Section 1: Thinking Strategy

When Leagues use eCommunications in thoughtful and strategic ways they have the opportunity to connect with new individuals. These individuals can and should play an important role in helping the League fulfill its message of Making Democracy Work®. LWVUS, along with state and local Leagues, value what these new individuals have to give -- whether that's time, money or their influence with their friends, family or elected officials. A key component of online engagement is giving individuals that connect with an organization online the opportunity to make the biggest impact with what they can or care to give, and helping to cultivate a deeper relationship if they are interested in doing more.

I. Who are Our Online Supporters?

Technology has changed the way that people interact with each other and take action on the issues they care about. Social media allows for flexible levels of engagement, and creates a space where individuals can give their time, money and influence to issues and causes on their own terms. As of 2014 an estimated 74 percent of adults that go online use social networking sites. When you break down that statistic by age you can see that over 80 percent of 18-29 and 30-49 year olds, 65 percent of 50-64 year olds and just shy of 50 percent of individuals over 65 use social networking sites. While younger adults are more likely to use social media for civic activities, older demographics are growing their online use faster, and organizations that create compelling content and purposeful engagement plans can help spur individuals of any age to learn more about an issue or move them to take action.

Early studies of internet communities suggested that 90 percent of users were "lurkers" or passive consumers who never contributed or interacted with web content. Only 9 percent contributed on a small scale and just 1 percent of users were very actively engaged. However, social media sites and online communities have evolved and are continually creating new ways for users to engage with others and contribute online. With expanded internet access, the success of Twitter, Instagram, and Google + and changes to Facebook, today those engagement figures may look more like 70-20-10 (small engagement, medium engagement, large engagement).

Over the years LWVUS has participated in nonprofit industry studies to learn more about how individuals interact with the League online. From these studies we've learned that League members and supporters tend to open our emails and complete our online actions at a higher rate

compared to similar issue organizations. We also learned that while our Facebook and Twitter accounts have been growing significantly over the past year, there is still a lot of room to grow and expand. Our social media followers also reflect our membership: most followers are women and over the age of 35. This is consistent with the league's overall membership, but on Facebook particularly, the age of our followers reflect the average ages of typical Facebook users. While social media is not a silver bullet to allow Leagues to reach new, younger audiences like millennials, it is a great way for Leagues to engage with members and nonmembers.

Once your League decides to participate in a specific social media site, maintaining the site with consistent information and updates is key, since allowing a site to go dormant may mean loss of participation and followers. Facebook uses an algorithm to determine who sees content you post, meaning that not every follower will see your content in their news feed. Maintaining your social media accounts will ensure that more people see your content and engage with your campaigns online.

Your League can use research to set reasonable expectations around social media engagement. For example, your League may have 375 Facebook Likes on its page, but it is very unlikely that all 375 individuals would ever leave a comment on your page or Like a post.

II. Steps to successful online engagement

Online engagement is a marathon, not a sprint. The key to creating successful online communities is consistently engaging with online supporters throughout the entire year, not just when it's convenient or when there is an opportunity to take action. The overarching purpose of your online engagement plan should be to give individuals the opportunity to choose their level of engagement based on what best suits their life. By posting useful and informative content that invites online supporters to engage with the League in various ways, individuals will be able to self-select actions they want to participate in and the level of involvement they are comfortable with.

A successful online campaign is an organized plan with specific actions, measurable benchmarks and a definable timeline that works alongside your offline campaign activities to achieve an agreed upon goal. To be effective in our efforts, it is important to create campaigns that are strategically designed to move online supporters up the pyramid of online cultivation. Keep in mind that all online channels must be maintained and monitored year round in order to be effective.

1. **Identify your online engagement team and assess where you are now.** Who is going to be responsible for drafting emails and content, editing content and posting or sending the content? Will multiple people manage different channels or will one person be responsible for all of them? Keep in mind that the best online communicators will be people who enjoy and excel at communicating with diverse groups of people, are creative, have their pulse on the community and are enthusiastic. They should also be people who are willing to post often, and have the ability to use the technology frequently. Before you start on any new plan, it's helpful to understand where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Here are some

questions your League can use to paint a picture of your current online landscape in regards to email, your website and social media.

Email:

- How often do we currently email our entire list?
- Do we have any regularly scheduled emails (newsletters, etc.)? How often do they go out?
- How many emails do we have on our list?
- Do we know who our members are? Do we have nonmember emails?
- More advanced questions:
  - Do we know our open and click through rates?
  - Do we know our bounce rates and opt-out rates (the rate at which emails are returned as no good and the rate at which people unsubscribe from our emails, respectively)?
  - Do we use segmented lists for targeted emails? For example, do we send emails to recipients based on specific information that they've asked to receive such as only action alerts on climate change or do we email our entire list every time we send an email?

Website:

- How often do we review our website to make sure that all of the information is accurate?
- How often do we post new content to the website?
- Is there outdated information that could be deleted or moved to another section of the website? How are we labeling sections to make sure content is easy to find?
- Do we have a way to archive old information so that it does not appear on the homepage, but is still searchable?
- Do visitors have to scroll through old action alerts and information before finding your new content?
- Is our content inviting and understandable to people who are not League members? Do we have specific and clear language about bills and our advocacy issues available?
- Are people able to sign-up for our email list on our website? Are they able to follow us on social media from our website?
- More advanced questions:
  - What pages are viewers landing on when they visit our website?
  - Are people downloading information that we make available on the website?
  - What other information do we want to track?
  - Can we include news clips and press statements on our site?

