

Addressing Poverty at the Local Level, 2022:
A proposal for study by the League of Women Voters-Moscow
(Study update authorized by vote at LWVM annual meeting, 5-4-22)

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Problem statement from LWVM study report from 2012: “Poverty is sometimes invisible in Latah County. As such, needs may be overlooked by those who might otherwise help. A variety of resources are available, but gaps in communication limit cooperation among service providers and access by people who need their services.” (See <https://my.lwv.org/idaho/moscow/position/poverty-latah-county>)

Ideas for updated problem statement for 2022: “Poverty persists in Latah County. Socio-economic conditions have changed since the League’s study in 2012, and not all of the recommendations in the report have been implemented. What interventions could help alleviate poverty under present circumstances?”

Background: The problem was brought to the attention of Moscow’s mayor in Dec. 2010, when two service providers approached her independently, to express concern over growing demands on their services, without commensurate increases in outside funding and other support for their work. At the same time, area food banks were calling for more donations to keep up. Rather than address issues piecemeal, the City convened a series of well-attended forums among a wide array of stakeholders (“Poverty on the Palouse”), and participants expressed enthusiasm over the prospect of cooperative problem-solving. In March 2011, the LWV-M embarked on a formal study of poverty in the area, and issued its report in Dec. 2012. That study enhanced awareness, facilitated collaboration, served as justification for successful funding proposals, and yielded substantive results. A lot has changed in the intervening years. At the LWV-M annual meeting on May 4, 2022, members voted affirmatively that it’s time to reassess the status of local poverty and update its position through another study.

Questions: Is poverty still a significant problem here? Should it be addressed differently? If so, how? What resources exist? What’s lacking? How have circumstances/variables/trends changed since the 2012 report? In what ways could interaction among service providers and clients be improved? What is the role of government, if any? Is advocacy by the League of Women Voters appropriate?

Proposal: President and VP/Communications Chair will solicit volunteers to study particular aspects of local poverty. Agree to a timeline. Conduct a study to 1) Collate existing data to document the extent to which poverty is a problem in Latah County and the larger region. 2) Determine whether the numbers and underlying causes have changed over time. 3) Expand study to include other relevant aspects of poverty, as may be agreed upon by study team members. 4) Inventory existing services (including volunteerism and private sector donations) and identify gaps. 5) Calculate effects of increased demands and adequacy of governmental funding for various categories of users, as well as response by private funders and volunteers. 6) Identify which services are complementary and propose cooperation for efficiency. 7) Recommend ways to improve communication. 8) Plan for follow-up to assess effectiveness

of intervention, based on changes in demands, funding, and policies. 9) Advocate for policy changes to provide remedies and solutions as may be agreed upon through the consensus process.

Consistency with the LWV Mission: “The mission of the LWV is to encourage the informed and active participation in government and to influence public policy through voter education and advocacy.” With regard to poverty, *lack of public awareness* and *limitations in interaction* among agencies and service providers are basic to the problem, so *education* is integral to the success of intervention. Funding programs to address poverty costs something, but there are societal costs associated with not addressing it too. Identifying the roles of various public and private sectors will clarify the relative need and benefits of *advocacy*.

Possible Approaches (including how public policy can address the problem):

- Gather the facts. Numerous resources were identified through the previous LWV-M Poverty Study and Report (2012), the City’s broad-based *Poverty on the Palouse* forums (2010-2014), and others from various organizations/agencies. Food insecurity became the focus of Poverty on the Palouse, beginning in 2017.
- Initial study looked at housing, food insecurity, childcare, transportation, and healthcare. Consider that this study could be more expansive, to also include social justice; opportunities for job training and employment; and legislation pertaining to this study (including new/pending bills). Other categories?
- Incorporate categories from study into themes for speaker forums.
- Inform the public. Once the facts and personal stories about the extent and effects of poverty are gathered, a public awareness campaign could help alleviate some of the problems. An informed and engaged public is more likely to support programs, projects, and policies that efficiently address problems they understand.
- Advocate for an agreed-upon position and recommendations to policymakers. Policy is shaped by many factors, but having the facts and being able to relate on a human level are important to making informed decisions. Rational and compassionate advocacy is a means to that (non-partisan) end.

Resources (including lead role):

- Nancy Chaney, member 2022 LWV-M poverty study appointed by president; co-chair previous poverty study/report (2012); former mayor for Moscow (2006-2014) and convenor of the City’s Poverty on the Palouse forums, 2010-2014. (nchaney@moscow.com, H/O: (208) 882-9350, cell: (208) 596-5836)
- Nancy Lyle, co-chair LWV-M poverty study/report 2012, healthcare (nancyl@moscow.com; H: (208) 882-7025)
- See Pullman League’s study of poverty (initially modeled after Moscow’s)
- News reports
- Other potentially interested League members so far...
 - Kay Keskinen, food insecurity
 - Louise Davison (*limited role?* Previously worked on stats/quantifiable aspects)
 - Jennifer O’Laughlin (potentially, a *limited role*; previously worked on statistics and quantifiable aspects of poverty)
 - Kylee Britzman (*limited role?*), kylee.britzman@gmail.com
 - Dulce Kersting-Lark, early childcare (complementary parallel study)