



Planning a Thriving Future for
*The League of
Women Voters of
Colorado*

Prepared by Joining Vision and Action (JVA)

www.joiningvisionandaction.com

For The League of Women Voters

<http://lwvcolorado.org/lwv/>

May 2018



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Visioning of Legacy	4
The Research	5
Big Questions.....	6
SMART Goals	8
Recommendations for Next Steps.....	10
Closing	11

INTRODUCTION

The League of Women Voters of Colorado (LWVCO) has contributed to governance in our state and support of citizens in their role in public affairs since it was organized in 1928. As a nonpartisan political organization, the League encourages informed and active participation in government, works toward increasing understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. In 2018, LWVCO partnered with Joining Vision and Action (JVA) to facilitate a strategic planning process. As part of this, JVA and LWVCO conducted research over several months to:

- Better understand local League member and leader perceptions through an online survey
- Learn about best practices and lessons learned from similar organizations across the country through models research
- Gain insights about strategic questions facing the state League from board members and additional members

This research process culminated in a strategic planning session on April 25, 2018. The desired outcomes of this process were to:

- Ensure sustained and renewed energy and support for LWVCO's mission
- Build organizational capacity to adapt and to lead most effectively in the future
- Increase LWVCO's impact in Colorado to make a difference in building the active, informed citizenry that Colorado needs and deserves

This report presents the summary of that journey. The following LWVCO members participated in the retreat:

Marlu Burkemp, director at large (Arapahoe and Douglas counties)

Gerry Cummins, 4th vice president/voter service (Arapahoe and Douglas counties)

Jean Fredlund, director at large (Denver County)

Deb Gard, Legislative Action Committee (LAC) chair-elect (Jefferson County)

Jeannette Hillery, LAC chair (Boulder County)

Toni Larson, president (Denver County)

Mary Lonergan, president of the Jefferson County League

Barb Mattison, development co-chair (Denver County)

Andrea Mitchell, secretary (Denver County)

Cath Perrone, 2nd vice president/administration (Jefferson County)

Linda Porter, treasurer (Jefferson County)

Ann Roux, development director (Arapahoe and Douglas counties)

Beth Sale, office administrator (Denver)

Patty Schoedler, Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) co-chairperson (Jefferson County)

Jeanette Scotland, secretary (Denver County)

Bonnie Seals, treasurer (Estes Park)

Ruth Stemler, director-at-large (Boulder County)

Sue Vaughan, 3rd vice president (Jefferson County)

VISIONING OF LEGACY

LWVCO was first reminded of its strategic framework as members considered how to reframe policy work as part of its commitment toward full participation in our democracy. The vision, mission, value and programmatic strategies of the national League are listed below:

League of Women Voters U.S. guidance

VISION: *We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate.*

MISSION: *Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy*

VALUE: *The League believes in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy. (Not adopted by LWVCO)*

5 CORE PROGRAMMATIC STRATEGIES:

- Ensure voter access
- Mobilize voters
- Provide voter education
- Ensure voter protection
- Promote transparency and accountability in government

LWVCO members were asked to reflect on what people would be saying and celebrating in 25 years as a result of the work done by the LWVCO today. The following statements of legacy were presented and grouped to help shape the story of what LWVCO will do to accomplish future impact:

Through... strategic communication, engagement and outreach, LWVCO:

- Is flexible, creative, diverse and actively seeking collaboration
- Has membership demographics that reflect society
- Is multicultural and diverse and multigenerational
- Is action-oriented
- Is inclusive of minority views

The strategic communication results in the LWVCO being:

- A “force to be reckoned with” in visibility and influence
- A respected nonpartisan resource for voter education information and a resource for candidate forums
- Seen as the “go to” well-known resource for democratic participation
- The recognized authority on voting and elections in Colorado

Which, ultimately, leads to the following long-term impacts:

- Voter participation in Colorado being the highest in the nation
- Strong female leadership in the Colorado Legislature as a result of encouragement by LWVCO
- The protection and advancement of voting rights for all
- The advancement of equality under the law

And, overall, the belief that when democracy was tested, the League stood up.

