

## LWVUS Convention 2018 and Plans for an Organizational Transformation

From June 28<sup>th</sup> until July 1, 865 voting delegates, 130 non-voting delegates, 119 volunteers and 20 LWVUS staff gathered in Chicago for the 53<sup>rd</sup> National Convention of the League of Women Voters. The theme of the convention was *Creating a More Perfect Democracy*. The adoption of a program, by-law changes, a budget, and proposed resolutions and the election of the LWVUS Board took place during the Plenary Sessions. Attendees heard speakers on redistricting reform, the census and election readiness, diversity, equity and inclusion and inspiring future women leaders. Caucuses and workshops took place before and after the plenary sessions. The topics included Immigration, Open primaries, Redistricting, Carbon pricing, Gun control, National Popular Vote, Abolition of the Electoral College, ERA and Statehood for DC.

A number of resolutions were brought to the floor by delegates (not the Board) and passed. These included:

- making gun control and safety and gun ownership limitations a priority in the LWVUS lobbying efforts,
- placing an emphasis on the ERA this year and every year until the ERA is ratified and becomes a U.S. Constitutional Amendment,
- reaffirming the League's long-held position that the Electoral College should be abolished,
- supporting efforts to price carbon emissions,
- reaffirming the League's commitment to the constitutional right of privacy and an individual's right to make reproductive choices, and
- supporting climate assessment criteria that ensures energy policies align with current climate science.

The organizers also made time in the agenda for League members to go to the *March for Families*, which took place in on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Despite the very hot day, about half of the delegates left the hotel to join others on the streets of downtown Chicago protesting the separation of families at the Mexico/US border.

Over the past two years, in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the League's founding, national and state leaders have engaged in a process of self-reflection, hard discussions and tough decisions related to the continued relevance and health of the League network. Following Convention 2016, conversations began including representatives from state and local Leagues. These meetings included a cross-section of the country, large and small states, urban and rural Leagues. Common challenges identified included: a membership that is not reflective of our communities, a lack of tools to more effectively carry out the mission of the organization, and our inability to demonstrate our collective impact as an organization. Participants at every level have embraced the need for change, and now we are at a critical place of taking action to ensure the efficacy and impact of the League in its second century. The various summits, meetings (including National Council), calls and committee work led to the creation of a [Transformation Roadmap](#), a 41-page analysis of internal and external stakeholder interviews and, most importantly, recommended action steps for LWV moving forward.

While the *Transformation Roadmap* wasn't presented for approval, because the LWVUS Board has already voted to move forward with transforming the League based on the document, it was the foundation upon which most of the convention presentations were laid. There is an opportunity for greater mission impact given an energized public, the League's sound reputation, and the compelling need for its work. Taking advantage of the opportunity requires the League to look both within and outside itself to understand the operating (and competitive) environment in which it works, along with its own capacity and its will to change.

What will NOT change are the core elements of who we are as an organization:

- The League will continue to focus on our mission impact work. All of this transformation work stems from the desire to be a more effective and impactful organization.
- The League will remain nonpartisan. This is ‘the’ non-negotiable statement and a crucial part of our brand. We will look at ways we can use our nonpartisan positions with new and different organizations to be stronger advocates at the local, state and national levels.
- The League will remain a membership organization. We will explore different ways that individuals join and engage with us.

Below is a summary of the four critical priorities affirmed by the national board and the recommendations for transformation.

## **1. ADVANCING A CLEAR STRATEGIC FOCUS**

**Assessment:** The League struggles to successfully tell its story. The organization lacks the proper story collection channels to demonstrate relevance and impact.

**Recommendations:** The programmatic strategies under the Campaign for Making Democracy Work offer the League an opportunity to leverage the competitive advantages of the organization, including its trusted brand, nonpartisan stance, and on-the-ground network for greater mission impact. Telling a stronger story will increase our visibility, relevance and funding opportunities. It also leads to more engagers in our mission; future leadership of the organization; and, most importantly, increased social impact.

As part of this process, the national board adopted the following mission, vision and value statements:

- Mission Statement: Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.
- Vision Statement: We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate.
- Value Statement: We believe in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy. The mission, vision, and value statements guide the League in our core mission work of what we do and why we do it.

### **Next Steps:**

The national organization will continue its focus on the goals set in the strategic plan and the Campaign for: Making Democracy Work<sup>®</sup>: Voter protection and mobilizing, Election reform and Money in politics, constitutional amendment and redistricting

- State and local Leagues commit to at least one of the programmatic strategies under the Campaign for Making Democracy Work<sup>®</sup>.
- The national organization will begin to utilize the new mission, vision and value statements adopted by the national board in more communications.
- State and local Leagues should adopt the use of these statements.
- State and local Leagues should embrace reporting programmatic data, both quantitative and qualitative, to the national office in order for all to measure our collective impact and tell our full story.
- The national organization will upgrade VOTE411.org, our core one-stop election information tool, over the next biennium to improve the function and reach more voters.

## **2. BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE CULTURE**

**Assessment:** The League has failed to adapt to current trends in volunteerism and embrace diverse populations. The “League Way”—a longstanding, commonly held set of rules and practices—is often regarded as “unwelcoming to new members” and an “orientation toward the past,” slowing progress on new challenges and opportunities.

