



# **New Member Welcoming, Engagement and Retention**

**A Compilation of Ideas Shared at Regional Field Service Meetings  
January and February 2017**

**A project of the LWVMA Membership Steering Committee and Field Service Program**

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## Introduction

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In 2016-2017 local Leagues and LWVMA experienced an 8% growth in membership over the previous year. The increase was fueled in part by several factors, one of which is the recent surge in grassroots activism and a desire for civic engagement. LWV offers an established group that people can join and have joined.

New members are essential to sustaining the League. Getting an influx of new members presents both opportunities and challenges. Leagues must try to embrace the opportunity and overcome the challenges to make sure these new members are welcomed and engaged, so that they stay with the League, become active members, and become leaders.

New members are the responsibility of the entire board or steering committee. If there is an influx of members, the **Membership Chair will need help**. Consider a new board position just for dealing with new members.

This document is based on input from Leagues that participated in the winter 2017 Field Service Meetings. Leagues can review it and get ideas, but there is no expectation that your League will do all of them! You might decide one of these ideas is perfect for your League, but you might also find that the ideas here will stimulate your board to come up with a different approach.

We recommend boards or steering committees review these ideas together to determine what might work for your League. There is no better source for new ideas than another League's success!

## General Procedures for New Members—the First Year

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You have a new member! What do you do? Below is a composite of several Leagues' procedures.

- **Enter the new member information** in the LWVUS roster and email LWVMA with name and email address ([lwvma@lwvma.org](mailto:lwvma@lwvma.org)). If the member paid by check, cash the check as soon as possible. These two steps will ensure they will receive state and national member email communications. LWVMA may be able to send a welcome card to new members if new member information is conveyed to LWVMA in a timely manner.
- **Telephone or email** (to arrange a time to talk or meet) the new member. As soon as possible, determine interest and availability for League participation.
- If a new member is interested in a certain committee, **email the committee chair(s)** with a cc to the new member, so everyone is informed and e-introduced. It is very important that the committee chair includes the new member in planning, welcomes the new member, and gives the new member a job she/he wants and can handle. Check in with the committee chair to see how the new member is doing. Keep committee lists updated and distribute to board and committee chairs routinely, or store in Dropbox, Google Drive, password protected webpage, or other shared location.
- **Deliver or send a Welcome Packet** to the new member. Review it in person or by phone. The welcome packet may include a welcome letter, League roster, League Yearbook, the latest bulletin, list of past years' activities, upcoming events (whatever your League produces). Don't overwhelm them with paper at this point.
- **Follow-up to ensure the new member received the monthly bulletin** soon after it goes out. Invite questions.
- **Invite new members to events/programs** throughout the year. Make certain the new member has a ride and knows someone will greet her or him, especially for their first program.
- **Follow-up after an event/program for questions or comments**, especially if they're not regularly interacting with other League members.
- **Use the Bulletin to introduce new members** (such as short bios, see page 4) and to make sure they are aware of opportunities for participation.
- **In summary, follow-up, follow-up, follow-up during the first year.** For a large number of new members, the outreach should come from multiple members in an organized way.

## Specific Successful Programs or Procedures from Local Leagues

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Members of the LWVMA Membership Steering Committee and local League leaders at Field Service Meeting shared the following ideas for welcoming, engaging and retaining members. Detailed descriptions of some of the ideas from local Leagues are given after the list.