Social Media:

- What social media accounts do we currently have?
- How often do we post or tweet?
  a. How often do we post or tweet original content? Do we have original content to share?
- How many Followers or Likes do we have?
  a. How often is our information being shared?
- More advanced questions:
  - How many impressions are our post making?
  - Is our content accessible to LWVUS and local leagues?

2. **Define your goals, objectives and timeline.** Leagues can tailor their goals and objectives to what makes the most sense for them. How would you define success over the next year? What objectives does your League need to meet in order to achieve these goals? What metrics or data will you monitor to see if your League is meeting its objectives? When executing this step, keep in mind your capacity and what is realistically possible, while at the same time set a goal that is challenging.

Base your goals off of your current capacity, knowing that down the line you can adjust as your online engagement grows.

Where we are now? What are our current strenghts and areas for improvement?

Where we are going? What steps can we take to step up our online campaigning? [Be specific!]

Rechaing our goal! What does success look like? How will we measure our progress?

3. **Define the audience.** Clearly defining your audience or who needs to be engaged will help to narrow and identify the actions needed to obtain your goal. Do you want to engage just League members? Do you want your message to spread to anyone who might be impacted or engaged (for example, if your campaign is on current legislation at the state level, your target audience should be any voter in a particular district)?

4. **Get organized.** Create a social media measurements or metrics spreadsheet to record any data that will be tracked. Identify who will be responsible for what channels, and how often the group, or individual, will review progress and adjust the goals and objectives if needed. Create content that supporters will want to share with their networks by being relevant, engaging and using visuals (pictures) when possible. A calendar can be used to keep track of and plan what content to post each month.

The LWVOK highlighting their great work registering voters with a bright, colorful and relevant picture. The simple description allows viewers to focus on the picture while still understanding the context. **Tip: Spell out acronyms and provide a link, if available, for even more background information. Don't assume your followers will know what you are referencing! You can even include information about your next voter registration event with contact information on how to become involved – use every post as an opportunity to get others more involved in your great work!**

League of Women Voters of Oklahoma at The OKC Capitol Building
March 30 at 1:50pm · 🌐

At the OKED Rally registering voters.

Like · Comment · Share

👍 7 people like this.

5. **Measure and improve.** Keep track of your social media activities/posts? to see what is and isn't working. *Did a Facebook post get a lot of Likes when you posted pictures of League members doing voter registration?* Then do more of that. *Did your website see a lot more traffic after you tweeted about important information that could be found there?* Then do more of that. Compare where you're at now to the goals and objectives that your group identified. Are you on track to meet them, will you surpass them? Do you need to try something different or get advice from LWVUS or other Leagues that are doing well?

Facebook
- How many new followers this month?
- What content did people engage with the most?

Email
- How many new subscribers (or unsubscribes) do we have?
- How many people took action directly from our email alerts?

Website
- How many new people visited the website?
- What content was the most interesting to them? How can we incorporate that more on our site?

6. **Celebrate your successes!** Keep your online supporters aware of your goals and celebrate milestones when your reach them. If one of your goals to get 100 Likes on your Leagues Facebook page, let supporters know when you've reached it or are almost there. Did a lot of online supporters take action on an important issues? Let others know about it. Did the legislation your League took action on move? Report back! Keeping your supporters in the loop shows that you value them, that you appreciate their participation and may make them interested in getting more engaged.


III.   The Online Cultivation Pyramid

Think of a pyramid when picturing how online supporters interact with the League. Not everyone will be interested in moving up or advancing their relationship with the League, say with a ladder or stairs. With the pyramid, the tiers get smaller as you move up in engagement levels, since less people will interact with your League on that level. The benefit of social media is that it allows for flexible engagement, which means individuals are free to engage at the level that they are comfortable with or what makes sense for them at any point and time. Members will move up and down the pyramid over the years based on their needs.

As to be expected, the majority of online supporters will simply be aware of what the League is doing, without necessarily engaging on a campaign or issue. As supporters become more involved, they may promote issues the League works on, participate in actions or give financially to the League, or even participate in offline League activities. Once supporters reach the *Engaged Supporter*, that individual will have interacted with the League on multiple levels and

