

Workshop#1 Creative Membership Activities

Birthday Box

The LWV Naperville created a Birthday Box for distribution to high school students when they turn 18. The goal is to get young people to vote. The students get a box with information filled with voter materials (magnet with absentee voter info, pen or stylus with inscription “The vote is mightier than the pen”, voter sticker, sample ballot, letter with registration/voting info and CANDY). Initially the box was mailed or delivered on the student’s actual birthday, but it was easier to conduct the distributions once per semester. The distribution is best carried out within a civic class or with help from a social studies or history teacher. These individuals are able to identify the students and can encourage them to sign up by email to receive a birthday box. A personal note from a voter is always a big hit. Volunteers are recruited to write these notes however, each entry must be screened for partisan language, inappropriate language, advertising, etc. The presenters recommended working with faculty sponsors to determine who should distribute the boxes—league members, teachers, etc. The final step involves a meeting of the group to decorate, assemble and label the boxes. It cost approximately one dollar each to deliver the box or envelope and \$500 to set up the logo placement on the box or envelope.

Resources to support the activity may be secured by a GoFundMe project, through a community program grant, village or city program, or a school PTO/PTA. Leagues were advised to avoid soliciting businesses due to our partisan stance. Finally, a plan to survey students following the election was completed to determine the number of students who received the box and what impact the birthday boxes had on voting behavior. 3500 boxes were distributed to high school students; 1200 indicated that the materials had a positive effect on their decision to vote.

Stroll to the Polls

The LWV Naperville believe that the best way to reach a voter is person to person. The idea of creating the stroll to the polls program is to provide students an opportunity for civic engagement. The project involved looking at data on voting in the community to determine voter turnout patterns. Low turnout districts were targeted for actions to improve voter engagement.

Student teams walk an assigned area in the precinct, going door to door equipped with a route, map, pen, voter ID card, painters’ tape, candy, a script, and return survey. In addition, they are given a voter information slip on early voting and voting in elections to leave. The routes are created after areas are surveyed to determine the number of houses that can be seen from the street; high rises are not visited. Before starting a route, the assigned team gathers at a close designated meeting site a half hour earlier(Sundays at 11:00 am) to sign in before starting the route at 11:30 a.m. Students are also required to sign out after completing their route which may take several hours.

The execution of this activity requires a good level of coordination with the school and help of a faculty advisor, the PTO/PTA, student groups and someone to create the door hanger and write the script.

The hard work of the league paid off in raising visibility, engaging students, and improving voter turnout. Analysis after the election showed a marked increase in voting in targeted precincts that had previously lower voter turnout. These metrics were shared with classroom teachers.

The LWV Naperville has graciously offered to help any league set up a similar program. They will allow their script and door hanger templates to be used or adopted. It was further suggested that leagues raise their visibility and the potential for increased membership by participating in local parades and giving out stickers, information or other league materials.

Workshop#2- Create, Foster and Sustain Partnerships in Your Community

Cultivating Relationships with Schools and other Youth Organizations

Heidi Graham from the LWV Arlington heights spoke about the appeal of establishing and maintaining a partnership with local school districts to include high schools, middle schools and elementary levels. The benefits of this outreach can raise community visibility, increase volunteer pools, provide fund raising opportunities and increase membership potential.

The league shared with participants which school officials or staff should be approached based on the grade level;

- H.S- reach out to social sciences and history teachers and division chairs; stress non-partisan stance; determine needs and goals and email prospective sponsor ideas or the plan for partnership; follow up with conversations
- For Middle and elementary schools approval is needed, start with the principal. Email your idea stressing the non-partisan stance of the league followed by conversations

Most of the ideas presented involved students at the high school level. These included:

1. Setting up Mock Elections at the school using technology such as laptops and survey monkey
2. Focus on voter activity in the school on National Voter Registration Day
3. Establishing a Student-Led Civic Club (requires a faculty advisor and food such as pizza over the noon hour)

Additional opportunities for high school students included utilizing them to assist at Candidate forums. Specific duties should be established.

Additional partnership ideas included working with houses of worship, the park district, having library hostings, and working with girl scout troops- proving incentives for students to earn a civic badge

It was further stressed that all student engagement should be posted on social media----if its not there it did not happen!