- Hold a **new member reception/orientation**. Invite recent members to a Sunday afternoon tea or evening wine and cheese event. Find out why they joined, what they have to offer, and match them up with committee chairs. Make sure the committee chairs contact them (see page 4)
- **Determine areas of interest and facilitate a connection** with the specialist in that area. For 1-2 members this can be done with a conversation. Another way is to create a sign-up sheet for new members to complete at various possible timepoints: joining, at a new member event, at annual meeting, after a welcome visit/call/email from the Membership Chair (or New Member Chair) (see page 6).
- **Events offer opportunities** to develop engaged members and potential leaders (see page 5)
- While **League visibility** may be thought of more of a way to attract members, it is also key to retaining members. Members want to feel part of an active, vibrant, and effective League. Some ways to gain visibility:
  - Letters to the editor, announcements of events, attractive flyers and brochures, tabling at local fairs and events.
  - Facebook and website can convey opportunities for involvement and are portals for information. Local Leagues can share LWVMA and LWVUS Facebook posts. Follow up with people who like a League Facebook post (send PM, personal message). They may want to join.
  - It reflects poorly on your League if Facebook and the website are not kept up-to-date.
- Create a **League business card**, bookmark, or other professional-looking information card.
- **Former members** may want to get involved again. Reach out to former members who may have more time or renewed interest by inviting them to a forum or annual meeting.
- **Have fun events**. Try to have a social element to some of your events. Try a League Meet-Up for new or potential members in a public place, such as a tavern or restaurant. Add a twist to events such as program planning. Have a holiday potluck, winterfest, winter bread and soup, wine and cheese, or barbeque.
- Do not hesitate to **ask a new member to join the board or steering committee** if you see potential. Perhaps invite them to a board meeting first, or meet them one-on-one. Give them a job that you think they will successfully carry out. Make sure a new board member receives an orientation and/or has a mentor on the board, and receives the Local League Basics document (<https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Local-League-Basics-final-1.pdf> ).
- As **new grassroots activist groups** form in your area, work with these groups, and don't view them as in competition. These groups could be a source of League members as are single-issue action groups.
- **Hold a regular (e.g. weekly or monthly) drop-in event** such as a book club, hot topic discussion, brown bag lunch, weekly chat, sip and chat, to name a few. Discuss an article, current events, an issue in town, etc. Although not essential, it helps to keep the time and place consistent.
- **Form Action Teams**, study committees, or other small active groups in which new members can become engaged right away. (see examples pages 7-8)
- **Let new members know of opportunities** to participate as they arise. Create a new member email group, include a "Help Wanted" article in the Bulletin, stress in Bulletin articles that new members are welcome, ask them directly to take part.
- **Car pooling** to events is a great way to make sure people know they are welcome. Carpool or take public transportation together to lobby days, marches, rallies, forums, etc.
- Assign a **buddy or mentor** to new members.

## New Member Bios—Potential Questions

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A short bio of all new members of the Cape Cod Area LWV appears in the next monthly Bulletin. The bios are one of the first points of contact, and also serve as a welcome. Questions that give some insight into the new member are suggested below.

1. Contact information - name, address, home phone and/or cell phone email address
2. Why did you join the league?
3. How long have you lived in the community? If new, where did you live before?
4. If newly retired, where did you work? / If still working, where do you work?
5. If children in school, where do they go to school?
6. Their personal interests or volunteer activities?
7. May include educational background.
8. Potential league interests - prompt with info about committees or groups?
9. If the new member expresses interest, inform the board member or committee chair of that area.

## New Member Reception/Orientation

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A new member event is a great way to welcome new members and get them involved. Here is how one League does it.

1. Membership Chair and another leader determine date and location (house or other meeting spot). Also determine 4-5 veteran members who can come (e.g. Voter Service Chair, newer member who has taken on a leadership role, upcoming event Chair).
2. Consider a Sunday afternoon or a weekday evening.
3. Develop a theme, such as “New Member Tea,” “Wine and Cheese Reception for New Members,” “New Member Meet, Greet, and Eat.” Theme is dependent on the time of day and how much you want to invest in wine, food, etc.
4. Develop a simple, flexible agenda. Let veteran members know what is expected of them, and urge them to be succinct. Sample agenda for 90 minute event:
  - 20 minutes Social and greeting
  - 10 minutes Show slide show about League, photos, etc. (if available)
  - 20 minutes New members introduce themselves, tell why they joined, share interests and ideas
  - 15 minutes Board member (President or leader) discusses League, 3 levels, overview of local League
  - 20 minutes Veteran leaders present their areas of involvement
  - 5 minutes Ask new members to complete a sign-up form.
5. Review your roster to determine who the new members are. “New members” can be defined according to what makes sense, past year, past two years, etc.
6. Create an invitation. Mail or email to your new member group. Follow up with emails and phone calls to all in the group.
7. Prepare a packet of information. Put it in a blue or red pocket folder with a LWV label on the outside. May include: copy of recent newsletter, information re. national and state Leagues, flyers for upcoming events, sign up sheet.
8. Ask everyone to complete the sign up form (see page 5).
9. After the event, contact committee chairs (cc the new member) to let them know who has signed up. Add names to master committee list. Make sure chairs are involving new members.