will be interested in deepening their affiliation. Participation at every level is necessary for the League to be effective advocates.
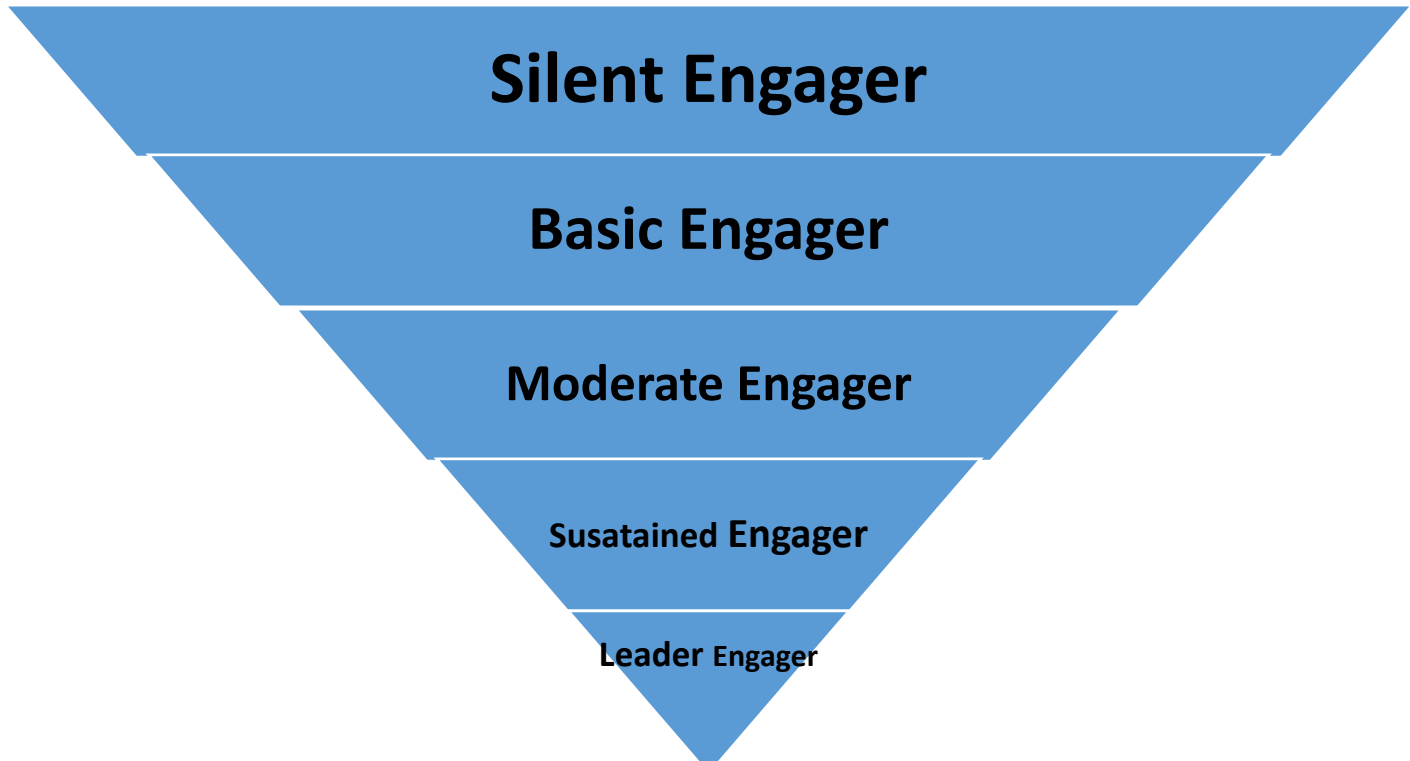
Silent Engager – A supporter who signs up to receive League emails, Likes a League's Facebook page or follows a League on Twitter. Those in this stage may do any one or all of these steps.

Basic Engager – A supporter who has interacted with a League's social media pages or shared a League's emails over the past year. These individuals may have liked or shared a League's Facebook post on their wall or retweeted a League's tweet, mentioned the League in a post or tweeted or commented on a League's wall or post. Those in this stage may complete these steps multiple times throughout the year or just once.

Moderate Engager – A supporter who completes an online action or petition or makes a one-time donation to the League over the past year. These supporters may do one or a combination of these steps over the course of a year.

Sustained Engager – A supporter or member who over a course of six months completes multiple online actions, makes multiple donations or attends a League event.
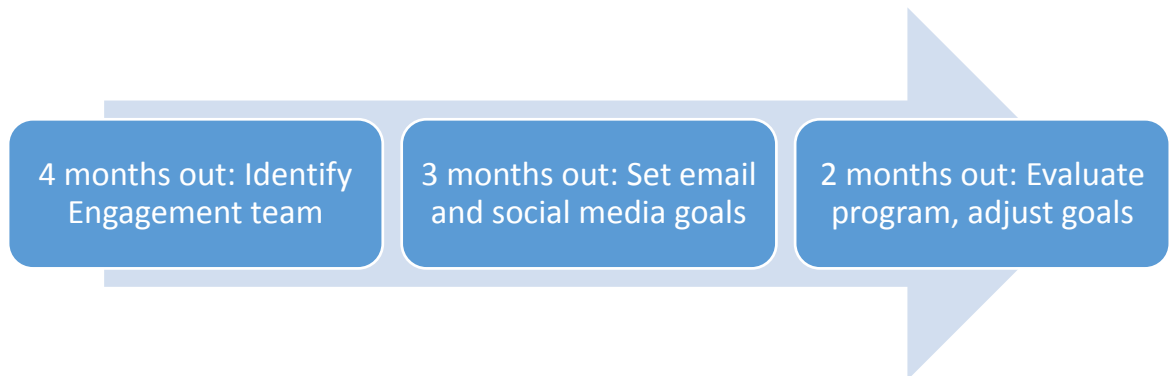
Leader Engager – A supporter or member who is engaging with a League online, offline or both multiple times a year or frequently during a short time period. These individuals should be targeted for additional tailored follow-up, such as a personal invite to get more involved with specific programs, volunteer roles or leadership and development opportunities.

Section 2: Creating Your Communications Plan

As your League becomes more purposeful about its eCommunication and online campaign goals, keeping track of everything you want to post will become increasingly important. Editorial Calendars provide a systematic way of tracking what messages are going out on which channels and at what time. Creating this master plan will help you identify where you may have gaps or where too much communication may be going on at one time. In order to keep everyone on your leadership team on the same page, keep your calendar in one place that is accessible by everyone (though only editable by those few people who need access).

The calendar is a tool to keep multiple people on task and organized, however, keep in mind that any calendar should be flexible. For example, your League may want to send a time sensitive action out during the state's legislative session. Your Editorial Calendar will let you see what else is scheduled to be posted that time, and help you make a strategic decision on what can wait, what can't wait and what should be done instead.

Start by identifying your timeline. While the idea of planning your content for a year might sound daunting, starting with a bird's eye view and working your way down to the week/day level will provide a better understanding of your League's overall eCommunications work. Creating a skeleton calendar with key dates and events will allow your team to create the outline of your social media posts, allowing you to post with ease in the future.

