EMPOWERING THE VOTERS OF TOMORROW

Developing Winning High School Voter Registration Programs
Introduction

In recent election years there has been a focus on the ‘youth vote’. Will they turn out? What do they care about? Do candidates care about them? There are good reasons for this focus. By 2012, Millennials (those under the age of 30) will represent 24 percent of the voting age population. In many respects, these young people are coming of age at a time of unprecedented diversity and opportunity. At the same time, they are growing up in a nation faced with fundamental questions about its place in world. Young people represent the future. In order to become the leaders who will propel us in the right direction in the future, they must first become voters.

Voter registration is critical to spurring young people to get involved. The fact is, 91 percent of the young people who registered to vote in 2008 actually turned out to cast a ballot. Unfortunately, less than half of all 18-year-olds were registered to vote. Too many of these young people report that it is lack of information, not lack of interest, that keeps them on the sidelines at election time. We can do something about that.

Like many others, the League of Women Voters believes that we all have a role to play in inspiring and empowering young voters to register to vote. What’s more, we have a responsibility to reach out to the young people who are too often left behind because they fall into the 43 percent of Americans who do not attend college, do not live in predominately white neighborhoods and do not frequent places where many voter registration drives are held.

This comprehensive training manual is designed to reach potential young voters in high schools, especially those most in need of quality voter registration information. The manual represents best practices gleaned from hundreds of volunteer hours by members of the League of Women Voters through the 2010 High School Voter Registration Project. In this pilot program, the League and Project Vote teamed up to test voter registration strategies in some of our nation’s most diverse high schools.

This manual constitutes a comprehensive game plan for executing and evaluating a high school registration drive, including tips for conducting the follow-up with young registrants that is critical to transforming them into lifelong voters. The materials are field tested for success by organizers and community leaders who share the goal of engaging young voters.

The League of Women Voters has worked for over 90 years to assist and inspire all Americans to take charge of their democracy. A key element of that work has been voter registration and education. Reaching young voters with the proper tools and information to allow them to engage in the civic process is a particular passion. We hope that educators, elections officials, and other organizations will build on these practical resources in order to inspire lifelong voting habits.

We gratefully acknowledge our anonymous supporter and Carnegie Corporation of New York for making the production of this manual possible. We also thank LWVUS Elections and Youth Program Specialist Maggie Duncan, who authored this guide and managed the League’s 2010 High School Voter Registration Project, as well as Jeanette Senecal, Senior Director of Elections and e-Democracy, who was integral to this project, and Elections Coordinator, Allison O’Flinn, who designed this guide.

Through thoughtful collaboration, it is possible to help all young people become active and engaged leaders.

Elisabeth MacNamara

President, League of Women Voters of the United States
EMPOWERING THE VOTERS OF TOMORROW

Developing Winning High School Registration Programs

A Training Guide

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
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Anyone who has tried it would likely agree that effective high school voter registration programs require a good deal of planning and dedicated volunteer and/or staff time. This chapter aims to help you plan for success in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Before starting any high school voter registration campaign, it is important to discuss your objectives, timeline and plan for achieving success. Key questions include:

- How many schools will we target?
- How will we identify our target schools?
- How many people—volunteers or staff—will we need, and how will we find them?
- What costs will we incur?
- What will best inspire students to register and vote in our community?

Based upon our 2010 High School Voter Registration Project findings, as well as helpful feedback from Leagues and other organizations around the country, we have compiled the following best practices to help guide your work. Please note that while most League programs were carried out by predominantly all-volunteer teams, we have made every effort to provide relevant guidance for any volunteer-managed or staff-driven process.

**Build a Versatile Team**

Before embarking on your high school registration effort, work to put together a team of dedicated, detail-oriented individuals who can be relied on to see your effort to completion. Consider incorporating the following individuals into your team:

- Enough people to ensure at least two or three can attend each school activity.
- Someone who is not afraid to pick up the phone and call (and call, and call) school personnel.
- Motivational speakers who are ready to speak enthusiastically about voting to large groups of young people (hint: this manual has resources to help you do it!).
- Someone well-versed in voter registration rules in your state.
- A reliable “organizer in chief” to lead logistical and coordination efforts: This could be a student (high school or college) intern and should be someone who can think outside the box when it comes to tackling tough challenges.
Train Your Team

Once you have established your team, include them in the planning process and put them to work! While some individuals may be long-time registration experts, many will not. That is why it is important for everyone to participate in a mandatory training and planning session before your registration activities begin. We’ve strived in this manual to help answer questions ranging from “What should I say?” to “What information can I gather from completed registration forms? Why should I do so?” and everything in between. A well-prepared team is essential to carrying out a successful program.

Once you’ve read through this manual and explored the resources available in the Appendices, pull together your team for a training session. See Appendix D for a detailed training and work plan including the following elements:

- Covering state/local election laws.
- Rights and responsibilities of deputy/third-party registrars.
- Practice walking through the registration form and discussing common questions.
- Conduct mock presentations to students.
- Discussion of data to be collected at each event.
- Protocol for handling completed registration forms, including timeline, copying of legally allowed information for future follow-up, supporting elections officials and more.

Choose Schools Strategically

Studies consistently show that certain groups of young people—communities of color, those unlikely to go on to college and those living in low-income areas are less likely than the rest of their peers to register to vote. Feedback from Leagues conducting high school registration work also suggests that the schools serving large numbers of underrepresented students were also less likely to have incorporated voter registration into their curriculum. Thus, conducting registration work at schools in underserved areas can have the twofold benefit of helping combat chronic underrepresentation and assuring that organizations will reach the largest numbers of unregistered youth. In other words, choosing schools wisely can help organizers get the biggest bang for their buck.

To maximize your impact, consider targeting:

- Schools in high-minority or low-income areas in your community
- Schools with high numbers of students who qualify for free breakfast and/or lunch
- Alternative/continuing education/occupational/trade schools
- Schools in Native American communities
- Institutions serving young people in the juvenile justice system, halfway houses, or reformatory schools.

Send no less than two people to each school activity
How Many Schools?

Of all the lessons learned through the 2010 High School Project, perhaps the most significant was that scheduling registration activities at high schools, especially those located in high-need neighborhoods, often requires repeated outreach. In fact, in many cases this preparatory work, not the registration events themselves, required the greatest time commitment.

While at some schools you might connect immediately with the right person who is ready and able to set up your visit, it is more likely that you will encounter extremely busy or even unresponsive school personnel. Inevitable scheduling constraints and timing concerns must also be taken into account. Furthermore, some school districts require that persons or organizations visiting their campuses be subject to a background or ID check. Be sure to ask whether any such requirement could affect your registration project planning.

Thus, it is recommended that outreach to schools begins at least three months before any planned registration events. Only plan to target as many schools as you can realistically contact (and follow up with) on a weekly or biweekly basis until an event date is secured. If your initial target list proved difficult to “break through” to, consider casting a wider net.

Scheduling Events

While many would assume that proximity to a major November election would be the best time to schedule registration activities, there are additional factors to take into account.

First, early fall tends to be a very busy start-up time for schools as well as civic organizations, meaning that scheduling an activity in this timeframe might be difficult. Second, registration deadlines are as much as thirty days before Election Day in many states, meaning you might only have a four or five week window after the start of the school year during which to schedule an event. Finally, and most important, most high school seniors will not turn 18 by Election Day, the age of voting eligibility in most states.

For the reasons cited above, the 2010 research effort showed that late winter/early spring registration activities were more effective than those in the fall, both in terms of the total numbers of young people registered to vote as well as the effort required to access school personnel and schedule events. There too, though, there are challenges. Spring testing, graduation activities, final exams and general end-of-the-year excitement all affected Leagues’ ability to schedule registration work and hold students’ attention. Late winter/early spring was generally the best time to hold registration events, with outreach and scheduling ideally beginning before the end of the previous calendar year.

