



# STARTING STRONG FOR STATE LEAGUES

## *BUILDING A LEAGUE PRESENCE AND LOCAL LEAGUES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL*

### Abstract

Starting Strong for State Boards is designed to assist your efforts in supporting individual Members at Large, Members at Large Units and Local Leagues. We wish to acknowledge the previous publication Starting Point developed by LWVUS and other tools developed by state Leagues.

We also wish to thank Connie Ferguson for her assistance as well as Karen Price, LWVMA; Olivia Thorne, LWVPA; and Caroline deLlamas, LWVCA.

Peggy Appler & Anne Schink

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# STATE BOARDS

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### I. ABOUT THE LEAGUE

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide. By joining the League, citizens can gain the information and skills they need to become effective participants in government. Belonging to an active local League offers additional opportunities to take part in the democratic process. For the organization as a whole, new members and new Leagues mean fresh ideas, innovative approaches to resolving public policy concerns, and ongoing sources of leadership.

#### **Our Mission**

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The League of Women Voters is a citizens' organization that has fought since 1920 to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives. We operate at national, state and local levels through more than 800 state and local Leagues, in all 50 states as well in DC, the Virgin Islands and Hong Kong.

Formed from the movement that secured the right to vote for women, the centerpiece of the League's efforts remain to expand participation and give a voice to all Americans. We do this at all three levels of government, engaging in both broad educational efforts as well as advocacy. Our issues are grounded in our respected **history** of making democracy work for all citizens.

Membership is open to all men and women without respect to age or citizenship status. *Voting* members are those who are 18 years or older and U.S. citizens.

#### **Nonpartisanship**

Nonpartisanship means that the League of Women Voters does not support or oppose any political parties or candidates. Today, this policy continues to ensure that the League's voice is heard above the tumult of party politics.

To ensure the credibility of the League as a nonpartisan organization, each League's board of directors is responsible for drafting and carrying out its own nonpartisan policy and for seeing that both its members and the public understand the League's nonpartisan role.

The League does take action on issues which it has studied and on which it has a position. The League is a multi-issue organization, with positions falling into the general areas of government, social policy, natural resources, and international relations.

#### **Voter Participation**

The League is known primarily for encouraging voter participation. This includes a commitment to providing fact based information so voters can make informed decisions. New groups organizing to become a local League may register voters, conduct candidate forums, distribute state *Voters Guides*, and publish local guides to elected officials. They may also host public issues forums in order to present various viewpoints on topics (e.g., recycling or health care), or ballot issues impacting their communities.

### II. WORKING WITH MEMBERS AT LARGE

Recruiting and welcoming Members at Large represent an area of great potential to grow a state League's membership, influence, and diversity. Every state is different and every community may respond differently to an effort to broaden League outreach. The LWVUS Bylaws state that "Members At Large shall be members who reside outside the area of, and/or are not enrolled in, any local Leagues. (LWVUS Bylaws, Article III, Sec.2A2)" Managing Members at Large is the responsibility of the state League. States vary tremendously in terms of the way they manage Members at Large, but this publication provides overall guidance for how best to accomplish the goal of providing flexible and innovative ways for people to join the League of Women Voters. Members at Large are not independent agents and must seek LWV board approval to use the League name for public activities.

For purposes of this publication Members at Large represent three different groups. First are individual Members at Large who join the League because they believe in the mission and want to affiliate with of the League of Women Voters and often live where there is no local League. Other Members at Large join because there is an interest in forming a local group, and then there are those Members at Large who are ready to become a formal Member at Large Unit.

- A. Individual Members at Large. Generally individual Members at Large join the state League because they live in an area without a local League and are not focused on forming a local League, at least not yet. Recruitment and retention of individual Members at Large is the responsibility of the state League. The challenge for state Leagues is engaging these members from across the state and offering them active roles in state or national endeavors. Some traditional roles and means of involvement include:
  - Member at Large Newsletter
  - Inclusion in membership-wide Action Alerts, Voter, Events
  - Routine conference calls, webinars, social media groups, email conferences
  - Encouraging participation in statewide committees, Observer or Lobby Corps
  
- B. Member at Large Interest Groups. Occasionally a small group of Members at Large begin to work together. This strengthens their commitment to the organization and gives them the organizational flexibility to continue the work of the League, while it operates within the structure of the state League.
  
