

### **Guidance on Opportunities: Using LWVUS Study to Connect with the Community**

Are League members the only people in your community interested in issues affecting our democracy? –Of course not! Our issues are some of the hot topics in our country and in our communities. This is a wonderful opportunity for Leagues to educate the community about a complex (and often controversial) issue in an impartial and factual manner. It's also a great opportunity to generate visibility, engage and recruit members, and connect with the wider community.

**Leagues are encouraged to simply *enhance* what is planned around the studies to ensure that members of the greater community (not just people in the League!) participate and that the League's profile in the community is elevated.**

Connect with the community by opening up the League's educational discussions about the study topics to the public, publicizing the League's study of these important issues, and inviting those that attend meetings to join the League. Only voting members of the League should participate in the consensus vote process, but the educational part of the study can and *should* be open to all.

Not only can you connect with the community through the study process, your League can reconnect with current members and offer some leadership development opportunities to those who may not be as active in the organization.

Below are some specific tips about how to connect with your community in the study process and build the League in the process – as well as ways to engage some future leaders. All of these suggestions mirror those on the [Event/Activity Planning Checklist](#), which is a perfect tool to intentionally plan your study activities around connecting with the community. Leagues are encouraged to use that tool to prepare for any of their study-related events.

#### **Connecting with the Community *before* the Event/Activity:**

Identify opportunities to reach out to members of your community interested in the topic – to let them know that the League is working on this issue and holding some specific event(s). Leagues can enhance existing opportunities (such as the regularly scheduled publication of their newsletter) or identify whole new opportunities (such as establishing a partnership with a local university).

- **Publicize your event/activity to the community and take advantage of free advertising in the media.** Use not only League publications, but also other community channels. Remember to

post information about upcoming events/activities on the Internet, including the League's website or Facebook page, community calendars, community blogs, and the websites of other organizations who would have an interest in this topic in your community. Post an invitation in the League newsletter, as well as in the other community or organizations' newsletters. Remember to start promoting upcoming events/activities at other League events to generate interest. Think about places that reach out to people not just in the League and make it obvious that the event is open to the public. All are welcome and encouraged to attend!

- **Get ready to ASK people to engage with (volunteer, donate, join) the League.** Have board members invite friends and colleagues to your activity. Create a "membership materials kit" (such as a tote-bag with brochures, sign-in sheets, etc. that can go each event) and ask League members to act as membership ambassadors.
- **Think of community partners for your event.** Are there any organizations who could partner with you in some way to reach the community for this event/activity? Can other organizations advertise these events/activities to their members? Are there individuals in your League who can reach out to these other organizations? Consider asking an organization or area university to cosponsor the event and think about inviting elected officials to attend discussions, as they can truly benefit from hearing the community's ideas and opinions. Generate a list of the opportunities that may exist for Leagues to disseminate relevant materials and information about the topics (created through the League's study process), and follow through on the top two ideas.
- **Brainstorm bite-sized tasks you can divvy up between emerging leaders and incorporate more people into your events planning.** Have your board brainstorm ways to engage more individuals in planning and executing your events. Try to think of someone who can "shadow" the organizers and start brainstorming small tasks you can ask potential future leaders to do. Remember to always ask: Who else? Who else would be interested in these topics? Who else could assist in planning an event? Who else can shadow the local League's study expert to learn more about the process? Who else can learn about consensus? Who else can assist in reporting back to LWVUS?

### **Connecting with the Community at the Event/Activity:**

At the discussion/event, Leagues should welcome, listen to and engage members of the community. Letting members of the community know that they can be actively engaged with the League, attend other events, volunteer to help on our voter service or issue work, donate or join to and become League

members, is extremely important. Make it easy for them to engage with us, take their name and follow up with them.

- **ASK people to engage, donate or join whenever possible.** Your League can and *should* ASK people to join in multiple ways throughout the activity/event. Include a “join the League” message in as many of the League’s statements and study-related materials as possible and, of course, have the moderator repeat the message at the event. Gear your messaging to your audience by speaking about how League members can help shape important issues and are given opportunities for leadership. Make sure that membership ambassadors are mingling, talking about why they love the League, and inviting people to join or come to the next League event. Make sure you have people attending fill out a simple sign-in sheet so you can follow up with them.
- **Make sure the League is always visible!** Putting on a great event for the community is always the League’s goal. Making sure the community knows it was the League who provided them with the valuable information and who gave them a forum to discuss an important topic is just as important. Make the League visible by having League members wear League pins, putting up a League banner prominently on display, handing out membership brochures, and talking about the League whenever appropriate and possible.
- **Thank your volunteers publicly.** Thanking your League volunteers for their hard work and contribution to the community is a great way to ensure your volunteers feel appreciated and want to continue giving the League their time and service. It will also show the community that the League is a great place to be!
- **Help your new members understand the process.** Engage your new members by having League members who are prepared to mentor newer members through the study process and “translate” consensus to those who may be unfamiliar with it.
- **Take pictures and get ready for the media!** Make sure someone has a camera and is snapping away! Pictures can be posted to the League website and Facebook page and can give you a better chance of having your story run in local newspapers and newsletters.

**Connecting with the Community *after* the Event/Activity:**

Following up with your allied community organizations, League leaders, potential League members, and the media is critical to ensuring your event/activity has a positive impact on League membership and leadership.

- **Follow-up on the sign-in sheet.** Send attendees updates on the progress of the study and invite them to other League events. Be sure to include an invitation to join and/or support the League in every contact with them and to thank them for attending.
- **Continue to build relationships with local media outlets.** Inform the press about the success of the League's event(s) around the studies. Help them see the local implications of this "hot" national issue, and when it is appropriate, let them know about the outcomes of the League study. Set the League up as a resource on these issues. (See below for more information about media opportunities.)
- **Make sure to thank your community organization partners and start the conversation on your next League study event/activity.** Close the loop with your partners and think of ways you can partner with them in the future. Offer the League as a potential co-sponsor to related events in the future.

**Other Media Outreach Activities/Recommendations:**

- **Talk Radio/Public Television.** Propose ideas to talk radio shows and public television programs about hosting key League members to discuss the status of the study topics locally concerns. Consider recommending or recruiting additional participants from allied organizations. In preparation for participation in any radio and/or TV appearance, key talking points should include a message to visit the League's website for more information about upcoming events (especially those related to the studies) and an invitation to be part of the League's work.
- **Rapid response.** Scan media coverage on an ongoing basis to identify opportunities for the League to be part of the community dialogue on this important issue. Remember that Leagues cannot speak about legislation or voice an opinion about possible solutions until a position is adopted, but League can remind the community that opportunities exist for self-education. Think about how this topic might relate to Election 2016. Are there tie-ins to possible changes in your community? Highlight the League's timeliness with its study and offer a way for individuals to become more educated on the topic.