To help guide your planning and expected impact, keep this in mind: during LWVUS’s 2010 High School registration project, volunteer teams reported that slightly fewer than half of the schools they contacted were ultimately able to schedule registration events. Additionally, Leagues collected completed registration applications from approximately three out of every ten students they encountered during classroom visits.
Touch Base With Local Elections Officials

Before embarking on a full-scale high school effort, contact your local elections officials to inform them of your plans and lay the groundwork for a fruitful relationship. First, ask what they are already doing to encourage registration at area schools. Explain that you want to help support or enhance any current efforts—or, if none exist, that you are ready to lend your time and resources to develop a successful program.

This initial conversation is a good time to set up a date to pick up voter registration applications and other materials your official(s) may make available. It is also a key opportunity to prepare officials for a potential influx of voter registration applications and offer your support in helping to process them. League volunteers who participated in the 2010 High School Registration project reported overwhelmingly fruitful collaborations as a result of their outreach to local elections officials, rating their interactions on average 4.95 out of 5.

Finally, this initial conversation is your opportunity to ask clarifying questions regarding any rules that govern third party voter registration drives in your state. For example, some states offer or require organizations or individuals who conduct voter registration drives to register with the state or participate in mandatory training sessions. Others require such individuals to become deputized before beginning a voter registration program. Your state or local officials may have produced helpful resources or guides for third party registrars; this is your opportunity to ask!

Maximize Personal Interactions

Based on consistent feedback from League members around the country, it is clear that just setting up registration tables in crowded cafeterias or school hallways is generally neither effective nor time efficient, and often results in very low numbers of voter registration applications collected.

Instead, we recommend that you work with your target schools to develop registration events that enable interactive conversations that will really resonate with students. In fact, research gleaned through the League’s 2010 High School Voter Registration Project indicates that in addition to being more cost-effective, individual classroom visits are twice as effective as large group assemblies in encouraging young people to register to vote.

Whether you plan to visit government classes, set up small discussions or arrange another event format, the most important thing to do is ask the school to dedicate time and space specifically for registration, and ensure students are compelled to attend—either because teachers require it, or extra credit or other incentives are offered for attendance, or the school deems it a priority. See the next chapter for specific tips on how to structure your event.

Aim to schedule registration events in early spring.

See Appendix D for a detailed work plan to help you stay on track!
Do a Little Prep Work

As the day of your registration event approaches, confirm the event with your school contact and make sure you have a full understanding of when you should arrive, how long you will be at the school, and how many classes/groups you will meet with. Some additional details to consider:

Make sure eligible students will actually be in attendance on the day of your event. This is important—several Leagues participating in the 2010 project arrived at school events only to find out it was “senior skip day” or that all 18-year-olds were on a field trip!

Ask about your schedule. If attending classrooms, ask how much time you will have in each room, whether the school follows a block or other special schedule, or whether you should plan a few days’ worth of visits to reach every eligible student.

Ask the school to publicize your visit through morning announcements, a school paper or TV/radio show, bulletin board, or other means. See a sample flyer in Appendix H.

Make sure the school prepares students by instructing them to bring any identification or other required personal information. All states require a driver’s license number or part or all of an applicant’s social security number—information most young people will not know off the top of their heads.

Follow Up

Multiple studies and registration programs have found that simply helping young people register to vote is not enough; critical follow-up is needed in order to transform new registrants into informed and active voters. In fact, many voter registration organizations live by the “3 contacts” rule: all newly registered voters must be contacted with voter education information at least three times before they are likely to turn out to vote. By planning ahead to gather contact information about the young people you help register, you will prepare your team to conduct critical follow-up communications. You will also create backup data that can empower your team to act on registrants’ behalf should any problems occur at the point of registration by local elections officials. See Chapter 3 for detailed best practices on data collection.

Working with schools is not a one-size-fits-all task. However, by thinking ahead and anticipating challenges, your team can greatly minimize barriers to success on the day of your registration event. See Appendix D for a comprehensive work plan to help you stay on top of the details every step of the way.
Once you have scheduled a date and time to conduct registration at a high school, even more questions come to mind: Do I know what to say? What should I bring? What are the rules guiding registration work in my state? This chapter provides guidance for pulling off an effective and engaging registration event.

What Should I Say?

Keep it simple. High school students have short attention spans for things they don’t already care about and have a lot on their plates. The most successful presentations are short, sweet and interactive.

Focus on the registration form. This may be the first time some students have ever filled out an official government form. Go slow; take time to answer students’ questions and keep your responses simple. The bulk of your presenting time should be set aside for actually assisting students in filling out registration forms. Succinct nonpartisan information about voting, candidates and your organization’s other work is also fantastic to include.

Get them talking. A great strategy is to start your presentation by introducing yourself and simply asking the group: “What injustices do they see in their communities?” Encourage students to raise their hands and share what they think. Use their responses to segue into how exercising their right to vote is the best thing they can do to be part of the solution to the challenges they identified.

Get them out of their seats. Ask all students in the room to stand up. Tell them they represent all 18 year olds in the country. Next, ask every other row (or roughly 50 percent) of the students to sit down. Next, tell those sitting that they represent young people their age who were not registered to vote in 2008. Next, ask every tenth student to sit down; these students represent those Americans who are registered but choose not to vote. Finally, ask everyone to look at those left standing; these are the young people making decisions for them every time they choose not to register or vote. Those sitting down have no voice in the elections that impact their lives, and they’re letting everyone else (their standing colleagues) make the choice for them.

Appeal to what they care about. Poll after poll has shown that young people care about jobs, education and opportunity. Try connecting voting to the issues they care about by saying things like the following:
“Who has applied to go to college next year?” (Ask students to raise their hands.) “Well, our elected officials make decisions that impact how much we pay for school, what kinds of financial aid is available, services available to college students and a lot more.”

“Who is going to be looking for a job or joining the military soon?” (Ask students to raise their hands.) “The people we vote into office make decisions every day that impact the kinds of jobs and companies that come to our area. They mandate safety where we work. They are responsible for funding and making decisions affecting the health and safety of more than 1.4 million military personnel. They help determine the kinds of benefits you’ll receive as an employee and even set the minimum wage.”

“Who might be looking for an apartment after you graduate?” (Ask students to raise their hands.) “Well, the people who we vote into office here in [TOWN] and in [STATE CAPITAL] have a lot of influence over your rights as a tenant. They are the ones who make sure your trash gets picked up and are in charge of keeping your neighborhood safe.”

“Who we vote for on Election Day impact pretty much every aspect of our lives. So, how do we influence who they are and what they decide on our behalf? We vote, of course!”

Make it local. There is likely to be a hot-button issue going on in your community. Even if it’s controversial, don’t be afraid to bring it up as an example of the power of citizen action and/or the power our elected officials hold. Examples include:
- Debate over the start time of the school day (students care a LOT about this!)
- School furloughs/teacher cutbacks
- High unemployment/foreclosures in the community
- Local construction/traffic headaches
- Upcoming ballot initiative issues

Stay positive! Studies show that Millennials (young people under the age of 30) are attuned to the challenges facing their generation, but remain uniquely optimistic about the future. Employ a positive, empowering approach when encouraging them to vote.

Cover the registration ground rules. Hand out registration forms to each student, then recite to them the age, citizenship and other eligibility requirements for registering to vote in your state. Make sure they understand that by signing a completed form, they are legally acknowledging that they have answered every question truthfully.

Be sensitive to ineligible students’ needs. It is important to assure students that if they’re not eligible for any reason, they can return a blank form to you, no questions asked. Otherwise, they might be able to take the form home with them to share with a friend or family member. Check with your elections official to see whether the forms you utilize for your drives are appropriate for students to take home instead.