- C. Member at Large Units. Over time, groups of Members at Large often decide to become a full-fledged League. Each state and the national League have basic guidelines for forming local Leagues. More information about those guidelines are described later in this publication. It should also be noted that some Member at Large Units were formerly local Leagues which lack the capacity to support a fully operational League. They are comfortable with the less-restrictive role of a MAL Unit and may reflect the change in a community.

#### **Communicating with Individual Members At Large MAL Interest Groups, and MAL Units.**

Today's communication technologies are opening up new possibilities for League organization, and members are exploring ways to take advantage of online opportunities via email groups, discussion lists, online forums, social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) to form communities of connection online, link members together who share common interests and form new League presences. Among those who might be interested in joining a "virtual League" would be state Members-At-Large (MALs) who live too far from each other to make regular meetings possible, members whose busy work schedules preclude their

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attending League meetings and members whose strong interest in a particular issue is shared by other members scattered across the state (or country).

State League leaders are encouraged to experiment with these communications tools to foster connections, develop new leaders and offer engagement for action to these members who do not have a local League or MAL unit in their area. A state League interested in pursuing formation of an electronic MAL Interest Group might consider taking the following steps:

- Review your current list of Members at Large. Can you identify a person or persons that might help form an Interest Group? While not essential, it would be very helpful.
- Start with a short survey to assess the interest of the current group of Members at Large and their use of computer communications. Areas of interest and leaders may emerge from the survey.
- Appoint an online state advisor. This should be someone with both organizational expertise and the know-how to facilitate and foster connection with the online community.
- Using online systems mentioned above (e.g. web or social media platform) establish an electronic platform for communication for the members. Start small, perhaps a Google Group or Facebook page to see how members respond.
- Invite and Recruit members. Find out which members are online already and invite them to join the electronic Interest Group. Announce the formation of the Group on your state League web site and encourage people to contact you for membership information. Those who want to join may be MALs and/or members of existing local Leagues.
- Develop goals and a program for the Interest Group. The members and the Group advisor will need to decide what they want to accomplish. Will they be a discussion group, sharing information and ideas about critical policy issues facing the state and/or the nation? Will they serve as an electronic lobby corps, responding to action alerts from state and national? Will they participate in a state or LWVUS study--or in state or national program planning?
- Expect and foster evolution. The focus that the Interest Group follows in its first few months is sure to change over time as more members join the Group and as new strategies for online participation develop. Online communities can really help the League “bloom” to embrace more people who want to affiliate with the League. It is important for new generations of leaders to feel welcome in our online communities.

### III. THREE PHASES TO FORMING A NEW LEAGUE

Here is an outline of the phases small groups of individuals who want to foster a League presence in their communities, with the support and guidance of the state League, can go through to form a new League:

#### Phase 1

- The idea for forming a new League arises, either through citizen inquiry or board initiative.
- A nucleus of interested residents is recruited.
- A state advisor is appointed and confers (in person, by phone) with the interested group.
- Local Member At Large Unit undertakes visible and active community activities with state League support. They find out what is of interest in their community too.

#### Phase 2

- Once the state feels a critical mass of people from the community is interested in starting a League, an informational organizing meeting is held and the decision to proceed is made.

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- Highly visible community activities continue, such as voter registration efforts, local observer corps, local issue forums with state support and oversight. Use “Events Planning Check List” to continue to grow the League presence.
- Requirements for recognition of an MAL unit are set at the state level (i.e. nonpartisanship policy; required number of paid members; selection of leadership team, list of planned activities).
- The state League recognizes the Member-At-Large (MAL) Unit.
- Unit leaders plan a calendar of activities for the year and assign tasks for fulfilling the steps for recognition as a local League.
- The Unit carries out a program of activities that furthers the League's mission, that is of interest to members and the community, and that demonstrates members' understanding of League policies and procedures. Program work included plans for ongoing membership growth and diversity.
- The Unit meets its financial obligations to the organization as a whole (i.e. PMP payments to LWVUS and the state league) and demonstrates its ability to secure needed member and community support for its operations.