Coalition Building- Efforts to Get a Street Named for Ida B. Wells

The LWV of Chicago shared their experience of partnering with local groups to get a street named for Ida B. Wells. The league worked with many individuals and neighborhood organizations in an effort to win the support of the City Council for passage of an ordinance for the naming. The LWV of Chicago and ward constituents played a key role in finally obtaining the support of a key ally, the Transportation & Public Way Alderman on the City Council. Following much advocating the naming process was again moving forward. Balboa Drive was earmarked by the community as the street whose name would change, however there was political push back by some Aldermen asking the City Council to leave the

name unchanged. Balboa was an Italian Air Force Marshal that led a transatlantic flight of 24 aircraft from Ital to Chicago for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. His flight was of tremendous significance to the Italian American community. It was later discovered that Balboa was also serving under Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and was an important brutal leader in the movement that brought Fascists to power. The Italian community insisted that Balbo had accomplished other good deeds in his lifetime and these activities should not discredit his flight. Proceedings to approve the name change of Balboa Dr. stalled temporarily but an agreement was reached, and policies enacted by the Chicago City Council for changing the name of Congress Parkway to Ida B. Wells. A grand party and celebration was planned in recognition of the name change and the contributions of Ida B. Wells. The Chicago league talked about the unexpected connections and experiences gained resulting from working with others.

Jo Daviess City-Working with Community Partners

The LWV of Jo Daviess County have been studying the effects of ground water for some time. When the issue arose in their community they had no idea of where it might take them.

There was a confirmed dairy feeding issue in the Galena area. As use increased, the questions arose as to where the manure was going and whether it should be in the area. Controversy got very derisive and the dispute went on for years. The league of Jo Daviess County thought this is the kind of issue we should get involved in. In keeping with how the league works, a ground water study was conducted. That study revealed that the area has soft bedrock surface allowing surface pollutants such as plant and animal waste, sewage and industrial waste to enter the ground water. With this knowledge the league sponsored a mega dairy seminar to discuss the issue and raise the level of understanding. Over 50 farmers attend and came out of the seminar with a very different understanding of the issues. The seminar created more questions for the league. What kind of process or actions was needed and how could they work collaboratively to engage partners and other organizations? They began with science, using a science-based evidenced-based approach. Soil and water topology were studied by Uof I extension, water quality was sampled and studied county-wide. These findings were shared with farmers and landowners. This effort resulted in a 2-year process (Galena Water shed Study) of conducting research and connecting landowners and scientist; working with the EPA and undertaking geological studies and more. The league was doing the planning, while connecting people, and inviting them to join as partners. The collaborative work on the Galena water shed project has improved soil health and water quality in the area and expanded industrial farming in northwest Illinois.

Workshop#3 Criminal Justice

Criminal Justice Reform: The Way Forward—Research, Legislation, and League Advocacy

Presentations by David Olson, Criminal Justice & Criminology Dept, Loyola University

Ben Ruddell, Dir. Of Criminal Justice Policy for ALCU of Illinois

The League of Women Voters of Illinois is in the process of updating its criminal justice priorities so that we can effectively advocate for legislative reform in Springfield.

The criminal Justice System is an extremely complex system, fragmented and works across lines , mostly by design.

It's correct to note that many recommendations of Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform have been implemented by legislators, others are advancing and for some nothing has changed. Those that have advanced have bi-partisan support and are heavily driven by data and research. Legislators were not willing to support recommendations for those who commit violent crimes—they are not yet willing to have those conversations. Olson indicated that policies and practices should have an impact on the problem; he supports research, planning and analyzing the problem (evidence based approach)and recommends that county boards develop a strategic plan and analyze outcomes

He notes that a 19% reduction to date in sentencing is resulting from the change in conversation not the Commission recommendations. It is the biggest drop since 1960. For ex. Local communities are putting pressure on local police to change the way they look at drug use; retail theft changed the threshold from \$300 to \$500---\$1,000 threshold is recommended. Kim Foxx is using the \$1,000 figure. The jail population is down from 800 to 200.

Criminal justice policy and practice is what goes on at the local level

All justice is local

The drivers of prison population are :

- Admissions to prison
- How long people stay

In the early 1990's the prison population grew rapidly because more people were going to jail for drug convictions and staying longer. The current themes of reform center around undoing the drug laws that were in large part responsible for increases in the prison population.

Recidivism—people released from prison do not return for violent crimes as one might think but return most often because of domestic violence

The ACLU listed 6 key priorities to immediately and safely improve Illinois' Criminal Justice System

- Reduce the number of people in prison
- Focus on real rehabilitation
- Remove barriers to employment and education
- Treat substance abuse and mental illness as a public health issue

- Eliminate racial bias
- Rollback excessive fines and fees

An area of reform that is outside of legislation but is in the courts is bail reform. The Coalition to End Money Bond is trying to take the issue statewide. Three public hearings are scheduled across the state to hear public testimony on the issue. The coalition believes that a bond offered must be reasonable or within reach based on income.