Prepare them for what comes next. Tell students that they should receive a registration card or other notification in the mail within a few weeks to a month. If they do not, let them know that they can contact your organization or their local elections official for help. Review upcoming election dates with students, and point them to your website or another resource to learn more about what they will see on their ballot.
See Appendix E for additional tips on talking to young voters.

**What should I bring?**

Plan to have the following on-hand at your event. (See Appendix C for a full materials checklist):

- Blank registration forms.
- Nonpartisan voter education materials such as those from your local League of Women Voters or elections official.
- Information about joining your organization.
- T-shirts, stickers, candy or other items to give away. If you encounter a shy group, try handing these out as an incentive to get the conversation going! (Note: such items must be made available to the entire group, and should never be used as an incentive or reward for actually filling out a registration application.)

**How does voter registration work in my state?**

Come prepared to answer questions about the rules for registering and voting in your state. To review the requirements for registering to vote, either read the instructions provided on the applications or check with your local elections official. It’s also a good idea to have a comprehensive guide on-hand in the event of complex questions (check your Secretary of State’s site or Appendix M for more resources).

If you are not familiar with who or what will be on the local ballot, study up by visiting your local elections official’s website or utilizing other nonpartisan resources, such as your area League of Women Voters’ website or the League’s national voting resource, www.VOTE411.org. Many local Leagues also make printed copies of their local voters’ guides available for free use in schools, libraries, and other places—all you have to do is ask.

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**Federal Voter Registration Guidelines**

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the rights afforded to voters in the United States and in your state. All voters should expect fair and decent treatment when registering and casting a vote. This includes equal treatment regardless of race, religion, national origin, sex or disability, privacy, and assistance from poll workers when needed. See Appendix E for suggested talking points to use in letting students know about their rights.

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) was enacted in order to enhance voting opportunities and make it easier for all Americans to register and maintain their registration. In addition to requiring that individuals be offered the opportunity to register to vote when applying for a driver’s license and/or visiting a public assistance agency and requiring states to implement systems to improve their statewide management of voter registration records, the law “provides that citizens can register to vote by mail using mail-in-forms developed by each state and the Election Assistance Commission” (U.S. Justice Dept. www.justice.gov).

Any individual may use the National Mail Voter Registration Form to register to vote, update registration information due to a change of name, make a change of address, or register with a political party. The National Form also contains voter registration rules and regulations for each state and territory.

Any voter registration organization has the option of using the federal voter registration form (instead of a state or local registration form) when conducting registration drives, and all elections officials must accept federal voter registration forms. For more information on the NVRA and the National Mail Voter Registration Form, visit the U.S. Election Assistance Commission at www.eac.gov/nvra.
Questions to Anticipate

“Why should I care about this?” It is possible that you will encounter disinterested or even disruptive students. You may also be confronted with students not paying attention and/or using cell phones during your presentation. If this happens, try to diffuse the situation by: a) asking firmly but calmly for everyone’s attention for a few minutes, b) engaging the students in a frank and informal conversation about why they think it is or is not important to vote, and c) if necessary, asking a teacher to intervene.

“Who should I vote for?” Students may ask for a recommendation as to who they should vote for. In crafting your nonpartisan response, be sure to let students know that while you cannot tell them which candidate will best represent their interests; there are a number of places where they can learn more about candidates and issues so they can make up their own minds:

- Nonpartisan voters’ guides (LWV or other)
- Newspapers or other media coverage (encourage them to be wary of political advertising)
- Friends and family/teachers
- Local candidate events/forums
- Candidate websites

“Which party should I designate?” Some states ask applicants to designate a political party when registering to vote. If students are unsure about which party to designate, let them know that they can select “no party” but explain that this might prevent them from participating in primaries. See Appendix M for a link to additional resources from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

“What if I’m not a citizen?” It is likely that some students you encounter will not be U.S. citizens, will be unsure of their status, or will be reluctant to fill out a registration application due to sensitivities about the status of family members. While some students may be upfront about this, others will likely not want to disclose these concerns in a crowded classroom of their peers. It is important to be perceptive to these concerns and announce at the start of your presentation that if a student does not think he/she is eligible or does not care to fill out a registration application, for any reason, they are free to return it blank or take it home with them. This message should be reiterated as the team works to assist individual students.

“I’m a felon. Can I register?” Similarly, it is likely that you may encounter student felons. Depending on the rules for your state, these individuals may need to work to have their voting rights reinstated before being eligible to vote. If possible, provide inquiring students with contact information to follow up with their local or state elections official(s).

Final Reminders

Put a form in every student’s hands while you speak. The more time students have to fill out their information, the better.

Bring at least 2 team members for each class/group. While one person talks, the other one can assist individual students, collect forms, and help echo important messages!

Walk the room. Take advantage of your personal visit by walking desk-to-desk to help students fill out the forms. Address any common questions with the entire class. If possible, collect forms directly from students while they are still seated.
Hand out extra forms. Encourage students to take their participation to the next level by acting as voter registration advocates! Leagues participating in the 2010 High School Voter Registration Project reported that many teachers and students, especially those in underrepresented communities, requested extra materials to provide to friends and family members who may never have had access to voter information. Take advantage of this enthusiasm by handing out extra forms and encouraging students to think of someone in their life who may not be registered to vote.

Cover every exit! If you must collect completed forms while students exit the room (for example, from a large group assembly), position team members at every door to collect and quickly check forms for completion as students exit. In particular, check to see that registrants have:

- Checked the box affirming they are over 18 years of age.
- Checked the box affirming they are US citizens.
- Provided the required identification number, usually their driver’s license number or the last four digits of their social security number.
- Signed and dated the form.

Keep track of your efforts. Utilize the sample form in Appendix F to keep a record of how many students you register, how many team members were needed, and more. Implement a strategy for following up with registrants to ensure they are prepared to successfully cast a vote (see Chapter 3 for ideas).

Thank the students and teachers for their time, and remind them to vote on Election Day!
As with any voter registration activity, it is critical to keep careful track of the results of your efforts. This will enable you to show the world that your voter registration drive made a difference and will give your team tangible results so they feel proud. Strategic record-keeping will also allow you to follow up directly with the young people you helped to register to vote. Evidence shows that newly registered voters who receive follow-up communications are more likely to turn out to vote. It is critical to include a get-out-the-vote component in your voter registration strategy.

Consider taking the following steps to ensure you will have the opportunity to remind new registrants to vote as Election Day approaches.

**Learn the rules for your state.** Because voter registration lists are a matter of public record, states allow third-party registrants to collect information from completed voter registration forms before they are turned in to the appropriate elections official. Some states have restrictions against copying certain information (for example, private data such as a driver’s license number or social security number). To find out the rules for your state, visit your Secretary of State website. Additional guidance for many states is available at www.projectvote.org.

If you are unable to photocopy or otherwise collect information from the voter registration form, consider utilizing a “pledge” card at your registration drives to collect students’ email and cell phone information. See a sample pledge card in Appendix G. Don't forget, you may also choose to use the federal form if restrictions associated with your state or local form hamper your efforts.

**Develop a data collection plan.** Designate an organized person or small team to take the lead on collecting all completed registration forms, copying the legally-allowed information, and turning the original forms in to the appropriate elections official within the timeframe required by your state.

**Use the information you’ve collected** to follow up with your elections official to ensure students were successfully registered. Offer to help contact students if additional information is required to complete their registration. You won't just be building a lasting, fruitful relationship with your local elections official; you'll also be evaluating your own efforts to make sure you can improve your quality control efforts next time. Because the students you registered will likely hold you accountable for any processing errors that occur at the officials’ office, this important step will help build public confidence in your efforts.
Reaching out to Your Newly Registered Voters.