### Phase 3

- The Unit is in regular communication with its members and community leaders (e.g. email alerts, blogs or newsletter) to keep members and community informed about Unit activities, critical issues, and organizational achievements.
- The Unit prepares for an annual meeting (budget, bylaws, program and nomination of a slate of officers and board of directors).
- The annual meeting is held and final requirements for recognition are fulfilled (bylaws approved, budget and program adopted, officers and board elected).
- The state League recommends to LWVUS that the Unit be recognized as a local League and LWVUS formally recognizes the new local League.
- The state League continues to support the local League through connection with a state liaison or coach and the local League also continues to participate in state and national training opportunities.
- The local League continues to ask people to volunteer, join and lead as it is visible and works to partner with other organizations. The local League continues to focus on education and advocacy and grows to reflect the population of its community.

## IV. STATE LEAGUE SUPPORT FOR MAL UNITS

### Role and Responsibilities of the Unit Coordinator/Advisor

Each state League establishes its own system for overseeing and engaging individual Members at Large and Units of Members at Large (MAL Units). Typically the responsibility for engaging, supporting and monitoring these groups is assigned to a person designated by the state board. Whatever the title (Membership Chair, State coach, Field Representative, etc.), this "Unit Coordinator" or state advisor has an important role to play in helping organize and manage new League groups in accordance with state League guidelines.

The Unit Coordinator(s) represent the state League and act as the link between the MAL Unit and the state board. Their role is to help the group's members develop an understanding of the programs and activities that are appropriate for furthering the League's mission, to support and assist the Unit in whatever it undertakes, to keep up the interest of the members and to guide and counsel its leaders. A close personal relationship among the Coordinator and the members of the MAL Unit can contribute greatly to the group's ability to learn, grow and have community impact.

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When an MAL Unit has been recognized by the state board, the Coordinator's initial responsibilities could include:

- Recognizing the MAL Unit with a letter of welcome, signed by the state League president.
- Insuring a check for start-up funds is sent (if such funds are provided).
- Adding the Unit chair and other advisors to the statewide mailing list.
- Notifying LWWUS of new members consistent with state league policy.
- Insuring delivery of basic leadership materials and new member packets, such as a Membership Handbook, to the Unit.

The MAL Unit Coordinator's ongoing responsibilities could include:

- Reviewing, updating, and/or preparing a state League member-at-large handbook.
- Reviewing and developing policies affecting MAL Units for state board approval.
- Assisting and guiding MAL Unit activities.
- Reporting to the state board on the health of each MAL Unit.
- Keeping LWWUS informed of the progress of MAL Units moving toward local League recognition.

Procedures to include:

- Sending changes in MAL Unit leadership (names and contact information) to LWWUS, state League and local League presidents.
- Ensuring Unit's membership records agree with those of LWWUS and the state League and that membership changes are passed along promptly.
- Ensuring MAL Unit submits official January membership count to the state League in a timely fashion.
- Consulting with, and advising, the Unit on all aspects of League activity. The advisor is not expected to be an expert in all areas and should call on other state League leaders for assistance whenever necessary.
- Keeping in close touch with the Unit chair through occasional personal visits, phone calls, mail and/or e-mail. The advisor should receive copies of newsletters, meeting minutes and reports of Unit activities (if required).
- Encouraging the Unit to develop activities that include high visibility components, and intentional efforts to grow the organization's volunteer and member force and identify important community partners so that it ultimately has impact and is as diverse as the community.
- Encouraging the Unit to develop and implement a plan to ensure its financial stability.
- Encouraging the Unit to send representatives to statewide events, such as workshops and conventions/councils, and to obtain every-member and leadership publications and materials, as well as specific publications on program items, over and above those routinely sent.
- Attending the Unit's annual meeting, as many leadership team meetings as possible, and other meetings and events as time and resources permit.
- Consulting with the Unit, as needed, on its responses to action alerts from the LWWUS and state League, and on all letters to elected officials, news releases, letters to the editor and public statements; approving all local publications; approving any involvement in local issues, including study, consensus and action.
- Reporting to the state board meeting or designated board member on the progress of the Unit.
- Arranging for regular leadership training sessions for Unit leaders.