4 months out: Identify Engagement team	3 months out: Set email and social media goals	2 months out: Evaluate program, adjust goals

What will you be publishing?

- *Website* – Messages from board or president, upcoming event information, issue updates, voting and legislative information, photos
- *Blogs* – post about recent events, targeted fundraising campaigns, success stories or member highlights, issue education information, legislative activities
- *Emails* – newsletter, campaign updates, event invitations
- *Social Media* – Facebook/Twitter – event information, photos from events, links to blog post or website updates, topical post (special event, articles relevant to the League and this issues it works on)
- *Other* - YouTube or Vimo

When is the deadline?

Review the list of items that your League wants to publish. How often will you post to each of these different platforms? Are there certain publications (i.e. newsletters) that should go out on a regular bases, and if so, when? Are there other deadlines that need to be made before the content goes out to the public (i.e. when do you need your draft newsletter done) and when do you need it edited by? Include all of these deadlines on the calendar as well.

Who is the writer?

Who will be responsible for creating and delivering each of the various pieces? Is this workload manageable? Make sure that everyone on the team is communicating frequently. If you have one designated person posting to Facebook and another person writing the action alerts, those two members should work together on the message they want to convey. While the calendar will keep everyone more or less on the same page, communication is key for when time sensitive materials (like action alerts) need to be sent to the League's online community. Consistency in messaging is important to maintain a clear voice throughout all online platforms.

	December	January	February	March
Facebook	Happy Holiday posts	3 posts per week on legislative session with links and/or pictures	Posts with links to action alerts, Updates on bills	Posts with pictures of League members at the Capitol or giving testimony!
Email	Happy Holidays email – no action alerts this month	Email announcing legislative priorities for this session	Action Alert email: Call representatives on XXX legislation	Email celebrating legislative successes!

Section 3: Writing Online

Leaders in the eCommunications field will tell you that *content is king*. Content, or web content, refers to the ideas, facts, pictures and statements that make up websites, social media posts and emails. Content works to connect, educate, inform and mobilize readers.

Why is good content so important? Because online readers have short attention spans and an ever-increasing amount of content coming their way. Writers must grab their attention – and quickly. Producing good content can help readers feel connected to your League, motivate them to act or inspire them to donate.

Research from the Neilsen Noram Group shows that we read differently on screens than on paper. We tend to scan, reading only about 20 percent of the words on the page. We also tend to read in an "F shape pattern," reading the first few sentences of the first paragraph and then glance down the left side of the page looking for other eye-catching content. Consequently, writers must alter their writing style and sometimes even break traditional grammar rules to create content that will keep an online reader's attention **and** stand out amongst the crowd.

This section is designed to help League leaders develop online content that will grab a reader's attention and build support for your League's important advocacy and education priorities.

I. Basic rules for online content

Start with powerful headlines, subject line and title.

Your headline for a blog post, press statement, article on your website or subject line for an email is the first thing that readers see. Industry professionals estimate that 8 out of 10 people will read your headline, but only 2 out of 10 will decide to read more. Your job as a writer is to make someone want to know more – to open your email, read your blog post or dive into an article you posted on your social media channels.

Experts say that headlines need to be short enough to read in a single glance, and that you should strive to keep them between 60 and 80 characters in length. They need to include enough information so that the reader understands what the article is about, but also short enough to be optimized for Twitter (which has a 140-chararcter limit) and Google search results. While entire books and articles are written just on creating winning headlines, here are a few tips you can try:

- Create numbered lists.
- Use trigger words like what, when, why and how.
- Ask an open ended question.
- Highlight what your reader must know about your topic.
- Make it action oriented and newsworthy.
- Keep it short and simple.
- Capitalize the first letter of each word in headlines and titles.

Examples: Headlines

Original:
>   LWVDC is now accepting applications for a new committee focused on DCs' Photo ID law.

Edited:
>   Want to Help Protect Voters? Join the Photo ID Committee

Original:
>   DC Council passes affordable housing Proposal 139 by narrow vote.

Edited:
>   Affordable Housing Advocates Land Narrow Victory

Make compelling points early.

Start strong and put the most important information that you want to share in the beginning of your email, at the top of your blog post or in the first sentence of your Facebook post or tweet. This will make your writing clear, and help readers who are scanning for important information. What is the most newsworthy piece of information? What has changed or could change the lay of the land on an important advocacy issue? How could readers make a difference by taking action right now?

Write for a broad, external audience.

Approach writing your external emails and communications as if you were talking to a class of high school students. It may feel repetitive, but always go back and remind your reader why you're writing about this, what the stakes are and why it is important. For context, include links to previous content on your topic. Don't assume all readers are starting with your knowledge or have been reading everything you've put out. You want someone who reads any one piece of content to have the information they need readily available. This is obviously harder to do with a social media post, but you can help minimize confusion by including hyperlinks when possible. Using this style will help everyone, including seasoned League members, quickly grasp what you are saying. To do this, keep your message simple and clear.

Use
Plain language
Active voice
Action verbs

Avoid
League acronyms, jargon and buzzwords
Policy wonk or overly legal language
Excessive punctuation/run-on sentences

Keep sentences and paragraphs short.

Ideally, try to use less than 20 words per sentence and less than five sentences per paragraph. Using fewer words and sentences to get your point across can make a big impact. Make sure to be clear and concise, without using excessive punctuation. Don't be fooled: this type of writing isn't any easier just because it's short. It takes hard work and practice to be concise and get to the point.