Just providing voter registration information isn’t enough to turn all individuals into active voters; they will be more likely to vote if you provide them with voter education materials or direct them to online resources like the League’s VOTE411.org website, where they can learn about the candidates running for office in their community and find additional election information. Empower newly registered voters so that they can feel connected and excited about the upcoming election! Do this by:

- Contacting the new registrants—by email, phone or mail—and remind them to vote or invite them to voter education events like debates. Ask them to visit www.VOTE411.org and/or your website to find their polling place and learn about what will be on their ballot. Let them know you’re there to help if they need information or assistance.

- Challenging them to:
  - Ask five friends to register.
  - Take five people to the polls on Election Day.
  - Attend or watch a candidate debate.
  - Volunteer at your next youth voter registration event.

Please note: while it is allowable to contact new registrants with election-related information, it is illegal to use information from a voter registration form for non-election communications such as fundraising, action alerts, etc. However, it is acceptable to foster longer-term contact when communicating with them about election-related information by asking them to “opt in” to your email list so that you can communicate with them about future opportunities to get involved in your organization.

In addition to incorporating evaluative and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) components to your work, it is critical to remember the basics of relationship cultivation in the days following your event. A simple thank you note can go a long way toward establishing long-term contacts with the teachers and school administrators who set up your visit. As time goes by, be sure to contact them for future registration activities, invite them to community events, or offer to take them out for coffee to discuss other ways to get their students more involved in the community.
High school registration programs are highly visible and positive efforts that directly improve the lives of young people in your community. This chapter aims to help you take full advantage of your hard work by leveraging it for increased interest and visibility for your organization.

**Gaining Visibility For Your Work**

Proactive media outreach is critically important to getting the word out about your work in the community. The following tips on working with the media will help you identify opportunities, develop and deliver your pitch, and follow up successfully. These tips can help to strengthen your media outreach efforts and, consequently, strengthen results.

According to some researchers, people need to hear the same message as many as seven times before it sinks in. With this in mind, community organizations have an opportunity to increase awareness about their work simply by thinking about ways to deliver repeated concise and consistent messages about their organization.

Every time you have an opportunity to speak to the public or the media, it is important to underscore the value of your organization and how it serves the community. It is also helpful to imagine every opportunity as one that will grow the organization. Remember to talk about the people who do the hands-on work of engaging young people, and always include an invitation for others to join in your effort. To help you prepare for any outreach opportunity (including working with the media), there are three questions you should answer.

**What’s my goal?** What do I want to accomplish in this communication? Though you may not be used to writing down and outlining your goals, it’s a great exercise to practice before any outreach opportunity.

**Who is my audience and what do they care most about?** Think about your audience. What issues are important to them? How can you make your points resonate with them most?

**What is my message going to focus on?** Once your goal and target audience is determined, deciding on what points to focus on is simple. There are three phases to sharing a message: sharing knowledge; building will (i.e. making a connection); and spurring the reader/listener to action. Review your goal and audience and determine how you can most effectively accomplish these three steps.

See Appendix I for sample media talking points/trends related to young voters.
Media Outreach

Below are tips for utilizing the five main mechanisms for getting media coverage: press releases and media advisories; op-eds and letters to the editor; editorial board meetings; media interviews; and social media.

Press releases and media advisories

These are two methods to get out information about what you are doing. Both provide succinct and pertinent information about your event or issue in an easy-to-read format. Media advisories are an effective way of encouraging media to attend your event (for example, if you have a school’s permission for the media to cover your registration work). Unlike a press release, which will include background information and quotes, a media advisory just provides the Who, What, Where, When, and Why of the event. On any materials you send to the press, it is vital to include contact information. Include your phone number, email address and website address, as well as any photo opportunities that may be available (for example, if you have the school’s permission to film/photograph your team interacting with high school students).

See Appendix K for a sample high school voter registration press release.

Making the pitch personal

While it may seem important to get your release out to as many media outlets as possible, there really is a great deal of importance placed on providing a personal touch. Taking the time to write a quick personal note to reporters, especially if you’ve seen them writing on your organization’s issues or have met them in the past, makes a huge difference. Also, remember that members of the press often set their calendars at the last minute; even if you send the release out a week ahead of time, be sure to follow up the day before the event to remind them. Here are some additional tips to remember as you draft a release or advisory.

Always make your most important point at the top. Reporters may only read the first paragraph before deciding if it’s worth it to give you a call or include you in a story.

Include a good quote. Why should they care? How does this relate to other issues affecting the community?

Keep things short. All information should fit on one page.
Do not send press materials as attachments. Paste the information right into body of your email.

Call at the right time. Most reporters have story deadlines of 3 or 4 pm, so calling in the mid-morning is usually best. They also prefer to be contacted early on Monday morning before they’ve put a plan in place for the new week. In a follow-up call you just want to reiterate why it’s important that they attend your event. Keep it short and friendly, and offer to resend the information!

Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-eds and letters to the editor serve as great opportunities to gain coverage after an event has already happened and drive the conversation within your community.

Op-eds

Sometimes a newspaper will call upon a local community group to write an opinion piece on a certain issue, but it is more likely that you will have to call the editorial page editor or other newspaper contact to pitch your idea. Op-eds are often selected for their unique or fresh perspective on a recent event or news story. Opinion pages are generally put together a few days ahead of time, so be sure to submit it early enough in advance.

Simply put, op-eds express the opinion of the author on a particular issue, and can offer an excellent opportunity for you to advance your messages.

Letters to the editor

Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials or op-eds published in your local paper. You should be prepared to submit a letter to amplify a positive editorial or highlight key information left out of an article. The key to getting your letter published is making sure that it is timely and brief (no more than 250 words). Ideally, you would submit a letter to the editor within 24 hours after the piece you’re responding to first appeared. Your submission must include your full contact information and organizational affiliation. The newspaper often will verify the authenticity of the submission with a follow-up phone call. When you submit a letter to the editor, call the opinion page office and ask them who to send to, what their submission requirements are, and if the paper is likely to run the piece.

A sample high school registration letter to the editor is available in Appendix L.

Editorial Board Meetings

Editorial board meetings generally involve one or more people from your organization and three or more writers for the opinions section of a newspaper. They’re usually not on issues of immediate news importance, but ongoing issues that are of interest to the community or the editorial board itself. They are conversations, usually about an hour, and sometimes result in an opinion piece being written.
The editorial board members will have questions, but you should also have talking points prepared to make your case.

The best way to set these up is to call the opinion page office to gauge their interest and find out who is the best contact person. If you do get a meeting, DO YOUR RESEARCH! Look through archives of the paper online, and read through any opinion pieces that have been written on the issue. This will give you a sense of the views of the board ahead of time, and you’ll be prepared for what questions are coming.

Media Interviews

Issuing press releases or fostering relationships with members of the media (print, television and radio) will hopefully result in your organization being called for interviews. Below are a few tips to help you maximize these opportunities.

Be prepared and do your research. The more knowledge you have, the more prepared you will be. There are several questions you want answered before an on-the-record interview: some to consider are:

What outlet is it for? If it is not one you are familiar with, ask about their format: Is it a weekly, a daily, or a conservative/liberal radio talk show?

What’s the interview about?

What’s your organization’s role in the piece being proposed? Is this a profile piece solely about your work, or are you being quoted alongside other stakeholders?

What is the interview format? Live? One-on-one? Call-in audience questions?

Remember who you are talking to when you are being interviewed. You are talking to the audience that reads the story or sees it on TV. You are not talking to the reporter who is interviewing you.

Speak up! If an interviewer misstates something or has a fact wrong, politely make a correction.