### **NURTURING AN MAL UNIT**

Once the state League has recognized an MAL Unit, its task is to help the group develop according to the interests and capacity of its membership. The state board will appoint an advisor to the Unit. The energy and level of resources that state League leaders decide to devote to an MAL Unit, however, may depend in part on their assessment of the group's potential for growth.

Some groups are likely to operate indefinitely as state Units, requiring steady but modest levels of state League oversight to help them maintain a meaningful League presence in their community. If, however, the population in the area is substantial and/or there is evidence of significant member-at-large and community interest, the state board may wish to encourage the group to work toward official League status from the outset. Such a group would require intensive guidance and mentoring. Both types of Units will benefit enormously from regular leadership training sessions arranged by their state advisor.

All League groups, whether they are on a "fast track" toward becoming a League or they expect to continue as an MAL Unit, should be encouraged to give attention to:

- o Voters service
- o Program work
- o Visibility/ Communications
- o Financial stability
- o Membership growth
- o Diversity

Although the following discussion is designed especially for newer MAL Units that are working towards becoming recognized local Leagues, it is relevant for League groups at every stage of development.

#### **A. Program Work**

A meaningful and compelling program is essential to the success of any League group. Our program is what attracts others to join us, it's what we do for our communities and it's how we have impact. Through its education and advocacy work, the new Unit will be helping fulfill the League's goal: to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide.

The Unit members' first step in planning their activities for the year is to select the issue(s) they want to address. Choosing issues that are timely, that need public discussion, and that are of vital concern to the community will help attract an audience and establish the group as an organization that can make a real difference.

Among the topics the group could consider are those issues targeted for emphasis at the state and national levels, particularly if one or more of them is generating a lot of community interest. Another option is to focus on a purely local issue that can then serve as a means for the new members to learn about the structure and operations of their local government. A thorough understanding of the governmental decision-making process is key to effective citizen education and advocacy.

The range of topics from which to choose is formidable, and the Unit may be tempted to adopt an overly ambitious agenda. The state League coordinator/advisor can play an important role in helping a Unit focus its energies and develop a program of activities that matches its resources and sends a coherent message about the League's purpose.

After identifying the issues they wish to explore, the members can plan the activities they will undertake in working on those issues. Possibilities include:

### **Voters Service**

Providing election-related services was one of the original purposes of the League's founders and continues to be a primary activity of League groups everywhere. Many members are first drawn to the League through voters service and it often provides the original impetus for the formation of MAL Units. The state League advisor will, of course, work closely with the Unit to ensure that it maintains strict nonpartisanship in conducting any and all voters service projects.

Among the voters service activities the group may want to consider are:

- Registering voters and disseminating registration and voting information.
- Conducting a get-out-the-vote campaign.
- Sponsoring candidate meetings or debates.
- Sponsoring pro/con forums on ballot issues.
- Compiling local voters guides/candidate questionnaires; distributing those and state guides/questionnaires/VOTE411 postings.
- Posting online or publishing a local directory of elected officials.

### **Member and Community Education**

Meetings with a guest speaker. This could be a local government official discussing an issue of community concern or a state League leader talking about one or more state or national League program priorities.

Discussion group. Members may want to meet to explore one or more public policy issues in depth, perhaps as a follow-up to a presentation by a guest speaker.

Tours and visits. Attending a local government meeting (preceded perhaps by a discussion with two or three local officials about the issues on that evening's agenda) can help League members learn about how their local government works. A visit to a landfill, a public works project, or a social service agency can make public policy issues come alive. Some Leagues offer an experience like this through a program they call "Civics 101" where community members register for a League sponsored briefing with an expert and then sit through meetings such as city or county council or other local government meetings.

