

LWVNH Voter Service brainstorming session – August 5, 2011

In planning for the 2012 election cycle, the state board along with representatives of three local Leagues and also three League members who had recently or previously run for state office discussed a number of possible voter education activities that the state and local Leagues could engage in.

Attending: Jane Armstrong, Ellen Blumberg, Sally Davis, Sally Embley, Peg Fargo, Ginny Higgins, Marilyn Lieto, Kelley Monahan, Mary Perry, Margaret Robinson, Martha Solow, Liz Tentarelli, Betty Wilson.

Online presence: two voter information sites were discussed.

1. VOTE411, which the state board used in 2010 to cover the congressional races, governor, executive council, and state senate races, and which the LWV Upper Valley used to cover Grafton county races and some state representative races. This site has been funded by LWVUS Education Fund until now. In future, Leagues will have to pay to participate. Cost for covering all races in NH would be \$5000. Cost for statewide races only (governor, executive council) would be \$500. If a local League wished to cover races in its districts only, the cost is based on per member count, ranging from \$200 to \$500. Liz will find out more specifics in the next few weeks.

Pro: LWVUS has promised to promote VOTE411 heavily (advertising campaign). Because it has been used before in NH, repeat candidates and users are more likely to access it again. Two members already are experienced in using it.

Con: Expense (though it is likely the state League could get grants and Ed Fund money for this). In 2010 only 1,378 visits to the voters guide were made by residents of 86 towns (and some of those were League volunteers repeatedly checking the site to be sure candidate info was entered). This is less than 1% of the traffic to voters guide info nationwide, so clearly we didn't promote the site effectively in NH.

Making the initial contact with NH candidates is difficult because they don't give email addresses when they file. We could overcome this by convincing the Sec of State to ask for email addresses. Otherwise we have the expense of mailing invitations to participate to all the candidates.

2. Project Vote Smart, sponsored by LWV California, is another online site. Liz urges members to check it out, even though at this time of year there are few contests posted. www.smartvoter.org Liz will find out what it would cost LWVNH to use that site. Feedback on members' impressions of that site vs VOTE411 should be sent to the state board. LWV Massachusetts may have used this in the past and we can pick their brains about it.

Pro: Appears simpler than VOTE411 to access candidate information. Primarily consists of simple facts about the candidate plus a link to the candidate's website and, if the candidate wishes, links to position statements.

Con: For some (many?) NH House candidates, having a website is a new concept. Candidates would be expected to post their own information (which is clearly explained on the website itself), but people still on dial-up would be challenged and volunteers are still needed to activate each candidate's posting when it's done (as in VOTE411)

If we use either of these sites, we should start work now on finding an intern through a college who can be a site administrator.

In general, we realize that many people throughout the state are relying more and more on internet sources for information, but with limited high-speed access in the northern part of the state, access is

difficult. We generally assume that younger voters will use the internet more than older voters, but we also realize that some younger voters will not seek out that information.

Questions raised: Who are the various audiences we are trying to reach with candidate information, and how do we reach those specific groups?

Older voters and others who don't use the internet much (many prefer **paper guides**).

Newspaper inserts (Drawbacks: small print can be hard to read, and cost. Advantages: reach many people at once. If we want to do this, we should start very soon finding out which papers would consider doing this us and start corporate fundraising to make it possible)

Paper guides in libraries and town halls

Drawbacks: costly to print and distribute, but could also be on state League's website in PDF format for libraries to download and print out additional copies.

Realistically these can cover only a few questions to each of a limited number of candidates. Would we want them to be district-specific so they can include state senate and house candidates? Who would prepare these multiple version?

Younger voters (need to get "in their face" with information). Paper guides in libraries and town halls (see above).

Social networking presence (how does one use Facebook to get potential voters to an online site such as VOTE411?)

Voters who want personal contact with candidates (such as in **candidate forums**):

We discussed increasing the number of **League-moderated candidate forums** across the state by training more moderators and offering their services to groups wishing to host a forum. This could be accomplished with letters to the editor explaining the service, asking groups such as a chamber of commerce or a PTO or a women's club to contact the state League. A willing moderator would then discuss and oversee the steps the group needs to go through to have the event, make sure all is place, and then moderate the event.

Several items needed here: the planning checklist and templates, which we can get and modify from LWVUS and from local Leagues who have been holding successful events. Also a job description for the moderator/mentor. Peg has a letter to editor template from another state League that did this.

The state League would also have to recruit League members to become moderators, calling on members at large throughout the state as well as local League members. Then the state League would have to plan the moderator training and hold it, likely in more than one location.

This model was accepted enthusiastically by those in attendance.

In addition, the model could be used to hold single-issue forums as well (such as a forum on education issues for a PTO group).

Voter Registration: Letters to the editor (state board can create template, get members around the state to send to local papers in their names).

Photo ID requirement: We didn't discuss specific strategies, but know that we would have to publicize this if it becomes law (if the governor's veto of that bill is overturned in the fall). That would include letting people know where non-drivers can get approved ID cards.

See letters to editor model above.

We also discussed the need for the League to get out information about voting registration to **high school students**.

Upper Valley League was successful in getting supervisors of the checklist to go into the high schools to register students. Works better when all students are from the same town, but we might try to get this organized in some large cities, even if regional school districts might be difficult.
Put posters in high schools to get students' attention, state simply how they go about registering.

Get out the vote campaign ideas: School-aged children can have a strong effect on getting their parents to do anything, including going to the polls. “Take your parents to vote” message could be promoted in schools (no specific suggestions on how to do this).

Put voting information posters in day care centers to reach young parents, many of whom may be new to an area or to NH and not sure how or where to register.

Discussion then shifted to the likely **Constitutional Amendments:**

Check the state website to see the complete text of these CACRs.

[CACR 6](#) has passed the House, is now in the Senate. It would require a 3/5 supermajority to raise new taxes or fees or to borrow money. (Now in NH tax and fee increases are generally just part of the budget bills and require only a majority vote to pass.

(opposition testimony by [Jeff McLynch, Executive Director, New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute, Before the Senate Internal Affairs Committee May 11, 2011](#)

(The League is opposed to this amendment.)

[CACR 12](#) and [CACR 14](#) (one is a Senate bill, one a house bill that will likely be presented as one bill after a committee of conference decides on final wording). This would essentially require state funding to schools to be “targeted” to neediest school districts, put the burden of school funding back on communities almost entirely. One version specifically takes the courts out of the mix. It could, in effect, make public schools “optional.”

(League also opposes this legislation via our funding government position.)

Discussion centered on whether the League can have more impact by

1. taking no public stand on these amendments and instead do a major campaign so that voters will understand, before going to the polls, what these amendments are and what a yes or no vote means.
2. Publicly opposing these amendments
3. Trying to do both simultaneously

If we take the neutral approach, we could hold issue forums in various locations across the state. We could also distribute fliers showing the pros and cons (get bill sponsors and opponents to either write blurbs or give us input on blurbs) and keep the League's name in the public's eye as a non-partisan group.

If we publicly oppose these amendments (through letters to editor? How else?) voters will learn about the negative impacts of passage, at least. We would be taking action on a League position.

If we try to do both things at once, educate the public and take a position—as Peg Fargo and Sally Embley related the League in NY state has done in the past—how do we go about that?