Be concise. Keep your answers between 10-20 seconds.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat. Try your best to repeat the information that is most important and relevant (website address, organization name and location, contact information, etc.).

Have a fact sheet handy. To the extent possible, always have current, up-to-date information available about your work. You can refer to it to help stay “on message.”

Tell a story. People remember points much more if they are illustrated with a story. By forming a good story as part of your presentation, your delivery skills will automatically improve as well.

Know what you want to say in advance. Your expertise might enable you to discuss endless aspects of your work, but only a few points will make it into a story and even then a reader/viewer may only remember bits and pieces. Select one or two key points to make—and make them well.
Be calm and confident. You may be nervous, but the most important thing is to be calm and confident. Feel free to keep notes in front of you during a phone or radio interview. The following tips will help you deliver your messages effectively:

- Collect your thoughts. If a journalist calls and wants to conduct an on-the-spot interview, ask if you can call back in five minutes. Use that time to gather your thoughts and review your key points.
- Keep it simple! Use clear language and avoid jargon. You don’t want to bore your audience or make them feel stupid.
- Use numbers, but sparingly. Memorize one or two precise statistics that will give weight to your messages and bring your information to life.
- Be honest! Don’t stretch the truth. If you don’t know the answer, say so and suggest an alternative source.
- Provide other sources that will back you up. Independent experts can help to provide support for your position.
- Everything is on the record. Don’t give in to the temptation to tell the reporter something is “off the record.” If you say it aloud, or put it in an email, assume that it will appear in the reporter’s story.
- Stay calm. Getting flustered can convey a host of things – none positive! Prepare in advance, stick to your messages and you’ll ace any interview.

Social Media

Social networking sites are fast becoming a primary way to stay in touch with personal contacts and also get the word out to potential new audiences. Social networking is a fantastic tool for nonprofits because it is inexpensive, it can allow an ongoing, interactive dialogue between the organization and the people it serves, and it gives passionate people a platform to talk about causes and organizations that they care about.

Consider some of the following ideas for incorporating your high school work into your current social media strategy:

- Ask students to upload videos of themselves talking about why voting is important. Share their responses on your Facebook page or website.
- Share statistics or news coverage of young people’s issues, and ask young people you know to “guest blog” or otherwise weigh in on what matters to them in the upcoming election.
- Give great teammates a public shout-out via your blog, website, Twitter or Facebook account. Positive reinforcement will encourage them to help out again next time!
- Keep up the momentum by announcing which schools you’ll be visiting, when you’ll be there, and how people can get involved.

See Appendices I-L for additional sample high school registration media outreach materials.
Like so many of the projects and programs undertaken by youth or civic organizations, high school efforts connect your organization with the larger community. Taking advantage of these connections to increase your membership, supporters and allies, resources, and visibility is just as critical to the organization’s mission as the registration work you conduct.

There are three main areas of potential benefit or growth:

**Existing supporters will become more engaged**

by hearing about your high school work regularly through internal communications, your members and supporters will feel “in the know” and part of something larger; this makes them more likely to remain supportive (financially and otherwise) of the organization.

- Hands-on work with young people lets your team see how the organization’s mission is being fulfilled in a concrete, measurable way. Besides strengthening their connection to the organization, this gives people something easy and specific to showcase when asking others to join the cause.

- People are provided with specific opportunities to get involved with your high school program. It brings individuals in contact with community leaders and provides them with opportunities to “be noticed.”

**Your organization will increase its community ties.**

- High school programs establish a positive relationship between your organization and school administrators, teachers, PTA members, and even students and their parents. These initial relationships can be cultivated into long-term partnerships involving voter registration as well as other youth engagement efforts.

- Youth registration programs help to strengthen communication (and, therefore, relationships) between organizations and local government officials/agencies.

- Youth registration programs, especially in underserved areas, can help foster relationships with other community organizations or allied groups.

**New supporters will flock to your cause.**

- Because of the visibility, the renewed enthusiasm of existing teammates and new ties to the community, it is likely that new people will join in your efforts.

- However, it is critical to remember that a story in the newspaper may pique interest in the organization, but in most cases, a person will get involved only when personally asked to do so.

- Remember that conducting registration and recruiting new supporters are not exclusive of one another. Talk about your personal dedication to your organization with potential allies (for example, teachers and school board members), providing additional information about the organization, and even carrying informational brochures to every registration event.

**Four Steps for Recognizing and Retaining Team Members**

**Show your team that they are appreciated.** Let them know how valuable their work is and how their efforts are making a difference. When possible, acknowledge them publicly at events and in publications.

**Have fun!** Consider adding some social component to your high school program (e.g., an annual breakfast or happy hour following the registration deadline).

**Make reporting easy.** Although it’s necessary, no one likes doing paperwork. Make forms as user-friendly as possible. A sample registration event activity reporting form is available in Appendix F.

**Be flexible.** People are very busy and have numerous commitments. If they can’t attend one high school event, invite them to the next one or assign them to make outreach calls to schools when they are available.
Appendices

Please note: all appendices will be made available for free download at
www.lwv.org/highschoolregistration

Appendices

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Appendix A: The 2010 High School Registration Project

Project Vision

The 2010 High School Registration project, launched with the desire to build upon the successes seen with increasing the political participation of young people during the 2008 elections and expand the franchise to underrepresented youth, was carried out in 2010 as a joint initiative between the League of Women Voters Education Fund and research partner Project Vote. The goals of the project were two-fold: increase voter registration among high school age students, especially young people of color, and foster significant research into the most successful and effective strategies for conducting voter education activities within public high schools.

Field Implementation

The initiative aimed to organize and support nonpartisan high school voter registration drives in high schools with a high-percentage of minority students in five states: Arizona, California, Florida, Texas and Virginia. Led on the ground by local League of Women Voters volunteers, voter registration and education activities were held in classrooms and in-school assemblies at more than sixty schools throughout the project time period. The voter education expertise, community contact base, and nonpartisan reputation of these local Leagues proved instrumental in ensuring the project’s success.

In order to provide a basis for comparison, the project was designed to test the effectiveness of various approaches to reaching young people, specifically by controlling the setting in which students received registration information. Half of the targeted schools were randomly assigned for “classroom” activities, in which League volunteers would visit government/social studies classes, homerooms, or other individual classes to conduct registration. The others were assigned to “assembly” activities, in which Leagues worked with school administrators to set up voter education assemblies, or work voter registration into a previously scheduled assembly on another topic. An additional number of counties’ school systems not receiving any League-sponsored voter education programming would be compared as “controls.”

Measured research variables included the costs associated with both kinds of activities, volunteer time needed to execute such programs, the relative success of each activity in terms of the number of completed registration forms collected, and the extent to which other programmatic elements impacted a program’s effectiveness.

Leagues worked throughout the spring and fall of 2010 to carry out their registration events in schools in all five states. Adhering to the randomized activity assignments provided for each school (“assembly” vs. “classroom”), League leaders worked closely with teachers and school administrators to schedule registration events in such a way that the maximum number of eligible students, generally seniors approaching or having already reached the age of 18, would have access to the registration information presented. Given that a key cornerstone of the project mission was to engage underrepresented youth, Leagues also made special efforts to ensure they reached eligible students at all academic levels (including those enrolled in special/alternative education programs).

In nearly every community, Leagues faced greater-than-expected challenges when reaching out and scheduling registration events with school administrators. From spring testing and end-of-year/graduation commitments, to concerns that teachers could not yield classroom time—even history or social studies/government classes—for voter registration, school representatives cited a wide range of challenges. Additionally, many League volunteers reported challenges in even establishing initial contact with the appropriate school personnel.