Observers. The MAL Unit may form an observer corps to attend and report on local government meetings to the community and members via website, blog or email. Sometimes forming a partnership with a local news outlet to help carry LWV observer corps content can also be an effective way to inform the community and have a visible League presence.

Community forums. A panel of speakers with a range of perspectives can help citizens learn about possible solutions to a critical governmental issue and how they can make their own opinions heard.

"Know your community" project. New League groups can conduct a study of their community, gathering information on the structure and procedures of the various governmental bodies within their jurisdiction. These can be published on a website or shared electronically as a potential resource for the community and League visibility too.

### **Studying Issues**

State/national studies. MAL Units are encouraged to take part in state or national League studies under way and in the related member agreement process.

Study of an existing state/national position. The group may want to learn about an existing position from the state or national League program and examine its relevance to the community. The members also could use local study material developed by another League in the state as the basis for an examination of the issue from the perspective of their own community.

Local study. With permission from the state board, the group may undertake a study with consensus on a local issue. This kind of hands-on learning experience can serve as a valuable introduction to the League's balanced approach to issues. Close supervision by the state League advisor would be essential.

### **Action**

State/national action alerts. Members of an MAL Unit are encouraged to respond to action alerts from the state and national levels.

Local action on state/national positions. With permission and guidance from the state League advisor, the group may apply a state or national League position to a local issue and take appropriate action.

Local action on a local position. If the MAL Unit has completed a study and consensus on a local issue, it may, with permission and guidance from the state League advisor, take appropriate action based on that position.

### **B. Visibility and Communications**

Visibility for each activity on the MAL Unit's agenda should be built into every project. Being highly visible in the community helps ensure that community members can participate in or benefit from League offerings. External communications are essential to the success of each individual activity and to the long-term growth of the new League group. Consider:

- Regular announcements of League events and meetings in the local newspaper's calendar of events, on local radio and on TV, as well as on a variety of community bulletin boards.
- Letters to the editor.
- News releases, particularly when new leaders are selected.
- Social media (guidelines available from LWVUS).

As they grow in strength and numbers, Units are encouraged to communicate regularly with members, volunteers and allied organizations via online newsletter and/or send regular emails, Facebook pages and websites to keep people informed about activities, meetings and other organizational issues. Funding will have to be provided for in the Unit's budget, The advisor can help by sharing examples of communications like this by other League groups. The Unit leader can be added to the mailing lists of local Leagues.

### **C. Membership Growth**

Incorporating strong visibility into exciting League activities and events is vital to help ensure membership recruitment and retention and leadership development. Asking people to volunteer, join and lead are also

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key elements to creating a vital and growing League. MAL Units of any size can make an important contribution to their community, but all League groups can benefit from bringing in new members with new ideas and energies. All League groups need to emphasize membership growth in order to reflect the diversity of their community and have impact. Increasing the size of their membership should be a major first-year goal for the leaders of any newly recognized MAL Unit. Their state League advisor should encourage them to:

- Set a specific numerical goal for membership growth.
- Identify community groups and individuals to target for recruitment.
- Design programs and activities that will generate community interest and attract new members.
- Schedule activities at times and in places that are convenient and inviting to the widest audience possible.
- Build a membership recruitment component into every activity, including a brief presentation about the League and an invitation to everyone present to join the League.
- Develop a system for following up with those who express an interest in the League (for example, by attending a League event).
- Develop a system for following up with all new members to help them find a level of involvement that suits each one.

### **Diversity**

An integral component of the MAL Unit's plan for membership recruitment is that it should reflect the diversity of the community. League members at every level recognize that diverse perspectives are necessary for responsive and responsible decision making and that inclusiveness enhances the organization's ability to have impact and be an effective voice for all citizens. Adopting a diversity policy and developing diversity strategies are important first steps towards achieving this fundamental goal.