## Using scheduled League events for engaging new members and developing leaders

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Being welcoming should be a priority for every League before, during and at each event. Engage all individuals, including non-members, members and leaders. Although you may think your League is welcoming, put yourself in a new member's shoes! It can be hard to be the new person, especially if everyone else has known each other for years (from LWVUS).

### ***Before the event:***

- Ask a newer member/potential leader to help you plan an event in a friendly, upbeat way. If not ready for a big task, ask them to take on something small.
- Mentor new league leaders during the planning phase. Don't leave one new person stuck doing everything by her or himself, especially if they've never planned an event.
- Be open to new ideas when planning an event.
- Always remember your tone when inviting individuals to an event or asking members to help out. Remember that sometimes the League can be intimidating. For instance, when planning a hot topics luncheon, remind people that they don't need to know anything about the issues to come to a forum- the League is here to help educate!
- Encourage each member of your League to invite a friend to the event! Suggest that you go together to the event and build a positive relationship and experience for them.

### ***At the event:***

- Have greeters welcoming all participants to an event. Make everyone feel equally welcome. Talk to everyone and invite people to join.
- Have a sign-in sheet to collect information from individuals so you can contact them in the future and welcome them to join the League.
- Mingle! League members should all be encouraged to mingle with non-members. This will show potential members that the League is a friendly group that loves to meet new people.
- Check in on your new members in a friendly, helpful, and nonjudgmental way. Have a seasoned leader ask potential new leaders how they are doing and if they need any help.
- Pay attention to your new members. Have a seasoned member sit with them to answer questions, explain what's going on, and introduce them to other members.

### ***After the event:***

- Say Thank You! Remember all the members and leaders who helped make your League event a success! Thank everyone who helped contribute to the event by sending an e-card, making a phone call, or acknowledging them at a meeting or in your newsletter.
- Always follow-up with individuals who signed the sign-in sheet. If someone shows a particular interest in the event topic or other aspects of the League, contact them and connect them with a committee or other League members who are working on that area.
- Remember the new leaders who helped out with the event for your next event.

## Member Sign Up Form

Member sign-up forms are excellent ways to get volunteers for League committees, events, and infrastructure needs. These can be used at Annual Meeting, Program Planning, other all-member events, and new member events. It can also be emailed to new members when they join or renewing members at renewal time.

### LOTS OF OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

*Check off the opportunities you are interested in hearing more about. We'll get back to you with details.*

Name: _____	Address: _____
Email address: _____	Phone: _____

- Please ask the **Nominating Committee** to contact me about **serving on the board**.

#### **Voter Service/Visibility:**

- Participate July 4 parade
- HS voter registration (May)
- Local election voter guide
- Give rides to polls on election day
- Candidates' Night committee

#### **Membership**

- Membership co-Chair
- Membership committee
- Annual Meeting committee
- Opening Meeting committee

#### **Infrastructure/Communications**

- Website (looking for WordPress experience)
- Social Media
- Help with preparing fundraising letters (Mail Merge)
- Budget Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Bylaws and governance

#### **2017 Action Teams:**

- Environment/sustainability
- Money in politics
- Health care
- Immigration

#### **Other Action Areas:**

- Improving elections and voting
- Food and agriculture
- Transportation
- Gun Safety
- Housing

#### **Events**

- Coordinate food for forums
- Civics Bee team
- Civics Bee help at the event

#### **Other Items not listed:**

- You name it! Write in below or on the back your special skills, interests, or ideas.

## Form Action Teams—Needham

Two Leagues, recognizing a growing desire to take action on major issues, have recently organized for action. The two Leagues took different approaches, based on the desires of their members.