While great effort was made to carry out registration activities in the scientifically randomized method (i.e. “classroom” or “assembly”) determined for each school, there were instances in which schools were interested in participating but were simply unable to comply with the type of activity prescribed. Even so, many school personnel were enthusiastic to have League volunteers conduct registration on their campuses.
Where necessary, the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF) worked closely with local Leagues to develop an alternative project approach whereby Leagues would conduct registration—in whichever way the school was able to comply—and provide detailed data from their activities.

In Florida, a state statute requires local elections officials to conduct high school registration in area public schools each year. While these existing efforts largely precluded Florida Leagues from conducting independent high school registration work as part of the 2010 High School project, they did allow for a natural collaboration between Leagues and local elections officials and yielded additional data and insight into successful registration strategies. The Florida efforts were also unique in that they provided a first-hand glimpse into a state's work to actively take advantage of a pre-registration law allowing students as young as 16 to fill out registration applications, thereby ensuring they will be registered and ready to participate in elections upon turning 18. Data from the Florida Leagues and elections officials has been incorporated into the overall best practices provided in this manual.

**Project Results**

Overall, more than 100 League volunteers ultimately carried out more than 200 classroom visits and more than 50 assemblies at 58 high minority high schools. As a result, they provided voter registration and education information to more than 9,000 students and gathered approximately 3,900 completed voter registration applications. Their wide range of detailed data reports, sample materials, feedback and anecdotal observations serve as the basis for the best practices included throughout this training manual. Their unfailing dedication and hard work will benefit voter registration advocates—and the young people they strive to reach—for years to come.
Appendix B: Sample Outreach Letter to School Official(s)

Dear [Principal/Lead Teacher/Administrator/Superintendent/School Board Member],

I hope you [are enjoying a successful year OR enjoyed a restful summer]. On behalf of the [your organization's name], I would like to offer [SCHOOL or SCHOOLs in XX DISTRICT] our services to help your students register to vote. We know how busy and strapped for resources you are so our programs are flexible, will fit within your time constraints and require no expenditures from [your school OR schools in your district].

You know how important it is to prepare America's youth to be effective leaders of tomorrow. And one important step in turning them into engaged members of our community, is getting them registered to vote. America's future depends on having active and informed citizens.

The need to reach newly eligible citizens is great. In November 2008, despite some increase in participation among younger voters, more than half of all 18-year-old citizens in the United States were not registered to vote and therefore could not participate on Election Day. Overall, Americans under the age of 30 remain severely underrepresented in the electorate.

Voter registration is the key, with approximately 90 percent of registered voters voting. But most youth registration target college students, completely missing the 43 percent of Americans with no college experience. Our organization is dedicated to reaching out to high school students and encouraging them to start the path toward lifelong civic participation.

We will be happy to work with you to build voter registration into your current curriculum. Our [volunteers/staff members] are available to set up class or homeroom visits to talk about the importance of voting, make sure students know their rights and assist eligible students in filling out their registration forms. We will then collect all registration forms and deliver them to the appropriate elections officials. If such visits are not possible, we are also open to scheduling a voter registration assembly or visiting during lunch periods even though these methods are not as effective in registering students.

From the economy to the future of their education and the safety of our neighborhoods, young people have a critical role to play in shaping important issues in our community and across the nation. We would be thrilled to work with you to help them register and vote this year.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,  [CONTACT INFO]
Appendix C: Registration Drive Checklist

Use this handy checklist to stay on top of every detail of your voter registration drive. See Appendix D for a customizable work plan to help guide your work.

Before your drive

• Establish your leadership team.
• Establish your goals.
• Recruit people to help out and assign time slots.
• Finalize plans and timing with venue/schools (including any required paperwork or permission for working at the venue).
• Meet with your local elections official to discuss your plans, ensure you’re following state and local laws, and acquire the needed number of voter registration forms.
• Check your state’s restrictions on collecting data from registration forms, and develop a plan for turning in completed registration forms in the allowable timeframe following your drive.
• Plan what you will say to young and first-time voters to encourage them to vote.
• Train your team. Whether or not training is required by your local elections officials, you should train your team on state/local election laws, how to help students complete the forms, preparing for presentations, completing their registration event activity reports and protocols for handling completed registration forms.

On the day of your drive

• Assign team member to be responsible for remembering the following materials:
  - Voter registration forms
  - Talking points/key messages
  - Volunteer name tags
  - Collection envelopes
  - Pencils and pens
  - Flyers/posters/banners
  - Information on/applications for absentee voting
  - Relevant publications/membership brochures & sign-up sheets students can fill out to receive additional information
  - T-shirts/stickers/candy or other give-aways (These items must be made available to the entire group)

• “At-a-glance” state/county information including:
  - Election dates
  - Registration rules
  - Absentee voting guidelines
  - Local elections official’s contact information
After your drive

- Before turning in registration forms to the appropriate official, take note of how many registration forms you collected and common questions that came up. Flag any potential "problem" applications.

- Where legally allowed, gather publicly available information from the registration forms, such as name, email address, address or phone number—this critical information can help you follow up with elections officials to ensure voters were successfully registered, and also provides you with current contact information to remind registrants to get educated and vote on Election Day! Please note: it is allowable to contact new registrants with election-related information, but there are restrictions on other kinds of communications. See Chapter 3 for additional guidance.

- Be sure to turn in completed registration applications within the timeframe set by state law.

- Follow up with the school officials and elections officials to thank them for their interest in voter registration, get their feedback on the activities and plan future activities like additional registration drives or get-out-the-vote activities for election week!

After Your Campaign

- Communicate with the public and the media about your impact (see Appendices I-L for helpful tools).

- Evaluate your program to learn how to improve future efforts. Ask yourself:
  - What were the biggest challenges we faced?
  - What did we do really well?
  - What would help us overcome challenges in the future (more funding, additional volunteers/staff, printed materials)?
  - What could be done to improve our relationships with teachers/school administrators and ease outreach and planning next time around?
  - What percentage of the students whose completed registration forms we turned in to elections officials were not registered successfully? What can we do to increase the number of successful registrations?
  - Did we conduct enough follow-up with students to encourage them to vote?

- Thank your team and celebrate!

- Reach out to the schools you worked with to plan registration activities for next semester.
Appendix D: Sample Work Plan

This work plan will help you stay on track from the planning stages of your registration program through the very end. Given that the ideal timeframe for high school registration programs was found to be mid-spring (March-April), it is recommended to begin planning in November of the preceding year.

See the at-a-glance timeline below, and use the following pages to help stay organized every step of the way.

At-a-glance Timeline: High School Voter Registration Process
Four months out: set project goals and leadership

Hold a meeting to answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who are the team leaders?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many schools will you target?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How many students do you want to help register to vote? *</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How will you communicate and stay on track? (Weekly call/daily email updates?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who will recruit additional team members? By when?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will develop a list of target schools? By when?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will you target underrepresented populations?</td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*To help guide your planning and expected impact, keep this in mind: during LWVUS’s 2010 High School registration project, volunteer teams reported that slightly fewer than half of the schools they contacted were ultimately able to schedule registration events. Additionally, Leagues collected completed registration applications from approximately three out of every ten students they encountered during classroom visits.
**Two/three months out: school outreach and assigning team roles**

**Get Organized:** Once you have recruited additional helpers and developed a list of target schools, pull together your entire team to get organized and assign roles. Use these charts as a guide, or consider setting up a Google Doc or other method for regularly updating and sharing the results of your efforts.

