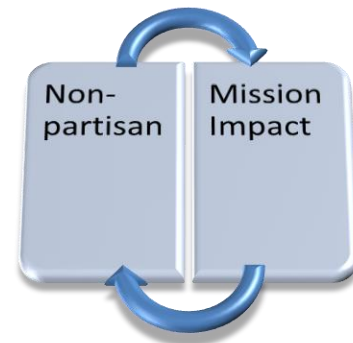


Working with Activist Groups as a Nonpartisan Organization
Guidance on Opportunities
March 2018

In a recent guidance we talked about the changing “democracy space” and how the League can partner with other organizations on shared interests. We also talked about how the League can bring its history and knowledge to newer organizations. As a nonpartisan organization, it can sometimes be difficult to navigate relationships with activist organizations that have a perceived partisan agenda. It is important to consider the risks but to also examine and embrace the opportunities present for partnerships (one-time or longer term) to spread the League’s mission and impact to a wider audience.

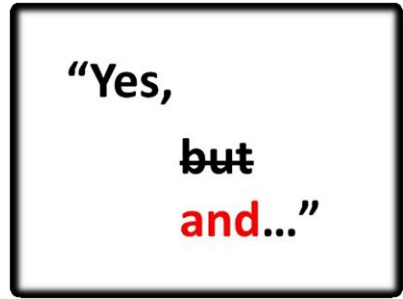
As we enter what promises to very a busy mid-term election year, these opportunities are likely to become more abundant. How do we navigate this increasingly busy and crowded democracy space? How do we maintain our nonpartisanship and engage the new activists? How do we maintain our brand while ensuring that we are not crowded out of the democracy space?



During the discernment over the League’s participation in the 2017 Women’s March, we developed a series of questions that Leagues should ask themselves when asked to participate in events. These questions can be a companion to the strategy screen that was shared last month. These are meant to be a discussion or facilitation tool when a board is examining opportunities.

- Does the event truly align with the core Making Democracy Work™ issues?
- Are the organizers of the event transparent in their planning and is the event nonpartisan?
- Does the event advance one or more of the League’s strategic goals?
- What risks are associated with participation and can League secure the appropriate insurance?
- Is inclusive and diverse participation a core focus on the event planning?
- Do League volunteers and/or staff have the bandwidth for supporting the needs of participation?
- What is the potential for earned media and other visibility?
- What access would the League have to names and emails of event attendees?
- Should the League seek speaking opportunities or take other leadership to shape the event?

One of the important things about these questions is that in some cases the answers do not need to be “zero sum.” In other words, a negative response does not have to be the end of a partnership or opportunity. What other opportunities exist that do fit with our nonpartisan values? How do we turn a “but” into an “and”?



Alternatives might include --

- Can the League register people to vote?
- Can the League provide information about polling place logistics or ID requirements?
- Can the group advertise the League’s candidate forum?
- Can the group direct people to Vote411.org (for any of the above and/or candidate information)?

Another “and” opportunity might be in the other areas of our Campaign for Making Democracy Work™. Redistricting, voter access, and money in politics affect all ends of the political spectrum. What opportunities exist in those areas for education and for advocacy?

The external interviews (those with partner organizations, funders, institutions and others) conducted as part of the transformation work underscored the value of our nonpartisanship. And, they also underscored the lack of clarity of our impact. Making our voice heard for the good of our democracy and for the good of the League will be more important than ever this election cycle. The opportunities will be plentiful, and hopefully, using the framework here will help Leagues to maintain or even increase their role in a very full democracy space.