how they can help. Hold trainings for new League leaders about topics that are interesting and will help them one day lead the League, such as a training session on event planning or on running a candidates' forum. Don't have the resources for a full-fledged orientation or training? Meet over lunch with interested individuals. Connect new members with a Leaguer who will stay in touch with them during the year and new leaders with a mentor to help teach them the ropes in an area of interest to them.

Available Resources

- [Event Planning Checklist](#) (Chapter 10)