THE RESEARCH

To lay a foundation for the conversation, JVA provided a summary of research collected using three primary methods:

- 1) The member and leader online survey, which was distributed to all 18 local Leagues and included complete responses from 483 members and leaders
- 2) The models research—conducted via 11 interviews with leaders of eight other state Leagues and three Colorado advocacy and engagement organizations

- 3) The board and strategic planning online survey, which gathered information from 15 LWVCO board members and three additional contributors

These data collection efforts informed the strategic planning process with key takeaways across diverse groups (for full research summary, please see separate report). Top areas of agreement in feedback gathered from the board, leaders and membership revealed strengths and areas for improvement. Strengths included membership quality, LWVCO's role in the community and through voter education, LWVCO's reputation and its current leadership. Areas for improvement that were identified included the allowance for and incorporation of alternative viewpoints; membership size, diversity and engagement; identification of goals and execution of strategies to achieve them; and development of future leadership.

The models research added perspectives on organizational programming, finances, communication, marketing and membership, best practices, lessons learned and trends. Discussion about aligning with the national League and moving forward with strategic direction for the state League was acknowledged. LWVCO also received updates on its influence in the redistricting process that strengthened its momentum to embark upon the strategic planning work.

BIG QUESTIONS

Four themes emerged across JVA's research, each one representing a core area of LWVCO's focus:

Big Questions Facing LWVCO

- *What will we do to increase **membership** (numbers, diversity, engagement)?*
- *What will we do to increase visibility, tell our story and improve internal and external **communications**?*
- *How do we effectively leverage **collaboration and partnership** to increase impact and achieve our other goals?*
- *How do we increase resources through **fundraising**?*

After review of the big questions, retreat participants were encouraged to consider which areas would have the most impact. These are some of the ideas generated:

1. **Membership:** What will we, as the state League, do to increase membership (numbers, diversity and engagement)?
 - Sponsor an inclusive statewide forum open to anyone, with virtual communication, co-sponsorship and outreach to affiliates
 - Collect good membership ideas from local Leagues and other membership organizations and distribute them

- Consolidate efforts at the state level to strategically grow membership size and diversity
 - Reach out to our like-minded “competitors” to become a resource and supporter
 - Provide a free student membership, as already proposed by the national League
 - Develop a Youth Advisory Council with youth from across the state
 - Host YouTube radio shows with “questions of the week” covering hot topics such as fake news, climate change, or voting information
2. **Communication:** What will we do to increase visibility, tell our story and improve internal and external communications?
- Be more strategic with activity on social media (e.g., topics or accomplishments posted consistently for Facebook; consider hiring someone to do this)
 - Communicate state information directly to members
 - Use webinars to communicate state and local success stories
 - Design a plan for strategic communication (to be reviewed annually)
 - Hire a communication specialist/executive director to assure that planning is being carried out correctly
 - Professionalize communication strategies
 - Create a statewide database of members and nonmembers with a task force to consider price, accessibility and affordability, and tech support
 - Increase internal communication via email blasts to local Leagues and other groups (these should highlight what the state board is doing and what activities the LWVCO is working on)
 - Create a process for sharing information and getting input from local Leagues
3. **Partnership and Collaboration:** How do we effectively leverage collaboration and partnership to increase impact and achieve other goals?
- Build relationships with multicultural and multigenerational organizations to learn from them
 - Review internal affiliation process (i.e., have one person in charge)
 - Share League partner list; network and nurture relationships

- Assign board member to affiliates (i.e., a partner liaison; note that this does not always need to be one board member, it can change depending on the topic or existing relationship)
 - Increase direct flow of communication from the state League to local Leagues
 - Work with other groups to further the League mission
 - Provide service leadership (i.e., “How can we help you?”)
 - Support local Leagues with identified criteria (use Strategy Screen: <http://lapiana.org/insights-for-the-sector/insights/strategic-planning/the-strategy-screen>)
4. **Fundraising:** How do we increase resources?
- Share ideas that local Leagues can use (e.g., book review, King Soopers gift cards, grant ideas, event ideas)
 - Apply for grants
 - Leverage our successes to ask for donations
 - Have a professional fundraiser/grant writer/executive director
 - Have a fully functional database—state and local
 - Target non-League consistent donor communication on LWVCO’s impact (annual report)

SMART GOALS

To tackle the big questions and begin to set strategies for LWVCO, participants created SMART [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound] goals for the identified topic areas of membership, communication, partnership, and fundraising. Table groups worked together to identify at least one or two SMART goals for one of the four areas. The identified goals for LWVCO are shown below in Table 1. The timeline for these goals was established as 12–24 months. The included LWVCO Action Plan is an Excel document that will allow the League to update and add details to the following goals, including who is responsible, and strategies and tactics to accomplish each goal.