Key steps for MAL Unit leaders in meeting the challenge of achieving diversity:

- Make a personal commitment to diversity.
- Develop a written policy that affirms the MAL Unit's commitment to diversity.
- Identify and learn about groups with diverse perspectives in the community.
- Identify opportunities to network and collaborate with diverse groups in the community.
- Weave membership outreach and diversity strategies into all League programs and activities (e.g. focus on registering voters from underserved populations, partner with diverse organizations in the community, publicize League events and activities through mechanisms that reach diverse populations in the community).
- Hold meetings in locations that are inviting to all people in the community.
- Establish an environment that is welcoming and supportive of all members.

### **D. Financial Stability**

The MAL Unit must be adequately financed in order to operate and carry out its goals. As members plan for the year, the state League coordinator/advisor can help them develop a budget showing the expenses they expect to incur and the sources of anticipated income. Since members at large join by paying dues to the state League, the new MAL Unit will need to decide whether it wishes to assess additional local dues to help support its activities.

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In making that decision, the group will want to evaluate other resources that may be available. Some state Leagues, for example, provide a small start-up fund for new MAL Units. Others rebate a portion of the state dues to help the new group get started.

MAL Units also are encouraged to seek financial support from the community at large. This will become easier to do as the group begins to gain visibility and recognition through its voters service and citizen education projects. The state League coordinator/advisor can help by sharing successful fundraising experiences of other League groups and by explaining how tax-deductible contributions may be made.

MAL Units often want to have their own checking account. The state League provides guidance about when and how best to manage their finances.

### V. MOVING TOWARD RECOGNITION AS A LOCAL LEAGUE

In addition to planning and carrying out the program-related and voters service work of the League--the activities that draw most members into the organization--the leaders of an MAL Unit that is aiming for local League recognition will need to give attention to fulfilling certain requirements. The state League advisor plays a very important role in helping the group keep track of the tasks that need to be accomplished, providing sample materials and advice whenever needed, and keeping up everyone's enthusiasm.

The state board is responsible for deciding when an MAL Unit has met the necessary requirements and for requesting that the LWVUS recognize the group as a local League. In making its request, the state board will be affirming that the MAL Unit has fulfilled all League requirements approved by delegates to national convention and any additional requirements that may have been set by that state League.

#### LWVUS Requirements

The approved a set of requirements that local and state Leagues must meet to gain LWVUS recognition and to maintain League status are as follows:

- The League must have bylaws, the first three articles of which must be consistent with those of the LWVUS. The remaining articles must provide for democratic procedures.
- The League must establish and maintain a nonpartisanship policy.
- The League must hold an annual business meeting of the membership.
- The League must hold regular board meetings.
- The League must meet its financial obligations to the state and national levels of the League.
- The League must have a plan for membership growth and retention that **encourages** membership as diverse as the community.
- Any advocacy pursued by the League must be consistent with League principles, positions and policies.
- The official League logo needs to be utilized for LWV websites, publications, banners and other items the public has access to.

#### State League Requirements

Any additional requirements set by the state League should be flexible, allowing for variations in structure and activity level while safeguarding basic League standards of operation. In many cases, these are called "guidelines" or "standards." **It is understood that they are goals that may not be achieved every year**

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**by every League.** These often provide a yardstick by which the state League measures the MAL Unit's readiness to be recognized as a local League.

Topics frequently covered by these state League requirements, or guidelines, include:

- **Membership.** Most state Leagues specify a minimum number of members for their local Leagues. While this number should be equal to or larger than that required for recognition of an MAL Unit, it also should be reasonably attainable by League groups in a variety of settings.
- **Governance.** Elected officers and board members are often mentioned, although local Leagues are given considerable flexibility in determining the exact configuration of their governance including Steering Committees and other alternatives.
- **Meetings.** Some state Leagues suggest that a minimum number of general meetings be held annually (in addition to the annual business meeting and regular board meetings specified in the LWVUS requirements).
- **Visibility and Communications.** Regular communication with members often is prescribed, although the frequency and format is left up to the local LWV.
- **Program/voters service.** Some state Leagues require MAL Units seeking local League recognition to carry out at least one project to demonstrate members' understanding of League policies and procedures.
- **Knowledge of local government.** Familiarity with the structure of the local government is important and can help an MAL Unit understand how and where to be involved in local issues. It can be done through a local study for example.
- **Jurisdiction.** Early in the process, the MAL Unit works with the state LWV to determine the geographical area for the group's basis of organization and assess the potential of the community to sustain a local League.