**School Outreach:** Who will call or write the schools to ask them about setting up a registration program? How often will they follow up? Does anyone know of a good contact to try first?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Team member responsible</th>
<th>Initial contact made (who? when?)</th>
<th>Follow-up efforts</th>
<th>Activity scheduled? When?</th>
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</table>

### Additional roles to assign (two/three months out):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Material(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will develop or acquire materials for use at schools?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>Material(s):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will set up a meeting with elections official(s)?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who, if anyone needs to attend a mandatory state or local training or deputization? When?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td>When:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will lead media outreach?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is responsible for following up with new registrants?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who will thank the schools/teachers for their participation?</td>
<td>Name(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One month out: team training

As your activities approach, hold a mandatory training for everyone who will be visiting schools and/or handling registration forms. At the training, utilize the other resources from this manual to ensure your entire team is ready for action. This should be done whether or not training is required by your local or state elections officials.

At the training, allocate time to:

• Identify whether additional school outreach is needed.

• Cover state/local election laws and generate a list of any follow-up questions for elections official(s).

• Practice walking through the registration form, including stating the eligibility requirements and reminding students that they are legally obligated to provide truthful information.

• Conduct practice registration presentations by asking team members to stand up and give their presentation aloud. Provide constructive criticism and help your team feel comfortable speaking to groups.

• Review registration event activity forms (what information you want team members to share about each event).

• Talk about the most likely questions you will hear from students.

• Lay out the protocol for handling completed registration forms, including:
  - What is required by law in your state.
  - Timeline for turning forms in.
  - Restrictions on gathering information from completed forms.
  - Which members of your team are responsible for handling completed forms.
  - How you will gain registrants’ contact information and follow up with them with additional voting-related information.

• Answer any additional questions and motivate your team for the busy work ahead!
One/two weeks out: final preparations

In the final days before your registration events, check in with each team member to clarify their roles during the event, and assign a specific person to bring each of the following:

- Blank registration forms, absentee voting info & other resources about voting in your state
  - Person responsible:
- Hand-out materials
  - Person responsible:
- Pens, collection envelopes & volunteer name tags
  - Person responsible:
- Flyers/posters/banners
  - Person responsible:
During the event

During the registration event, designate one person to serve as the “spokesperson” and additional people to serve as “helpers.” Helpers can walk from desk to desk to answer students’ questions or otherwise support the spokesperson. Designate a “collector” to gather all completed applications forms and record the results of each event.

Post-event

- Data Collection: After the event, follow your previously-determined protocol for collecting data from the completed application forms (as allowed by state law, see Chapter 3) and return all completed registration forms to the appropriate official in the timeline set by your state.

- Follow-up: Next, begin planning your follow-up communications with the newly registered voters, urging them to learn more about the elections process and reminding them to vote. See Chapter 3 for more tips on following up with the voters you helped to register.

- Say Thanks: Finally, follow up with the appropriate person to ensure the teachers/administrators at the school have been thanked; a quick, timely note will go a long way toward establishing a fruitful relationship in the future!

Post-campaign

- Media: After all your registration events have wrapped up, work with the individual designated earlier to get the word out to the public and the media about your impact (see Appendices I-L for helpful tools).

- Evaluation: Evaluate your program and learn about how to improve future efforts. Ask your team what could have been done better and start thinking about your planning process for next semester (See Appendix C for specific evaluation questions to consider).

- Celebrate: Thank your team, publicly if possible, and take some time to celebrate your successes!
Appendix E: Talking to Young Voters

Whether you are speaking to students as part of a large group or in a classroom setting, it is critical to go into your registration event with a clear plan for inspiring your young audience to register, informing them about their voting rights and the rules for participating in your state, and initiating the registration process to ensure they successfully complete their forms. Feel free to draw upon these talking points as you plan your presentation. See Chapter 2 for more.

Why vote?

• Do you care about: Keeping crime low in your neighborhood? Health care for your family & friends? Our national security? Clean air, safe water and secure routes to school for your younger siblings? Funding for sports and music programs, prom and other events here at [school name]? How about financial aid for college or finding a job when you graduate?

• Guess what? Every single one of those things, and so many more, are decided by our elected officials. The people who run your school board, work in city hall and represent you in Congress are making decisions every day that impact your life.

• Voting is your chance to choose the decision makers and tell them what you want.

• Your voice is needed to help fix the problems in our community and put us on the path to a better future.

• Stand up and have a say in the issues that affect you! Start today by registering to vote.

How does it work?

These points will vary by state, but these are the basic messages to convey to students:

• If you are a U.S. citizen and will be at least 18 years old by [the next federal election date], you are eligible to register to vote.

• Provide any state-specific details about pre-registration here.

• In most states, you MUST register to vote before participating in an election (30 days, 2 weeks, etc. before Election Day).

• We’re making that easy for you to do today. By filling out these forms and having us turn them in for you at the [Board of Elections, County elections office], you’re taking a first step toward having a say in our democracy.

• Once you fill out the application form, you should receive confirmation by mail within a few weeks.

• If no confirmation is received, you can contact your local elections office or the organization holding this drive (have this information on-hand for students).
Once you’re registered, it’s critical to get informed, then get out and VOTE! Whether you’ll be voting in person or absentee this election, it’s easy and important to learn about the candidates running for office and find out what to do on Election Day.

Every voter deserves to be treated fairly. You have rights at the polling place! This includes:
- Equal treatment and opportunity to register and vote, regardless of race, religion, national origin, sex or disability.
- Privacy—only you should know how you voted.
- Having your vote accurately recorded and counted.
- If you have a disability, access to a voting device you can use and appropriate assistance.
- Assistance from poll workers on how to use the voting equipment if you request it.
- Courtesy from poll workers and others at the polling place.

Most likely, you’ll have several choices to make when you vote. For example, this year you’ll vote for (Senate, Governor, members of Congress, mayor and school board. You may also be asked to vote on other things, like money for schools or roads, and whether you approve of certain laws.

Visit VOTE411.org for more information, or go to (local League site or other resource).

Tips for youth registration:

Keep it relevant & personal. Tie voting to a hot issue in the community and frame it in a way that speaks to results. Has the school budget recently been cut? Is a highway being built through the center of students’ neighborhoods? Chances are the students have an opinion. Let them know that voting is one way to affect these decisions and speak up for what they care about.

Tie it to something in the classroom. Talk to the teacher and/or school administrator ahead of your event and find out what issues or trends they are discussing in the classroom or upcoming assemblies. By working with school officials to tie voter registration into their current goals, you’ll help complement and add value to their efforts—and increase the chances that they will be interested in working with you.

Keep it brief and interactive. While you want to use your speaking opportunity to tell the students a little about your organization, your activities in their community, and discuss the importance of voting, it is important to keep your remarks brief and interesting. Leave some time to hear from students about why they think voting is important, and allow students to ask questions about completing their form. Students and teachers are pressed for time—make the most of it!

Study up on voting rules in your state. Be prepared for questions regarding the registration and voting process, especially absentee voting in your state. Help any students in need of assistance and be sure to look over their registration forms to ensure they are complete.

Partner with a student group. What better way to reach young people than to team up with their peers? Work with school officials to reach out to the student government, political/civic group, volunteer organization or another group to make the most of your registration project. Students will know the ins and outs of their schools, can add creative ideas to your events, and will be enormously helpful in maximizing the number of student registrations that are completed.
Appendix F: Sample Registration Activity Worksheet

Youth Voter Registration Activity Worksheet

BASIC ACTIVITY INFORMATION

School Name:__________________________   County:_________________________________

Date of Activity:_____________________  Length of Activity (in hours) ___________________

Type of Activity (tabling, classroom visits, assembly, etc): _________________________________

Total Number of Participating Team Members: ________________________________________

BENCHMARKS OF SUCCESS

Total Number of Participating Students: ______________________________________________________

Total Number of Registration Form Distributed: ________________________________________________

Total Number of Completed Registration Applications Collected: __________________________________

Total Number of Applications Taken Home/Left Behind at School: ________________________________

Total Number of Pledge Cards Collected: _____________________________________________________

Approximate Number of Educational Materials Distributed: ______________________________________

Rate Level of Student Interest in Voting (1 to 5, 5 being highest) _________________________________

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Use the space below to provide any additional details regarding the event, including key questions asked by young people, unexpected challenges, etc.
Appendix G: Printable Voter Pledge Cards

Print and cut out these cards to collect student information and motivate them to vote.