**Recommendations:** Create a culture that is welcoming, inclusive, trusting and attuned to the needs of today's volunteers so that we grow our organization and have a greater impact.

**Commit to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion** - The League has identified its lack of racial, economic, age and social diversity as an impediment to achieving its mission and as a barrier to greater impact and growth. Equity prioritizes efforts to ensure the most under-served and marginalized among us has as much of an opportunity to succeed as the most well-served and advantaged.

Many state and local Leagues have taken steps to build a more diverse membership. The national organization has committed resources and expertise to apply throughout the League network. Going forward, the League will need to adopt a bottom-to-top and top-to-bottom action agenda to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in its own ranks as well as in its core work.

**Next Steps:**

- The national organization will provide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion tools and training for League leaders at Convention 2018.
- State and local Leagues should commit to sharing the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion tools with their members. The national organization will use allocated resources to develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plan for the entire organization
- State and local Leagues should welcome new volunteers, even if those individuals do not want to become traditional members.
- The next class of Shur Fellows will focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion implementation.

**Adapt to Modern Nonprofit Best Practices** - Despite some modest recent upticks, League membership has steadily declined by almost a third over the past few decades. Current volunteers are looking for ways to engage that might not be traditional dues-paying membership. While the nature of volunteerism in the US has changed, there are other ways for people to participate in the League as “engagers.” This group includes donors, those who opt-in to emails from LWV, social media followers, and advocacy action takers. The League must meet these new engagers where their interests lie.

**Next Steps:**

- The national organization will revamp the board nominations process, using explicit criteria in addition to the current apparent emphasis on League tenure.
- State and local Leagues should structure opportunities and communications with individuals to facilitate their entry into leadership roles and embrace new ideas about the way League operates.
- State and local Leagues should take advantage of the Student PMP Membership pilot program by reducing or eliminating student dues or PMP charged to local Leagues.

### **3. BUILDING A HEALTHIER LEAGUE NETWORK**

**Assessment:** The three-tiered structure of the League is cumbersome and has become an impediment to effective, efficient operations, decision-making and impact. Priorities set by the entire League, including capacity-building support at the state and local level, should be clear in order to accomplish those priorities.

**Recommendations:** Building a healthy League network requires all levels to focus on the mission and vision, aligned with programmatic priorities, and operate with impact and efficacy. A consistent goal across the organization is being seen as “one seamless League.” A key opportunity to support this vision is to make it simpler and easier to join the League as a dues-paying member.

**Next Steps:**

- The national organization will lead a process to explore a “Join at All Levels” online experience. This process will explore the systems and businesses processes needed to build engagement, membership,

and increase retention. “Join at All Levels” could require major structural changes with far-reaching impact on how the League presents itself to the world, how newcomers experience their relationship to the League, and the relationship between various levels of the League. Implementing this “Join at All Levels” membership is deceptively complex. In addition to culture change and the need to develop a significant technology infrastructure, this will have immediate and long-term financial implications.

- State and local Leagues should assist the national office in beta testing the “Join at All Levels” membership platform and ensuring the supporting business processes meet the needs of diverse Leagues.
- State and local Leagues must commit to a brand usage and affiliation agreement to help ensure consistency and integrity throughout the organization.

#### **4. INCREASING CAPACITY AT ALL LEVELS**

**Assessment:** The administrative demands on all levels of the League limits the ability for more mission impact work.

**Recommendations:** To accomplish our mission impact work and tell our story more effectively requires an increase in capacity, including staff resources, technology, communications and fund development.

#### **Next Steps:**

- The national organization will grant more programmatic funding to state and local Leagues to work on the core elements of the Campaign for Making Democracy Work.
- The national organization will explore the feasibility of one organization-wide, comprehensive database of all stakeholders and interactions, shared across national, state and local Leagues and the ways this might interact with the “Join at All Levels” effort.
- The national organization will work to increase state capacity by providing trainings and resources, increasing communications assistance to provide more frequent tools and information, and providing technical support to leverage funding opportunities in their communities.
- State and local Leagues should participate in a baseline assessment so that national understands the collective capacity of the organization.

The Board emphasized that implementing these goals will be a challenge. They recognized that buy-in, collaboration, and resources from all levels of the League will be required. However, the leadership was firm in their belief that this road map will lead to a more impactful League with a better future.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you have any questions about the Fact Sheet?
2. How do you feel about the Value Statement on page 2 of the Fact Sheet?
3. What do you think are the pros and cons of the transformation that LWVUS is proposing? What are your biggest concerns and what excites you the most?
4. Even though advocacy around Democracy Building (see page2) will be the advocacy emphasis at the national level, local Leagues are still encouraged to work on issues that they believe are important to their communities and engaging to their members. What issues might those be for Montgomery County?
5. The League has a rich history, strong traditions, and specific processes for doing our work, which have existed across the decades. But there can be negative sides to those processes and traditions: Who here has ever heard the term “the League way”? As in, “That’s Not the League Way” – said to any member who wants to try a new idea or a different way to do something. What part of the *League Way* are you willing to be more flexible on and what should never change.