Example: Compelling points early and short sentences

Original:

Yesterday DC Councilmembers heard comments from both those who support and oppose Proposal 139 for over three hours. The LWVDC was represented by a large turnout from the advocacy committee, and by others who felt compelled to make comments. After the comment period closed, a Councilwomen thanked the community for making time to share concerns about Proposal 139. It is the League's understanding that this affordable housing proposal will provide a framework for development policies and help meet the areas growth needs in an inclusive way. The final vote on Proposal 139 is set to take place Wednesday, August 16 at 6:30pm. All LWVDC members are encouraged to attend to help show the League's support for Proposal 139 and other strategic affordable housing plans in the District of Columbia.

Edited:

Join the League of Women Voters of DC (LWVDC) members on Wednesday, August 16, at 6:30pm to support affordable housing in DC. At this meeting, Councilmembers will vote on Proposal 139, which would provide a framework for including affordable housing in the area's growth plan. LWVDC testified in support of Proposal 139 at yesterday's Council meeting and encourages the DC Council to move forward with this inclusive proposal.

Tip:

Gauge if your content is written in an approachable manner by checking its readability level. In Microsoft Word you can change your settings so that you get an idea of the reading level of your document immediately after running spell check. The setting allows you to view both the Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level. These two tests review the word length, sentence length and number of syllables used in words to calculate the grade and reading level needed in order to understand the writing. Some writing will naturally require a higher reading level, for example when discussing complex policy issues or referencing legal terms. However, Leagues should strive to keep their content approachable and at a middle school reading level.

Use heading and subheadings.

Headings and subheadings visually organize information and tell the reader what is in each section. Headings should be short, one to five words, be consistently formatted and should only

be used if you're going to use more than one. Subheadings can be slightly longer if needed and are used to help navigate readers through each heading that they come under. Headings and subheadings can be added after your content is written to help provide clarification.

Use bullet points.

Bullet points should be used to break up information into easily digestible parts to help readers scan and comprehend your points. However, try not to use more than seven bullet points in a single section or you run the risk of turning your bullet points back into a wall of text.

Use numbered lists.

Like bullet points, numbered lists, colloquially called listicles, are a great way to break up information. It can also add clarification when asking the reader to do something in a specific order or requiring them to take multiple steps. Highlighting your numbered list in your subject line or headline by using titles like "10 ways" or "5 things" can also increase a reader's interest.

Examples: Numbered list

Original:

Action alert on voter photo ID Constitutional Amendment JR 419

JR 419 was placed on the legislature's informal calendar on April 23, 2013. This bill would place a constitutional amendment on the November 2013 ballot for voters to consider. The bill would require voters to obtain and use a state approved ID in order to vote. Why do we need it? There are NO cases of voter ID fraud in DC. The present requirements are clearly working. This bill would cost DC taxpayers approximately $3.3 million to implement. Women, the elderly, minority groups and the disabled would face significant barriers in obtaining the documentation necessary to get the required photo IDs.

Write your Councilmember and urge them to vote NO on this legislation that discourages DC citizens from voting.

Edited:

Take Action: Three Reasons Why Voter Photo ID is Bad for DC

The Voter Photo ID Constitutional Amendment (JR 419) would require voters to obtain and use a state approved ID in order to vote. If legislators move this constitutional amendment forward, it will be on the November ballot for voters to consider.

Three reasons why we don't need it:

1. This bill would cost DC taxpayers approximately $ 3.3 million to implement.
2. Women, the elderly, minority groups and the disabled would face significant barriers in obtaining the documentation necessary to get the required photo IDs.

3. There are NO cases of voter impersonation in DC; the present requirements are clearly working.

Call your Councilmen before April 23 and urge them to vote NO on legislation that discourages DC citizens from voting!

Stick to dark font on a pale background.

It can be fun to change up font colors and background, but by doing so you run the risk of making your content more difficult for people with visual impairments or preferences to read. Your focus should always be on readability and accessibility.

Use limited font types.

As a general rule, emails should contain only one font type. Emphasize particular words or phrases by making them **bold** or *italicized*. This will help readers scan your content and focus on your key points. Do not underline text, since that often indicates a hyperlink. Websites or publications may feature more than one font; but again, strive for consistency.

Use a limited number of font sizes.

Eleven or 12 point font is great for the body of an email or content in a webpage. Since readers are able to adjust their screen view, it is not necessary for your font to be any larger. You can use larger font sizes for headings and a slightly smaller size for subheadings, but you will need to be consistent in your usage to keep your content looking polished.

Use links.

Writing online gives authors lots of ways to expand on and support their content. One way to do this is by hyperlinking to other articles, from credible sources or bloggers, or resources on your website. When doing this, avoid phrases like "click here" or "click here for more information." To avoid using these phrases, create hyperlinks off of your well-crafted, clear content. Again, this takes practice, but your emails will read more clearly and concisely, and most modern online readers will be familiar with this format. Additionally, the language that is in a hyperlink helps search engines understand what the link you're including is about.

Examples: Using links

Original:

Click here if you need contact information for your own Assembly representative.

Edited:

Find your Assembly representative.

Original:

> Share your comments and support for this important piece of legislation. <u>Click here</u>
>
> **Edited:**
>
> <u>Share your comments and support for this important piece of legislation.</u>

II.   **Speaking with the Same Voice**

In some Leagues, one individual is responsible for writing every email, social media post and piece of content that goes on their website. However, this is not the case in most Leagues, nor does it need to be. With a little work, your League can create a framework to use for generating content that has a common voice, no matter who's doing the writing.

