



League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County (LWVSSMC)

Final Report on Accomplishments of LWVSSMC's work in response to Stanford School of Business Alumni Consulting Team (ACT) Recommendations

Mission Statement: *The League of Women Voters (LWV) encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

INTRODUCTION

Four years ago the number of members in our League had declined dramatically, attendance at our events was down, and our volunteers were overloaded with work.

What could be done to disrupt this reality? A core group of veteran League leaders banded together, with support from our Board of Directors, to form an ad hoc membership team.

We decided to apply to the Stanford Graduate School of Business for assistance from an Alumni Consulting Team (ACT). We were looking for an analysis of our strengths and weaknesses and recommendations on how to improve and expand our League so we could make a positive difference for people in the communities we serve. We needed impartial recommendations on how to re-boot to achieve our mission.

We got this in spades. On February 11, 2017 our League received a tremendous gift of research, recommendations and hard work from a talented team of Business School alums who took on our challenge. Rick Warp, now our League Treasurer, headed our Stanford team of Alison Cormack, Stacey Newman, and Jammie Peng.

Clearly, without Rick's leadership and the acumen of his colleagues we couldn't possibly have accomplished so much. They worked over a five-month period doing the research to create a 'road map' for us.

Their report (many pages but large type and easily scanned) is available on our website at lwvssmc.org or by clicking on the following link **Stanford ACT Survey Results & Recommendations**.



Kathleen Weisenberg chaired the League's ad hoc membership team. Joining Kathleen were a core group who met 40 times over the next three years: Lisa Conrad, Patti Fry, Ellen Kitamura, Linda Liebes, Joyce Shefren and Lida Urbanek. Also participating were Tracy Clark, Shirley DesMarais, Suzanne Fouche, Sue Gould, Ellen Hope, Ashley Wagstaff and Rick Warp.

In addition, we held 13 meetings prior to receiving the ACT Report working on our goals and tweaking the application that was crafted by Ellen Kitamura with assistance from others on our team.

The objectives of our ACT project were to:

- 1) Substantially increase LWVSSMC membership
- 2) Increase the number of members who actively participate
- 3) Recruit and develop members to take leadership roles
- 4) Retain as many existing members as possible
- 5) Develop a membership strategy that could be replicated by other local Leagues and scaled up to use at State and National LWV levels

We also hoped to target and recruit a younger and more diverse demographic that better reflected the makeup of the six communities in our service area: Atherton, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Portola Valley, Redwood City and Woodside.

ACTIONS TAKEN

ACT presented the findings of their research and their subsequent recommendations to our ad hoc membership committee on February 11, 2017. Subsequently we launched a three-year concerted work effort to implement ACT's recommendations and meet the stated objectives.

Recruitment

Our first goal was to increase our membership.

The ACT research showed that people join:

- 1) For social reasons (e.g., they were invited to an event, they know someone in our League)

- 2) Because they are issue-oriented (e.g., they want to learn and potentially educate others)
- 3) Because they support our mission and want to make a contribution and have an impact

We relied on some of this research in implementing our recruitment strategy. For example, we reached out to friends and colleagues, offered meetings with excellent speakers on topics relevant to our communities, and offered mentoring and training.

Our first task was to follow up on the sign-ups we got at the January 21, 2017 Women's Rally in Redwood City. We believed people attending this event were interested in politics and issues and would provide a good source of potential members. We invited each person for coffee, one-on-one; many joined as a result.

All new members received a packet that contained:

- 1) A membership brochure
- 2) Background information on the League
- 3) Announcements of upcoming events
- 4) A copy of the U.S. Constitution

They also received a welcome note from the President and from the Membership Chair along with an online interest survey and encouragement to attend the next League meeting and new member orientation/onboarding.

Result: Our membership growth has been impressive: from 103 in early 2016 to a current total of 171. It has helped immensely to have a younger Membership Chair, Ashley Wagstaff, who is a natural recruiter, lead the recruiting effort.

Membership ebbs and flows and needs our constant attention. Every member, especially the Board, should be thinking of anyone in their circle who might be interested in joining us—and ask them!

Retention and Engagement Strategies

We've hosted 13 onboarding/orientation meetings for new and prospective members since March 2017. Seventy interested men and women attended to learn more about League's mission and history, how we're organized, our main functions, and the current issues we're following. They heard about upcoming speakers and programs, how they could become involved in our League, and how they could take action to strengthen our democracy.

We also asked them to share their interests, talents, and ideas. We took notes on each individual that we added to an ongoing list of new member profiles. This information was useful to committee chairs and our Nominating Committee.

