

Attract the Community... Choose "Issues with Legs"

What are "issues with legs"? They are issues that transcend demographics and unite rather than divide your community. They are issues that lots of people care deeply about and have an impact on the broad community—people are motivated to address them. Issues with legs can travel from one part of the community to another.

The issues that community members describe may not be the kind of issues your League has typically taken on. Residents may be concerned about school programs or the lack of city services in their area. These issues, and many more, are opportunities for the League to show citizens how the system works and how they can have influence. When people see that they can make a difference on one issue, they are more likely to become involved in others. In this case, the issue's "legs" move the citizens from one issue to another. People who see the League as an avenue for making a difference on their concerns are likely to be more open learning about other League efforts.

What Leagues Are Doing: Choose Issues with Legs

After study, the League of Coos County, OR determined that the violation of the human and civil rights of people of color warranted action. Though some people and businesses felt there were no problems with human rights violations, the League found that harassment of people from minority groups was often swept under the rug or ignored. The League advocated for a Human Rights Commission to "seek to ensure the basic rights and human dignity of all Coos County citizens." The League solicited human rights advocates from a variety of communities—including Hispanic, Native American, African American, Asian American, gays, physically/mentally disabled, the aged, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and the Jewish community—to express interest in serving on the commission. The League has stayed active after the commission was established, including inviting commissioners to a Diversity Workshop sponsored by the League and AAUW.

In Lawrence, KS, the League addresses a mix of issues of concern to the community. Public transportation concerns people without private cars and those around town who need to commute; monitoring the issue of foster care privatization attracts the people who work in the foster care system; and, a very local issue, local park use, attracts neighborhood activists. For the local park issue, the League polled the affected neighborhood to determine residents' views on the issue. Although the League did not have a position on the park, the reputation of the League as an objective and nonpartisan organization allowed it to provide a useful service to the people who had an interest in the outcome.

How to Choose Issues with Legs

When considering issues to take on, there are several factors to consider. Answer these questions to fill in the outer rectangles of the chart on the following page.

1. What are the League's strengths?

With the profile, history and expertise of the League in mind, identify key strengths that can be called on.

2. What are the pressing concerns of the local community?

What are the most pressing issues that motivate the local citizenry, even if they are not "typical" League issues? What have you learned from your efforts to know your community?

3. What are the interests of the potential members and diverse people you want to work with?

From your contacts with respected community members, whether they are well known or not, determine what their hopes and concerns are?

4. What are potential coalition partners interested in?

From your talks with representatives of diverse organizations you should know the issues that concern them. What are they? What issues offer the greatest chance to collaborate with diverse groups?

5. Where is there the likelihood for results?

On what issues can you demonstrate success? What are the potential tangible results that matter to community members concerned about these issues?

6. Where is the potential for visibility?

What will get the notice of media that is targeted to diverse populations? What issues allow you to involve the most people in creating the solution so the success and attention will be shared?

Putting it all together

Review your answers for each question. Identify those issues that are common answers for at least four questions. Those issues can now be placed in the center circle of the chart on the *Issues with Legs Working Chart*.

To decide among issues with legs, consider if any issues are common to all six questions? What is the potential for fundraising to support the project? What is the availability of other League resources?

"Issues with Legs" Working Chart