I want to help build a stronger community and a more diverse America that is ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow. I pledge to vote this Election Day.
I, ____________________________ pledge to vote this year.

Please send me reminders about upcoming election activities:
Email: ____________________________
Cell: ____________________________

I want to help build a stronger community and a more diverse America that is ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow. I pledge to vote this Election Day.
I, ____________________________ pledge to vote this year.

Please send me reminders about upcoming election activities:
Email: ____________________________
Cell: ____________________________

I want to help build a stronger community and a more diverse America that is ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow. I pledge to vote this Election Day.
I, ____________________________ pledge to vote this year.

Please send me reminders about upcoming election activities:
Email: ____________________________
Cell: ____________________________
Appendix H: Printable Flyer

Customize this flyer and ask school officials to post it prominently on the day(s) preceding your registration event.

It's your turn to speak up!

Register to Vote [DAY]

[Attend Assembly in XX Room during XX period OR Visit the Cafeteria tomorrow from x-x and bring driver’s license/social security number. Must be XX [age required] to register].

YOUR LOGO HERE
Appendix I: Media Talking Points about Young Voters

Utilize these talking points to prepare yourself for media interviews, public appearances, or even internal questions about the importance of reaching young voters. See Chapter 4 for additional savvy spokesperson tips.

- **Who are young voters?** The Millennial generation (young people under 30) is large, diverse, tolerant, civically engaged and optimistic.

- **Young people are involved in their local communities.** For example, almost half of Millennials take part in neighborhood activities in their community, helping out their neighbors by exchanging favors.

- By 2012, Millennials will represent 24 percent of the voting age population, and 36 percent by 2020. Racial and ethnic minorities make up 39 percent of the Millennial generation.

- **Do young people vote?** Young voter turnout has been on the rise in recent years, and we know young people are ready to build on that momentum. Eighty-three percent of young people believe their generation has the power to change our country.

- Twenty-two million young people voted in the 2008 presidential election, two million more than in the 2004.

**Are the issues that young voters care about different from other age demographics?** Young people's issues are generally the same as most Americans' issues. Right now they are concerned about the economy and jobs, as well as education, college affordability, and healthcare. In addition, an overwhelming majority (86 percent) of young people are concerned about the influence of corporate and special interests in elections.

- Young voters want their political candidates to pay attention to them and their issues. A 2008 national exit poll found that 69 percent of young people who voted said that a “candidate’s position on the issues” was more important than a “candidate’s leadership/personal qualities.”

- The same poll also found that 30 percent of young people who voted were contacted by a presidential campaign about voting, indicating that when campaigns reach out directly, young people respond.

- The lesson here is that when candidates and elected officials talk, young people listen. It is critical for us to engage young voters in our community and provide them with meaningful opportunities to get involved. One way to do this is through voter registration at the high school level. (Pivot into discussing your high school registration efforts).

*Talking points borrowed in part from the Vote Again 2010 national youth coalition.*
Appendix J: Demographic Trends in Voter Registration

Demographic Trends in Voter Registration

All rates reflected as percentages of voting age citizens;
2008 Census Bureau statistics

Registration by Age

Registration by Race

Registration by Education Level

Registration by Marital Status

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow
Appendix K: Sample Press Release

Use this press release to send a customized message to media in your area. Be sure to include tangible facts about the success of your registration program! See Chapter 4 for tips on how to break through to reporters in your area.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

CONTACT: [NAME]

[PHONE, EMAIL]

AREA YOUTH VOTERS KEY TO UPCOMING ELECTIONS

[LOCAL ORGANIZATION NAME] Registers [XX] High School Students to Vote

[TOWN, DATE]- [LOCAL ORGANIZATION] members recently registered [XX] students at [XX] local high schools to vote, according to a statement released today by [SPOKESPERSON].

“We’re thrilled to have worked with the dedicated faculty and staff at [HIGH SCHOOL NAME(s)] to make sure students know their rights and know the critical role they play in our community’s future,” said [SPOKESPERSON’S NAME]. “We can’t wait to see them at the polls in November.”

From strengthening the economy to building safer communities and making education more affordable, today’s youth are fired up and ready to roll up their sleeves to build a stronger America. This year, [ORGANIZATION] is working to galvanize that energy, encourage voter registration and help all Americans become more engaged in their democracy.

“Students were excited to have the opportunity to participate in the upcoming election,” said [SPOKESPERSON]. “For example, one young man/woman [provide interesting anecdote or quote from student about why they are registering to vote].”

Young people are an increasingly influential part of the electorate. In 2012, Americans under 30 will represent nearly a quarter of the electorate. Exit polling has shown that young people participate in significantly larger numbers when they are directly contacted by an organization or have the opportunity to interact with candidates for office.

For more information about registering to vote or getting involved in [ORGANIZATION's] work, visit [YOUR WEBSITE].
Appendix L: Sample Letter to the Editor

Customize this sample Letter to the Editor to submit to your local newspaper(s). Doing so will help publicize your efforts and expertise and elevate your organization within the community. See Chapter 4 for tips on getting your letter published, including the importance of timeliness and brevity.

Health of Democracy Rests with Area Youth

To the Editor,

Every passing day brings renewed debate about the future of our economy, the fate of our health care and energy industries, and our place in the world [If possible, refer to a recent article written on a public policy issue & include publication date]. Too often lost in the shuffle of partisan politics and snappy sound bites is the reminder that each one of us has a say in influencing that future.

[Today, this week, last Thursday, etc], an active debate was underway-- not in the halls of Congress or City Hall [or other local government seat], but in the [12th grade history class/auditorium] at [High School name]. Together with [ORGANIZATION], I had the opportunity to talk with students about why their voice is needed on Election Day and throughout the year. As [18]-year-old student [NAME] told us, “[reason why registering/why voting is important].”

Now more than ever, our community’s young people want to be a part of the solution to the challenges we face. Their future depends on it. Thank you to [Student NAME from Above] and all [School name] students who took a stand and registered to vote. I hope readers will do the same.

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]
The League of Women Voters’

VOTE411.ORG

The One Stop-Shop for All Your Election Information Needs

At www.VOTE411.org you can access:

• Polling Place Locations
• Voter Qualifications
• ID Requirements
• Election Dates
• Absentee Ballot Information and Early Voting Options
• Tools for Overseas Voters
• Registration Deadlines and Voter Registration Forms
• Contact Information for Election Officials
• Data on Candidates in Federal, State and Local Races
• Ballot Measure Information and more!

We know your time is valuable and so is your vote! VOTE411 provides comprehensive, easy-to-access information for all your voting needs in one convenient location!

Go to www.VOTE411.org, get educated, and get out and VOTE!

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.
Appendix N: Resources for Additional Information

League of Women Voters  
www.lwv.org  
www.VOTE411.org

Project Vote  
www.projectvote.org

Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools  
www.civicmissionofschools.org

CIRCLE  
www.civicyouth.org

Rock the Vote  
www.rockthevote.org

Smackdown Your Vote!  
www.smackdownyourvote.com

U.S. Census (voting statistics)  
http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting

U. S. Election Assistance Commission  
http://www.eac.gov/NVRA

Vote 18  
www.vote18.com

Youth Leadership Initiative  
www.youthleadership.net
Making Democracy Work

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. With more than 850 state and local affiliates nationwide, the League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join us in Making Democracy Work™!

League of Women Voters Education Fund
1730 M Street, NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
202-429-1965
www.lwv.org