Define your Leagues' personality

Leagues across the country labor to fulfill our same mission.

"The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy."

But our mission does not describe everything about us. How would you describe your local or state League? What descriptive words would you use? Review the table and identify 5-7 words that you could use to describe the League to someone who is new. Alternatively, how would you like your League to be perceived? Make this a small group discussion and include members of your board, office staff or volunteers that are interested in crafting content for your League.

Authoritative	Friendly	Enthusiastic	Relevant
Respectful	Caring	Upbeat	Thoughtful
Informative	Committed	Inviting	Smart
Trustworthy	Professional	Welcoming	Determined
Proactive	Worldly	Responsive	Passionate
Inclusive	Practical	Helpful	Tolerant
Current	Hard-Working	Involved	Dedicated
Cooperative	Educated	Purposeful	Experienced

Make a list of the agreed-upon words and share it. Keep it handy as a framework to refer to when you're writing content for emails, social media, blog post or your website. Using a consistent personality in your eCommunications writing will help your readers build a stronger connection to your League.

Tone

Your League's personality should stay consistent, but its tone will need to change depending on the type of content that's being created. For example, it may be appropriate to take a stern tone when writing an op-ed about a League position or a celebratory tone when posting pictures on Facebook of your League's latest voter registration drive. When choosing your tone, consider what is most appropriate for both your topic and your audience.

Examples: Tone

Facebook post – Did you know that in DC you still can't register to vote online? We think it's time for a change! Our latest op-ed explains three ways online registration could help our democratic process. [provide link in post]

Op-ed – Allowing DC residents to register to vote online would save taxpayer dollars, increase accuracy of voter rolls and make registering and updating voter information easier and more convenient. [provide link in post]

Keywords

Identifying, agreeing on and using keywords is important for both your League's messaging strategy on key issues and for optimizing your website content for search engine results.

In the for-profit world, businesses identify keywords and phrases to use in their marketing strategies to sell products and build brand loyalty. In the nonprofit world, the League's keywords and phrases identify priority issues and ways in which we communicate about these issues. LWVUS helps to provide keywords, phrases, talking points and press release information that state and local Leagues can and should use when communicating about LWVUS priority issues.

State Leagues should also be consistent in the keywords and phrases that they use to talk about issues that they work on at the state level. Keep a list of your own, share it with those that are creating online content and review it periodically to make sure that it stays current with messaging best practices for certain issues.

Examples: Keywords for voter protection work

political participation	manipulate election laws	free, fair and accessible	voter suppression
civic duty to vote	voter photo ID	political gain	your vote matters
underserved populations	voter discrimination	voter registration modernization	early voting
pro-voter reforms	online voter registration	protecting and engaging voters	voting rights

III. Creating Searchable Web Content

The League writes about important issues, and we want readers to be able to find our information so that they can be informed and empowered to act. When it comes to League websites, this means creating and posting content in a way that helps search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and Bing return our websites at the top of the list of results (called "search results") when individuals are searching for information on our issues. This purposeful way of optimizing our websites and website content is called Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which we explain more in depth in this piece on the League management site.

Identifying and using keywords consistently is critical for search engines to find our content and deliver it to those searching for our issues. Put simply, the better the job your website content does at using keywords around your issues, the more likely it is that individuals using search engines to look for information on your issues will find your website. These types of keywords perform better in search results than basic or generic keywords, which are harder to compete with. For example, optimizing your League website with the phrase "voting in [your state]" rather than just "voting," which is not specific enough.

Example: Keywords

Basic key words – "voting", "voting rights", "Section 4"
Better key words – "Voting Rights Act", "Voting Rights Act and Section 4", "voting rights in Washington DC"

Tip: If you're having trouble identifying keywords you can always look at LWVUS' blog to see what keywords are being used for a particular issue. The keywords for each blogpost are listed at the bottom of the article as tags.

Once you've identified your keywords, use them in your headline and introduction as well as throughout your article. Evenly distributing keywords and phrases through out your content helps your writing look more credible and authoritative, which is one way that search engines rank which websites and articles to include at the very top of search results.

Hyperlink your keywords. Earlier we discussed the importance of using hyperlinks to provide supporting information in your content. For SEO best practices, you'll want to take this one step further. **Use the keywords and phrases as hyperlinks to connect to supportive content on your League's own website specifically**. This helps search engine maps understand the content of your website.

Section 4: Creating Effective Emails

Advocacy and organizing for social change has evolved a lot, even in the past five years. It will always be important to engage with elected officials face-to-face and to mobilize supporters to attend an in-person event. But the importance of having an online organizing component cannot be ignored. When used correctly and strategically, online organizing can help Leagues to engage and mobilize large groups of people to make a big impact.

A major difference between creating content for emails versus creating content for your website is the reader's relationship with the content. When readers come to your website, it is because they are looking to have their needs met. When readers get your emails, you are asking the reader to help meet your needs.

Just like in any relationship, common courtesy can go a long way.

- **Value your readers' time.** Keep your emails short, to the point and edit them with vigor.
- **Respect their wishes.** Always include an unsubscribe link in your emails and never add anyone to your email list who has not specifically asked to be on it. This isn't just courtesy best practice; it's the law.
- **DON'T YELL AT PEOPLE!!!** Using all caps or excessive punctuation in an email signifies yelling. Using all caps and excessive punctuation in the subject line of an email can also lead to your emails being marked as spam.
- **Make one clear ask.** Each email you send should have a single, clear purpose such as a call to action. Readers should never feel confused about what you were trying to communicate after reading your email.
- **Repeat your ask.** It is considered best practice to repeat your ask three times in your email communications. You want your first ask to be "above the fold," i.e. on the screen when an email is opened. Subsequent paragraphs can further build your case.
- **Double, even triple check the steps you're asking readers to take to make sure they will be successful.** This includes checking all of the links in your email to make sure that they work and that all of your webpages display correct, up-to-date information. Ideally, include another person in the final check process who may catch things you're glossing over after having reviewed it countless times.
- **Try the "3 seconds" test.** Can your reader understand your message or what they're being asked to do in three seconds? Ask another League member to give you feedback.

