

## **LWV Youth Membership Survey LWVUS 2006 Biennial Convention**

At the 2006 LWVUS Biennial Convention, a group of approximately 50 convention delegates attended the first ever Youth Caucus. This meeting was dedicated to getting the League's youngest members together to network and discuss their views about their current and future roles within the League and how to get younger women involved with the LWV. The meeting was held on Sunday, June 11, 2006.

Hosted by the LWV of Alachua County/ Gainesville, FL (LWVAC), the caucus was organized by Odetta MacLeish-White, current member of the LWVUS board and former President of LWVAC, Crystal Goodison, current President of LWVAC, and Elizabeth Reyes, LWVAC board member and Voter Editor.

The attendees of the Youth Membership Caucus hailed from 24 states, including: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Conveners of the caucus led an informal discussion and also distributed a survey to collect comprehensive answers from attendees. The purpose of the survey was to identify various factors and characteristics about current young members, in order to address how to attract more young members.

The survey questions addressed how and why current younger members became involved with the League, how much time they contribute to League, how members communicate and pass on knowledge, what kind of experience they had with the League, and what issues are of interest to young members. The survey also solicited for ideas on what the League can do to better attract younger members.

### **SYNOPSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS**

Of the caucus attendees, 21 responses to the Youth Membership Survey were collected. Survey results showed a demographic of young women, between the ages of 20 – 42, many of whom sought out the LWV through their own initiative. This may indicate a willingness of young people to get involved in civic and volunteer activities.

Most women shared having good experience with LWV activities, though some felt overwhelmed with responsibility. This may indicate a need for LWV to reach out and develop a larger base of volunteers, rather than relying on a few new ones to take over operations and responsibilities.

Included at the end of this survey is a list of suggestions and steps that can be addressed in order to attract and retain younger people to the LWV. Survey respondents offered specific suggestions that can be broken up into four major categories: (1) Events & Programming, (2) Recruitment, Retention & Mentoring, (3) Publicity & Marketing, (4) Flexible & Specific Volunteer Opportunities.

These suggestions offer a bridge between senior LWV members and junior members, and between current LWV members and LWV members.

## **Age**

Of the survey respondents who stated their age:

- Range of ages: 20 – 42
- Median age: 30
- Average age: 30

## **How did you hear about the League of Women Voters?**

Over a third of the respondents heard about the League through a family member, friend or colleague. Others heard about the League from various ways, including the Internet, at League and voter registration events, through their employment, and via the League's reputation in the community.

## **Why did you get involved with your local League?**

Survey respondents ranked civic responsibility and involvement, networking, and leadership opportunities at the top of their reasons for getting involved with the LWV. Other reasons included personal education, advocacy, academic interest, employment, and to act as a bridge between younger people and the LWV.

## **Were you recruited by a friend or at an event, or did you seek the League out of your own initiative?**

A majority of respondents sought out the LWV on their own initiative, for a variety of reasons, including:

- As a way to become involved in the community
- To learn about local politics
- Seeking volunteer work and opportunities
- Networking

Of those who sought out the League, some members found the League via the internet. Others asked around the community, and the League was recommended to them.

Over a third of respondents were recruited by a friend or at an event or after attending an event.

## **How would you currently rate your local league experience?**

An overwhelming majority of the respondents rated their League experience as excellent or good. Only a few people rated their experience as average, and no one rated it poor.

Those who responded with an "Excellent" experience said the League women were welcoming, enthusiastic, encouraging, helpful, and got the new members involved very quickly.

Some members who responded with a "good" experience felt they were excelled and given too much responsibility too quickly, while not having enough knowledge of League procedures and processes.

Responses of disappointment included:

- Lack of willingness to act or try new things to increase membership
- Group was more social than service.

### **Do you serve on a board or committee at your local League?**

Of the members surveyed, all were currently serving on a LWV board, or working for the LWV.

### **How many hours a month are you willing to contribute to your local League?**

The survey inquired about the number of hours young members are willing to contribute to their Local League. The answer to this question varied widely. The range of hours that young members were willing to contribute ranged from 2-3 hours a month to 120 to countless. Over a third of respondents answered 10 hours per month.

### **What issues are you interested in?**

Survey respondents listed the following areas of interest (listed in order of popularity):

- Voter services
- Civil Liberties
- Education
- Environment
- Immigration
- Campaign reform
- Health Care/ Public Health
- Affordable Housing
- Domestic Violence
- Justice System
- Women/ Children Issues
- Literacy
- Voter confidence & involvement
- Community involvement
- Encouraging ethical behavior by public policy makers

### **Does your local League pass on knowledge from senior members to new members, and if so, how?**

The answers here varied. About a third of respondents answered that knowledge was passed mainly via one-on-one discussions. Another third noted that knowledge was passed via mentoring activities and leadership training. Another third stated that knowledge sharing could be better, could be more organized, or that they had to ask for information.

### **What, if anything, can your local League do to help better fit the League into your lifestyle?**

Various suggestions were given:

- Offer flexible volunteer opportunities (not just long periods of time)
- Conduct evening and weekend meetings
- Have meetings at places other than churches
- Use more email for contact and communication
- Shorter board orientations/ meetings
- Welcome younger, dynamic members and be open to new ideas

## **Would you be interested in youth specific recruitment and networking activities sponsored by your local League or by National?**

All survey respondents indicated an interest. During the caucus, attendees stressed the need for a youth membership initiative to revitalize and sustain the LWV.

## **What can and should the League do to attract younger members?**

Survey respondents offered many useful suggestions for attracting younger members. The responses can be broken up into four major categories

- Events & Programming
- Recruitment, Retention & Mentoring
- Publicity & Marketing
- Flexible & Specific Volunteer Opportunities

### Events & Programming

Survey respondents suggested events, programs, and issues targeted towards younger populations. Suggestions included:

- Regular or monthly meetings & forums
- Networking events
- Social events
- Youth speakers
- Events on college campuses
- Sexier issues
- Programs that are more “hip”

### Recruitment, Retention & Mentoring

Many survey respondents suggested the LWV target recruitment activities on college campuses, including meeting with campus women’s groups and creating college internship programs. Others suggested the LWV look at partnering with other organizations, particularly those that already involve young people, for recruitment. Other respondents suggested the LWV offer leadership training and mentoring as a way to attract young members.

### Publicity & Marketing

Many respondents suggested that the LWV reach out to younger members through publicity and marketing geared towards younger people. Some suggestions included:

- Publicize, visit high schools
- Get the word out with targeted campaigns, messages, publicity
- Work on PR, visibility in the community with quality programs and forums
- Better messaging that appeals to younger members
- Actively work to change public views of the league as all “old ladies”
- More national visibility

### Flexible & Specific Volunteer Opportunities

Survey respondents indicated that young members need specific volunteer tasks and more action/ advocacy oriented activities at meetings. They also suggested flexible opportunities and times to get involved, indicating that young members need a range of volunteer commitments. Some women have full-time jobs, while others have children and families.