**Evidence to determine the MAL Unit's potential to thrive and become a recognized local League can include:**

- Number of paid members
- Level of interest, commitment and enthusiasm of the group's leaders
- Visibility in the community
- Description and implementation of organizing activities
- Incorporation of visibility, membership growth and diversity and leadership development in League activities and events
- Financial stability- including a copy of a budget of anticipated expenses
- Communications
- Other human and financial resources needed to strengthen the unit, such as members with previous League experience or a supportive civic and business community or donors/funders who've made financial contributions.
- Indication of how this MAL Unit will increase the League's demographic or geographic diversity

**A state League support or field service plan for the group should include:**

- Name, contact information and qualifications of the group's state League advisor.
- Proposed method of working with the group, including number of visits planned.
- Plans for leadership training for the group.
- Goals and a time line for achieving local League status.

**An assessment of the MAL Unit's first year, including:**

- Growth and diversity of membership.
- Strength of the leadership team and development of future leaders.

- Adherence to the group's nonpartisanship policy.
- Growth in understanding of League positions, policies and procedures.
- Involvement in issues of importance to the community.
- Efforts to become knowledgeable about local government.
- Activities carried out, including program work and voters service.
- Internal operations, including board meetings and annual meeting.
- An accounting of income and expenses related to the budget for the first year.
- Funding sources and financial stability.
- Communication with members and degree of member involvement.
- Community awareness of, and support for, the MAL Unit.
- An updated plan for the second year.
- A budget of anticipated expenses for the next year to carry out League activities

## VI. RIGHT SIZING YOUR LEAGUE

*“There is nothing wrong with scaling back what you are doing and what you expect of yourself. Your job should not be a Superman or Wonder Woman contest. The owners are not going to sell the team if you don’t win every game. But if you don’t have nine players, don’t expect to play baseball. Readjust your priorities and play basketball instead.”*

If this description begins to sound like a few of the local Leagues in your state, then it may be time to do a frank assessment of the League’s strength and potential. Many local Leagues are finding that the administrative burdens of managing the membership database, the finances and the expectations of a board overwhelm the good intentions of what League members want to do and what they are strong enough to do. Take the advice of the quote above—rethink what is really important to the remaining League members in the group. If they want to become a small network of Members of Large with a modest set of expectations, by all means give them permission to do that.

Times have changed and the League needs to change with it. Ties to our local municipalities are looser than ever. We find that we work in one place, live in another, worship in another, and drive great distances for entertainment. We want members who feel an affiliation for our organization at any level. We would all rather continue our affiliation with an organization we love without feeling burdened by what we are not doing. Instead, focus on what is satisfying to the members and just do it.

The state board can play a valuable role in helping local Leagues find their way before disbandment becomes a devastating reality. In states where MAL units have been functioning for a while, some recognize that a MAL unit is all they ever want to be. And if it meets the needs of members, then make it easy for them to maintain their loose connections to the state League.

### **In Conclusion... United for Strength and Impact**

The notion that a League leader can “do it all” or “go it alone” is false. In order for individuals to be fulfilled and for the League to build itself for the future, we must work in groups or teams. The state League’s role in helping foster, support, advise and connect teams of people who are interested in the League is invaluable.

LWVUS is a willing partner in support of state Leagues in this work. Human resources and partnerships are part of our commitment to the state Leagues. National Board liaisons and national coaches (Shur

## STATE BOARDS

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Fellows) through the Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) program, are part of the human resources available to support state Leagues. And national online resources, tools and discussion forums continue to evolve to provide the League network with support.

As we move toward our 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the League will need to better accommodate the ever-busier volunteers by expecting less from each individual and more out of the team efforts. Together, in collaboration with state and national leaders, these teams of people will help strengthen the League's ability to have the impact that is so vitally needed in our democracy today.