We instituted a Mentor Program, involving seasoned League members who received training and were matched with a new member. Mentors met with their mentees, invited them to programs, and gave a warm welcome to newcomers. One happy side effect was that mentors increased their own attendance at League events!

We created an online Survey, user friendly and brief, to find out members' interests and best times for meetings. We've added a "Welcome to New Members" column in our VOTER and biographies of Board members in our Annual Meeting Kit. We successfully recruited new leadership, with seven new members now serving on our 14-member Board.

We recruited two members who are dedicated to handling the renewal process. We tightened the renewal period and emphasized the chance to renew online. We have created but not yet implemented a telephone exit survey.

Communication Enhancement/Technology Upgrades

Thanks to Communications Director Debby Maio, we brought our website up to Silicon Valley standards. Frequent updates keep the site "fresh" to encourage more viewing. You can access it at lvssmc.org.

We've made more of our communications digital:

- 1) Our Voter newsletter is now being published quarterly and distributed digitally via MailChimp.
- 2) We send e-blasts via MailChimp to our 171 members and 150 LWVSSMC Friends (people who have attended League events, but have not yet joined). The e-blasts publicize upcoming League events, updates on committee activities, and events being held by like-minded non-profits. These blasts typically go out twice a month but will become more frequent as we enter the 2020 election cycle.
- 3) Our Facebook followers have been growing steadily, and we expect substantial growth due to the 2020 elections.
- 4) We use Survey Monkey, typically for an annual appeal to our members for volunteers.

We are using Google G-Suite as our central location for all our files, communications, and financial reports, in addition to the Membership database. We no longer have individual members maintaining League files/records on their personal computers. This was a huge step forward in becoming more efficient and better organized!

Thanks to the expertise of League member Juanita Croft, we are using FileMaker Pro as our database application where members' and donors' contact information are stored and updated. Database files (Excel spreadsheets) are generated and stored on the Google Drive for easy access by the Board and other officers. Special requests for contact information (e.g., mailing labels, membership roster) are processed as needed.

The cloud environment we use is Google for Non-Profits and allows us to keep communications and storage in a central location. More could be done to improve use of emails and drive apps. It is a complex system that will take some time for members to take full advantage of, but this year we have seen much more use of the system.

Community Outreach/Diversity

We created a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Team whose mission is to become known to residents of target areas regarding League's mission and its work. We will start by:

- Holding League events that are relevant to residents in those areas
- Concentrating our voter services in those communities
- Coordinating League work with community groups already working there

We also plan to encourage interaction between League members across residential areas, and help all members become more aware of how hidden bias effects our understanding of others.

Since January 2019 we:

- 1) Organized Breakfast with the Mayor of East Palo Alto, Lisa Gauthier.
- 2) Co-sponsored with Palo Alto a book talk on Biased by Jennifer Eberhard.
- 3) Worked with our Housing Committee to organize a program with Kate Bradshaw, author of The Almanac series "Uneven Ground," held in one of our target areas.
- 4) Received Board approval for League co-sponsorship with Menlo Together for an event last fall: "The Color of Law: Menlo Park Edition." The event was a follow-up to Menlo Together's presentation about the book The Color of Law, A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America. The event focused specifically on Menlo Park.
- 5) Participated in League's successful effort for a County Grant for Voter Registration, which we will coordinate with a local community group in a target area.

In addition, the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Committee (currently 12-members strong) is in the process of organizing book discussions on Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving. We're also organizing a talk by an expert on Hidden Bias for April 2020. And we are currently discussing the possibility of reaching out to Youth United for Community Action (YUCA) and perhaps other community groups about a joint project on sea level rise.

Further Outreach Activity

We held three "Meet the Mayor" events for Menlo Park, Redwood City and East Palo Alto that helped League establish a relationship with each Mayor's Office. These events offered opportunities for our members to learn about issues and events directly from their city leaders and to communicate any thoughts or concerns. Still to go: Woodside, Portola Valley and Atherton.

Our collaboration with New Voices for Youth has expanded our reach into underserved communities of North Fair Oaks, Belle Haven and East Palo Alto.

We increased our League's impact in the past two years with a Voter Outreach Campaign led by Voter Service Director Geoff Ryder. 2018 was an election year, and our voter service outreach program reached more than 2,000 county residents in person. We also contacted 750 county residents via our in-person voter outreach program in 2019, an off year for elections.