Table 1. LWVCO SMART Goals

LWVCO SMART goals
<p>Membership:</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 1. By May 1, 2018, LWVCO will implement free student membership to engage younger members and increase membership to 100 students by January 31, 2019.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 2. By January 1, 2019, LWVCO will form a diversity, equity and inclusion (D.E.I.) task force to explore collaboration and engagement of multicultural and multigenerational individuals and communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Communication:</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Internal Communication</i></p> <hr/> <p>Goal 3. By May 31, 2019, and beginning in August 2018, the state president or designee will provide an opportunity to speak with her (seven times) and at least 30% of the members will participate in at least one conversation.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 4. By May 31, 2019, and starting in August 2018, LWVCO will provide a monthly update of state board activities that address the question of what the state board does to impact local League members.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>External Communication—Shorter Term</i></p> <hr/> <p>Goal 5. By May 31, 2018, LWVCO will appoint or hire a communications director.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 6. By December 2018, and beginning in May 2018, LWVCO will publish monthly stories about League programs and successes to the press and currently identified affiliations (via web, Facebook, etc.), as measured by having five stories by the end of 2018.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 7. By December 2018, LWVCO will broaden board membership to include community members with expertise in communication and fundraising as measured by three new members.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 8. By December 31, 2018, LWVCO will identify a committee to help with the creation of a business plan for the hiring of an executive director.</p> <hr/> <p>Goal 9. By December 31, 2018, LWVCO will have the technology for an electronic board meeting.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>External Communication—Long Term</i></p> <hr/> <p>Goal 10. By June 2019, LWVCO (with professional help) will develop an external communication plan that will be passed by the board. The plan will include processes for affiliate groups, potential donors, other Leagues and social media, and an implementation plan.</p> <hr/>

LWVCO SMART goals

Collaboration and Partnership:

Goal 11. By June 2019 (the convention), LWVCO will partner with two multicultural or multigenerational organizations as measured by two activities per group (i.e., new groups or those with a current affiliation that offer additional leverage).

Fundraising

Goal 12. By December 31, 2018, LWVCO will meet all existing fundraising activity amounts.

Goal 13. By December 31, 2018, LWVCO will set up a process to commence hiring an executive director/professional fundraiser to be hired in 2019.

Goal 14. By December 31, 2018, the board will develop a database of donors and potential donors that includes both members and nonmembers, allowing LWVCO to easily create impact reports and communications to potential donors.

The Garden (Follow-up Items)

Additionally, the following items were placed in “the garden” for follow-up by LWVCO members after the retreat:

1. Form a technology and data management committee to assess the interest and need of local Leagues and the state office for Association Management System software (Club Express)
2. Focus on impact data by collecting three data points from each League in the state (e.g., voters registered, and non-League members attending educational events)
3. Develop a task force to design a comprehensive program for training and technical assistance needs of local Leagues
4. Read the online Indivisible Guide for concrete ideas of how to influence and organize voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

1. Keep the camaraderie and teamwork from the retreat in the forefront in moving through the processes of implementation.
2. Complete the LWVCO Action Plan to include who is responsible and identify strategies, tactics and interim deadlines to accomplish each goal.

3. Embed reporting on strategic planning goals in board meeting agendas to support progress and infuse accountability.
4. Make decisions on next steps for items placed in “the garden” for follow-up.

CLOSING

Reflecting on the day, retreat participants were asked to share one thing they were excited about. Participants noted their gratitude for a successful planning retreat with strong agreement on the value of, and path for, their work together in the future.

During its planning session, LWVCO built on its strong foundation and engaged in productive dialogue to recommend the strategies outlined in this report. Informed by comprehensive research methods, the strategic framework allows LWVCO to adapt and ensure sustained and renewed energy to support its broader mission and increase relevance and influence in the midst of changing times.

LWVCO is well positioned with the organizational capacity to move forward and fulfill its visions of legacy as a force to be reckoned with, knowing that when democracy is tested, the League stands up.

