



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA[®]

Democracy in Dialogue Workshop Presentation • May 16, 2015

Given at the LWVC Convention in San Diego, CA

Presenters: Collaborative Team of LWV Members from San Diego, North County San Diego, San Luis Obispo County and LWV State of Washington

Applying Democracy in Dialogue

Take stock of your community and your League:

- What are the issues in your community?
 - Is a community survey needed to define them?
 - What's the voter turnout rate in your community?
- Is your League currently engaging with a diversity of voices in your community on any of these issues?
- What actual or perceived obstacles prevent you from doing so?
 - What is your plan for overcoming these obstacles?
- Do you have a nucleus of members willing to take on projects of civic engagement?
- Do you need training to accomplish this?

Do your homework. Familiarize yourself with the broad scope of civil discourse, community engagement, and deliberative dialogue resources that currently exist. As you become familiar with the wide range of engagement methods available, what approach seems to be the best fit for your situation?

- Are you looking to provide a “one and done” informative presentation?
- Are you looking to provide a series of forums that are incremental, resulting in informed dialogue and deliberation?
- Are you looking to incorporate information, dialogue and deliberation into an initiative building exercise that produces findings for later community use?

Look for and reach out to potential collaborative partners:

- Who are the “voices of political analysis” in your community (who gets interviewed during election time by local newspapers or TV)? Seek them out. Make them aware of LWV resources. Look for ways to collaborate – invite them to be headliners at a League forum to draw an audience.
- Mindfully seek out a variety of diverse community groups as potential partners. Ask “*How can the work we are doing align with and support the work you are doing? We are natural collaborators.*”
- Encourage your League’s group participation in non-League-focused community events, such as holiday food drives, Earth Fairs, etc. to expand League’s community presence.
- Explore relationships with your local academic institutions. Western Assn. of Schools & Colleges (WASC) accreditation has a community engagement component. Look for ways that students can support League’s work as part of their service



learning. Example: Engage student interns at election time for research and online social media posting or observers at government meetings.

- Partner with your local libraries. They are eager participants with a focused mission in community engagement and have low-cost or no-charge facilities for public meetings.
- Partner with businesses willing to co-host gatherings or provide food/drink to reach a diversity of individuals in your communities in unexpected ways.

Reach out to your elected officials:

- Encourage the support of your community/county elected officials through capacity-building to understand the power of true community engagement.
- Collaboratively partner to seek ways to fund community engagement activities. Will they champion grant applications, for instance?

Develop a media presence in your community:

- Create an action team focused on developing a positive relationship with your community/county media. Write letters to the editor or articles of community interest. Incorporate the work of student interns to expand your media presence.

Move toward meaningful change:

- Be prepared to help citizens understand and exercise their civic power through engagement efforts like Participatory Budgeting and calls for government transparency, accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness.
- As League, consider the *Deliberative Issue Frame* (501c3) versus *Persuasive Issue Frame* (501c4). As citizens engage on issues, will your League take action?

Excerpt from **Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson** by Robert A. Caro, (p. 953), “To keep the two sides negotiating – to keep the 1957 civil rights bill from degenerating into the open hostility and bitterness on the Senate floor in which so many previous civil rights bills had died – **he had to persuade them to conduct the debate in an atmosphere of outward friendliness and respect, or at least civility,** so for some days after Part III had been disposed of, the opening scene of the Senate each noon hour featured the Majority Leader as Emily Post. In statements written by Reedy and delivered during his opening remarks each day, **Johnson encouraged the Senate to mind its manners, saying on one day that the Senate was on trial, that the world was watching it, and that he was confident that the Senate would do itself proud, that his colleagues would “continue debate as reasonable men.”** On another day, he said he was happy to see his confidence justified. **“Never before have I seen in the Senate a debate which has contributed so much to understanding. In that sense, I think the debate has been one of the finest that the Senate has ever had.”** Day after day, he repeated his plea that they **be fair and open-minded, open to reason and compromise, and praised them for being so reasonable and open-minded thus far – which of course made it harder for them to act otherwise, and kept them, as much as possible, on their best behavior.”**

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What do you need to get started?