LWV Needham held a program planning meeting in mid-January, with about 40 members in attendance. After a fine pot luck meal, everyone assembled with a flip chart. The flip chart had 5 pre-selected topics (chosen by the planning committee) with space for more. The pre-selected topics included five areas

- Immigration
- Environment/sustainability
- Ballot questions/voting
- Health care
- Money in politics

Members were asked to consider what areas to focus on this year. They were asked to consider “How can the League of Women Voters of Needham make an impact in these areas?” Local activists in these areas gave a five minute presentation each that suggested some ways LWV-Needham could take action.

Additional areas were proposed from the floor, and 3 more areas were proposed and the proposer given time to present.

- SpEd funding reform
- Transportation (local)
- Housing (local)

Everyone was given 4 colored dots (colors were irrelevant). Members placed their 4 dots on the 4 areas they thought LWV-Needham should focus on. Results were tallied, and the four top areas went to 4 locations with the charge to develop a list of potential actions LWV-Needham could take.



After re-assembling in the large group, everyone received a sign-up sheet with the Action Teams listed and checked off the teams they wanted to be part of. They could choose more than one.

After the meeting, lists were compiled and three of the four teams had chairs or co-chairs in place. The teams are meeting, emailing, planning educational forums, and developing plans.

When a new member joins, she/he is given a sign-up and can join a team.

In addition to planning in the community, the teams are on the lookout for action alerts, lobby days, League events in other cities and towns, conferences, and other opportunities at the state and national levels.



## Form Action Teams—Northampton

The LWV of Northampton board decided to create the following teams:

- Health care
- Environment/climate change
- Education
- Voter service

Here are the procedures they are undertaking:

1. Concentrate on Washington actions, but also work on state-level actions.
2. Emphasize calling and emailing legislators, rather than writing to them.
3. Create an action table (see below) with a list of actions for individuals.
4. Send the action table, with an introduction, to all members.
5. The action table is meant to be an on-going, with a flexible format for League members to react to changes in Washington and Boston.
6. Prepare and distribute a list of tips for making calls (see example below).
7. Write more letters-to-the-editor from the League (action in the table).
8. Reach out to neighboring Leagues to join the teams.
9. Teams regularly share articles, videos, etc. helpful to their activism goals.

### Northampton Area LWV Legislative Actions (Abbreviated list as a sample from LWV Northampton)

Also included is: List of Legislators and contacts and tips for contacting your legislator. The entire LWV Northampton document is in a separate file available from LWV Northampton (See League Leader email from Nancy Polan March 8, 2017).

Date (first call to action)	Massachusetts Action	Target person/organization	Contact Info	Coordinator	Notes	Your notes
1/31/17	<b>Call:</b> Increasing the Renewable Portfolio Standard. SD1632 and HD2103 (same title) An Act relative to solar power and the green economy	MA state reps and senators		Nancy Polan		
2/15/17	Letter-to-editor: Allegations of wide-spread voter fraud in presidential election are not true. No need for an investigation.	<i>Hampshire Gazette</i> Printed 2/24		Margie Riddle		
	<b>Federal Action</b>					
3/1/17	<b>*Call:</b> Do not repeal the Affordable Care Act without an effective plan that will assure we have affordable, quality health insurance for all Americans.	U.S. Representative And Senators		LWVUS Action alert	See note below.	

### \*Note: Affordable Care Act: No Repeal without replacement. Action alert from LWVUS

Congress has taken the first steps to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in both the House and Senate. They are rushing to make major changes that will harm millions of Americans while throwing the U.S. health care system into disarray.

Repealing the ACA without an effective plan to replace it is unacceptable. An analysis done by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that 32 million Americans will lose health insurance, premiums will double and out of pocket costs will sky-rocket. Access to adequate, affordable coverage for people with pre-existing conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease could be endangered. Young adults would no longer be covered under their parent’s plans, and women could face discriminatory rates.

It is critical that you tell Congress that now is not the time to take away health care protections and coverage without an effective plan that will assure we have affordable, quality health insurance. Stand with the League today and tell Congress that they cannot repeal the ACA without a comprehensive plan to provide health coverage for all Americans.

After you send an email to your Representative, consider giving their office a call as well. Tell them: “Don’t repeal the Affordable Care Act without an effective plan that will assure we have affordable, quality health insurance.”