I. Email Layout

While constructing an email may seem very straightforward, taking time to be purposeful in your construction can go a long way. We'll break down the various things you'll need to think about in addition to the great content you've now created.

From: Sender

Most often you will use a League leader's name as the sender of the email. Depending on the content of the email, it may be appropriate to have a different leader's name on the email. For example, an action alert can come from an Advocacy or Voter Protection Chair, while a fundraising pitch can come from your President or Program Chair Voters' Service Chair. This makes the email more personal and allows your members to feel like they are getting to know the whole team over time. A title should always be used when an email is coming from a person on your leadership team.

If you don't have a blast email program, we encourage you to create an email address specifically for sending League content. This account can be transferred between leaders as needed. Having a League-branded email account will lend credibility to your messages. Make sure that someone is receiving, reviewing and responding to any replies sent to this address in a timely manner, particularly after each send.

Understanding the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) rules and guidelines for email based on the [CAN-SPAM Act of 2003](#) dictates how, when and why businesses can contact individuals. Email services like Constant Contact, Mail Chimp and Salsa make these rules a part of their terms of service. It's essential that Leagues stay in compliance to avoid federal prosecution and reduce the risk of losing access to important email services.

- **Only email individuals that want to receive emails from you**. Individuals must have clearly opted in to your list in order to receive emails from you.
- All emails are required to have an **opt-out or unsubscribe button**. If a reader opts out of receiving your email, for any reason, do not email them again.
- **Do not send emails to people on other email lists unless you have an agreement with the organization that manages that list to do so**.
- All emails should have both a **working and managed return email address**.
- All emails should **include your League's mailing address and phone number**.

To

For most Leagues this section will be populated using an email list or through email management software, but you should consider who on your list should be receiving each email. Are you sending a blast email to all of your statewide advocates and members, asking them to take action? Is the message internally-focused and only intended for local League leaders? If so, think about how you should [segment your email list.](#)

Subject line

This is your first and best chance to get your reader interested in your email.

- "Tell and compel." Your subject line should indicate that you have information that is beneficial, timely, important and worth passing along.
- Use less than 55 characters and put the most important words in the beginning.
- Use sentence case instead of capitalizing the first letter of each word (title case). It looks friendlier, and you're less likely to make a mistake.

Creating good subject lines takes practice. If you have a program that allows you to review data on your email sends, test different ideas and see what your list responds to best.

Body of email

Stick to one topic or one action per email.

1. Calls to Action

Use the following tips to create strong action alerts to mobilize your supporters:

- **Clearly tell people why you need their help and why their action is important.**
- **Make it easy to take the action.** Clearly indicate one thing they can do after reading your email, ideally with a clear and repeated link.
- **Use more than just a bill number.** Include the name or nickname of the bill or piece of legislation and a very short description to help clue people in. Don't assume knowledge, even if you have already sent emails on this particular topic – the person reading it might be new to your list, skimmed over the last email, or just needs a refresher. This will also help your emails sound less wonky and help supporters feel confident when making a decision to act or not.
- **Put a date on it.** Tell your readers when their action will be the most effective or when they need to complete it by. Make sure this date is based on your real needs.

Repeat your call to action language or ask two to three times in your email. Since it's the most important part of your email, one of those times should be within the first couples of sentences in order to build your case.

Example: Action alert

Original:
Tax Policy – Advocacy Coordinator Chair

Resolution 133 has now been passed by both the council subcommittees and is on the Mayor's desk. The League is opposed to this bill because it will, when fully implemented, severely restrict the Districts income by reducing income taxes on individuals and most businesses. Studies have shown the reduction could be from $400-500 million per year. The tax decrease for individuals would be very small, amounting to around the price of a gallon of milk per month according to one study. However, the huge majority of businesses in District of Columbia are small and medium sized businesses which report income through their owners via the individual income tax. These would include lawyers and lobbyists (as noted by Mayor Wrinkle) but also small restaurants, mom and pop businesses, electricians and plumbers, handymen and house-

cleaners. In fact, some have predicted that many bigger businesses would change the way they report income to take advantage of this cut. The "trigger" that was included in the tax cut requires that the Districts income increase by $150 million before it takes effect, but that is a very small increase in its budget and one that is needed just to keep up with inflation and rising costs.

Such a tax cut would severely hinder the District of Columbia from fully funding public education preK-12 and higher education as well as other basic services. Raising taxes later would be extremely difficult as they would need to go to a vote of the people. For these reasons (and more) Mayor Wrinkle is expected to veto this bill. She has until May 1 to do so which would leave a couple of weeks before Councilmember could attempt an override which requires a 2/3 majority. In the meantime, it is critical that all League members contact their legislators to express their opposition to this reckless tax cut at a time when many city services are suffering.

Other tax bills continue moving through the process and it is possible that there may be one passed which is even more harmful to general revenue than Resolution 133 and would be sent to the ballot in November. Voting on a tax increase for roads at the same time as an income tax decrease would be a disaster for educating voters (but a windfall for those profiting from huge expenditures prior to elections).

