

**March 2013 Guidance on Opportunities:  
Action as an Engagement/Leadership Development Tool**

APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

Review the following quote from LWV founder Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947):

*To the wrongs that need resistance,  
To the right that needs assistance,  
To the future in the distance,  
Give yourselves.*

Now, consider the following questions:

- How does this quote fit with your League experiences?
- How does this relate to our mission?
- How might this resonate with new or potential members?
- How might this motivate new or emerging leaders?

GUIDANCE

In League, we generally think of our programmatic work as encompassing two large areas: action and education. Both offer great opportunities for visibility, outreach and leadership development. This month's guidance will focus on action or advocacy as a vehicle for organizational development.

Before looking at any specifics, there are a few resources that we want to highlight:

1. *Impact on Issues* is available online at <http://www.lwv.org/content/impact-issues>. This publication contains all national positions, which can be used by local and state Leagues to take action at those levels of government, as well as the history of how each of these positions have been used at the national level.
2. For Leagues that haven't traditionally taken action, there is a great tool, *Streamlining Local League Advocacy: How to Make a Difference with a Small Group or a Committee of One*, available online at: <http://www.lwv.org/files/Streamlining%20Local%20League%20Advocacy.pdf>
3. For Leagues that have more experience with taking action and want to plan a more elaborate campaign, please visit the Yahoo! group for a campaign planning tool.
4. To learn more about balancing advocacy and education work, there is a primer on "Advocacy Myths," which was created for the LWVUS National Convention. It is available here: <http://www.lwv.org/files/LWVUS%20Action%20Myths.pdf>

**Defining Action or Advocacy**

What is advocacy? It is mobilizing people to create change – to bring about improvements to our democracy. One key distinction is that it may or may not involve **lobbying**. Very specific criteria must be met to constitute lobbying. (For more information about this, please visit <http://www.lwv.org/content/defining-advocacy-vs-lobbying>)

In fact, most of the advocacy work that we do is not lobbying. We raise this distinction as we know that "lobbying" is not viewed as popular now. But, creating change is! Making our communities stronger and our democracy healthier are popular messages that resonate.

## LWV Membership and Leadership Development

### Keys to Effective Advocacy

There are two key elements to effective advocacy:

- Delivering the right message to the right people by the right person
- Developing and maintaining a strong coalition with a unified goal

Do these sound familiar? They are some of the same key elements of the MLD program. The same tools that we are employing to identify, refine and deliver key membership messages can be employed in advocacy work.

With that said, the question is how to combine the two? How do we work to motivate others to a specific action as well as value the League? One important piece is to **promote our own internal messages** alongside those related to our action.

For example, we might stress the following points:

1. **The League gets things done.** Point to our history and our achievements. Who else can create effective change?
2. **Through League, you can join your voice with others.** Whether doing advocacy or voter service work, we are always more impactful as a group than when working as an individual.
3. **Though League, you can make connections.** We are one of the most trusted organizations in the country. We have relationships with government leaders, elected officials, and the larger public.
4. **League is a place for learning.** Whether it is about specific issues or how to do advocacy, Leagues is a place for continuous learning.

### Advocacy as an Organizational Development Tool

- A. Generate visibility:** Remember that the seed for getting people to join the League can't start to grow until they know about us and our work. Advocacy or action is a great way for us to get visibility. It showcases our mission and our positions. It highlights our efficacy and makes us highly relevant.
- B. Build relationships:** Advocacy work is the perfect vehicle for building relationships with allied organizations and with the media. As was noted above, building a strong coalition is a critical element to a successful advocacy campaign. Working on a common issue is a natural way for groups to come together – and for the League to be introduced to many other community organizations and their members. And, it is a great opportunity for building relationships with the media as well. Setting the League up as a resource on issues can lead to regular and consistent coverage of the issue and League!
- C. Engage existing members:** Advocacy offers many opportunities to engage existing members. It especially offers those valuable one-time, short-term commitment opportunities to feel engaged and part of the League's larger mission. From responding to an action alert to attending a local government meeting, there is a menu of options that can be activated and shared. In short, give them something to do!
- D. Showcase successes:** Advocacy is a way to underscore our success and relevance. We are "out there," rolling up our sleeves and doing the work to build our communities. We need to highlight what we are doing, what we are working on and what we are achieving. We often don't take the time to reflect on our efforts or highlight them among our members and with the public. We need to articulate how we are impacting our communities – and say it again and again.
- E. Use advocacy as a learning opportunity:** Action work or advocacy is a wonderful learning opportunity for members or prospective members. Learning about issues, learning about ways to accomplish change, and learning about the current system are all exciting opportunities for individuals. League leaders have this knowledge to share!