During the 2018 midterm election cycle we:

- Trained 50 League members who worked a total of 42 events, primarily in the fall
- Held Candidate Forums for 6 City Council races with 11 members helping, reaching over 300 attendees plus many web replays
- Had 11 members participate in 15 presentations on the Pros & Cons of the November ballot measures, reaching hundreds of attendees
- Initiated a high school outreach program (described below)

In 2018, six out of fifteen (40%) of our voter service locations were in, or served residents from, precincts defined as having low voter turnout:

- Fair Oaks Community Center and St. Anthony's Catholic Church, North Fair Oaks
- Onetta Harris Community Center, Belle Haven Library, Second Harvest Food Bank operations and Facebook Festivals at Facebook Headquarters, all in Menlo Park

In 2019, the number of these precincts increased to eight out of twelve (66%):

- East Palo Alto YMCA and East Palo Alto Indigenous People's Festival
- Fair Oaks Community Center in North Fair Oaks
- Onetta Harris Community Center, Belle Haven Library, and JOBTRAIN in Menlo Park
- YearUp Program, hosted at Facebook in Menlo Park
- Menlo School Student Activism Festival, where students were bused in from other schools

We also held voter outreach events at Redwood City Library Main Branch and Cañada College, which serve residents from low-turnout precincts.

Our League, in collaboration with the nonprofit Belle Haven Action, was recently awarded a \$14,000 grant by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. We will use the funds to run a higher-paced version of our outreach program ahead of the 2020 Presidential Primary Election. We will use most of the money to hire part-time canvassers to walk precincts door-to-door that have historically low turnout, and hand out election and Census 2020 flyers. We will also run 50 traditional voter outreach tabling events in venues across South San Mateo County before March 3.

Our Education Committee chaired by new member Susan Briggs introduced League to future voters by creating a special High School Outreach program. The ultimate goal is

to reach all graduating seniors in South San Mateo County with information about the importance of voting, how to register, how to fill out a ballot and how to educate themselves on the issues and candidates.

So far our presenters have reached approximately 120 students at Menlo Atherton High School and about 30 students at Mid-Peninsula High. Presentations are revised based on student and teacher feedback.

Also scheduled is a presentation at Redwood High in Redwood City. We will present to another 180 students in six classes at Menlo-Atherton High before February 18, the last day to register before the California Primary. We involve about three to four League members per class. The Committee is also thinking about how to recruit younger presenters from the junior colleges.

We have a committee in place for this year's dual commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the League of Women Voters and of the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. We'll celebrate with an eye to increasing League's visibility throughout our communities. The committee is currently planning one special event for later this year. Our League will also be part of the suffragist contingent in this year's Fourth of July parade in Redwood City.

We held two successful annual fund drives, raising \$18,694 in FY 2017-18 and \$25,416 in FY 2018-19, a 36% increase. Sending timely thank you notes to our donors offers another chance to acknowledge how much we value them as members.

CONCLUSION

When we began to confront the membership decline in 2016, we set a goal of increasing our membership from 103 to 150—a somewhat daunting challenge but one we felt was worthy of an all-out effort. A year after receiving the ACT recommendations, we were up to 160 members—a solid overachievement! And we continue to grow: our current total is 171.

We not only attracted but also engaged more members. We saw numbers increase at our events, had more people join committees, and most exciting of all, successfully encouraged new—and younger—members to take on leadership roles, whether on our Board or as committee chairs. These men and women brought new energy and new ideas to our League and relieved the veteran volunteers from burnout stress.

This success cannot be taken for granted, for attrition is a fact of life in any organization. Membership must remain a priority for League leaders. In fact, every member can do their part in introducing League to their friends and colleagues and asking them to join.

We have greatly increased our operational efficiency through technological upgrades and improved communication. Our members realize more work is needed in this area but we are off to an impressive start.

Through our DEI Committee, we are working to establish trust between League and those in our underrepresented communities, an important first step in successfully recruiting new members there. It's important to continue our outreach efforts in schools and throughout our service area.

Our voter service team educated an impressive number of people about candidates, ballot measures, and voting over the last two years. The 2020 elections offer a perfect opportunity to keep our momentum going and increase our visibility, impact, and membership.

So far, we've shared our strategies with two state Leagues: the League of Women Voters of California as well as Washington state. We've also shared them with the local Leagues of Oakland, Palo Alto, and North/Central San Mateo County.

As we celebrate the League's 100-year history of nonpartisan service to voters throughout the U.S., our reputation remains the envy of many organizations. In the current political climate of often-uncivil discourse, our voice and commitment are needed more than ever. We can't stop now!

We owe a great deal to the ACT group who guided us and encouraged our efforts. Let's pledge to give back and continue implementing the important legacy ACT has gifted us.

Feb. 9, 2020