So . . . call and e-mail your Councilmember, inform your family and friends (and anyone else who will listen to you) and stay tuned to see what other interesting events happen in the next few weeks.

Edited:

Subject line: Tell your Councilmember to reject reckless tax cuts

The DC City Council is set to vote on a bill that would save taxpayers the cost of a gallon of milk per month. The savings to a single taxpayer may be low, but the total impact of this tax cut would **reduce city revenue by as much as $400-500 million a year.**

When many of our city's residents are struggling, now is not the time to reduce vital public services, including public and higher education. **Tell your City Councilmember to oppose the reckless tax cut!** [link to action page/contact information]

The proposed tax cuts, known as Resolution 133, would restrict DC's income by reducing income taxes on individuals and most businesses. While the Resolution targets small and medium sized businesses for these tax cuts, some have predicted that bigger businesses would change the way they report income to take advantage of this cut.

Join with other League supporters and tell your City Councilmember to protect critical public services and to reject Resolution 133. [link to action page]

Thank you for weighing in and Making Democracy Work®.

Sincerely,

[advocacy chair/LWV president]

P.S. Want more information on Resolution 133? [link to background information]

There are also other harmful tax bills in the pipeline. Stay updated on the latest developments by checking the League of Women Voters of DC Facebook page [link to Facebook page].

2. Events

Use email to send out invitations to various League events. However, it's important to make sure that you're presenting your information in the clearest way possible.

Use these tips to make your invites more appealing:

- **Keep your invite short**.
- **Clearly state that you're inviting the reader to attend something, and clearly list when and where the event will take place**.
- **Arrange important pieces of information in a hierarchy**. List or bullet out the essential information – when, where, why.
- **Answer a reader's "What's in it for me?" question**. Explain clearly and compellingly the benefits they will receive by attending. Readers need to feel that you're going to address issues that are relevant to them.
- Pictures or graphics can make your invitation more interesting. **If you include pictures in your invitation, make sure they are appropriate for your message and the audience you're trying to reach.**
- **If you ask people to RSVP, make sure the directions for doing so are clear**.

3. eNewsletters

Kivi Leroux Miller of Network for Good compares transitioning your newsletter from print to online as a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. It's technically the same animal the entire time, but it's a very different creature depending on which stage of life it's in. Your online newsletters should not look the same as your print newsletter. Again, you can apply many of the tips for creating strong web content to your eNewsletters writing process.

You can find more in-depth information on creating effective eNewsletters in Millers' free online manual, but here are a few key tips to use when developing an eNewsletter.

- If you have several topics to share information on, decide which ones are the most important and put them first or otherwise **denote their importance through bolding or italics.** Make sure the most important information appears in the top of the email before readers have to scroll.
- Shift from long eNewsletters that go out once a quarter to **shorter versions that go out more regularly**.

- **If you have a very long newsletter with a lot of information, put a summary at the top with the most important points or subject headings.** Use anchor links to enable readers to navigate the content and jump to what's most interesting to them.
- **Do not send eNewsletters as email attachments**; the content should always appear in the body of the email.
- **Be selective when using images.** While using images is a great way to show off work that your League is doing they can also <u>load slowly in emails or look distorted</u>. If you have a lot great pictures to share try posting them on your League's Facebook page or website instead. Make sure you are cropping and resizing any images that you are using in eNewsletters.

Signature

The signature or signer in your email should match the sender of the email or email address you're using.

II. Basic template design

Email templates, or the frame around your content, help with brand consistency, and can make sending out emails quicker and easier. Most email blast programs allow users to create and save templates to be reused. Here are very basic tips regarding email templates and layout. Again, less is more.

Header

The League's logo and your state League's name should be the first image that supporters see when opening your emails. While there is flexibility in the design of the email, <u>LWVUS' name and logo guidelines</u> will provide specifics about the logo design, colors and presentation.

Footer

The footer of your email should include your League's name, mailing address, phone number, website and a working unsubscribe link. If applicable, also include hyperlinks to your League's social media accounts.

Section 5: Additional Tools and Resources

LWV Resources – For [information on SEO](#), look at the [LWVUS Blog](#) for ideas and examples of writing for the web, LWVUS [guide to creating a Facebook page](#), [sample social media content for elections (from 2014)](#), LWVUS [guidelines for names and logos](#), LWVUS [Facebook posting guide](#), and LWVUS [Social media tips (from 2014).](#)

Email – Nearly all email blast platforms provide you with basic metrics you can track, like email open rates, click throughs on emails, email bounce rate and unsubscribes.

Google Analytics – This powerful free tool tracks statistics about website usages and traffic while also allowing users to customize what information they see. For example, you can track how online users interact with your website (what pages they go to, where do they come from), and learn what content gets the most attention (how long a user stays on a particular page, what information gets downloaded). There are lots of great online videos to help get your League started using [Google Analytics](#).

Facebook Page Insights – This tool is already available on every Facebook page that has at least 30 likes. [Page Insights](#) gives page managers the ability to track page views, post reach and information on engagement over the last seven days.

Twitter Analytics – This tool measures much of the same information that Page Insights measures, only for Twitter accounts. [Twitter Analytics](#) is free, and users simple need to login via the website to get started.

Social Media Management – [**Crowdbooster**](#) **–** This services is fee based, but accounts start at just $9 a month. The platform allows users to monitor their social media accounts, get metrics on their posts and suggestions on how to make a bigger impact and schedule posts for later. [HootSuite](#) is another services that individuals use to manager their online brands. It allows users to schedule posts, and keep track of information coming across multiple accounts. HootSuite has both a free and fee-based version.