League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh
Civic Education Model
2021-23

#Make Government Work For You and
Pennsylvania Voter Registration

Mission of Civic Education High School Outreach

To provide a civics-based motivational, interactive program targeting young and new voters including high school seniors and college/university students with context and encouragement for Voter Registration, and empowering young and new voters to become lifelong, active, and informed citizens.

From the **League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh**
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Mission of the Civic Education Model

This **Civic Education Model**, as developed by the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh (LWVPGH), provides guidance and content for the development of Civic Education programs for high school and college/university students by other local Leagues of the League of Women Voters. The model encourages local Leagues to work collaboratively with their local school districts (and colleges/universities) to present nonpartisan, meaningful instruction on the importance of voting and being an active participant in our democracy. It fully complements the PA Act 35 Civics Toolkit and faithfully represents the mission and ideals of the League of Women Voters US and League of Women Voters PA.

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Overview

This Civic Education Model has been developed and refined over six years. The League of Women Voters US and the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania have prioritized youth voter registration outreach with high school and college/university students for many years. Beginning in 2017 and funded with a grant from the LWV Education Fund, the **League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh** reshaped previous efforts and recruited a core group of volunteers to present a PowerPoint that was originally designed for college students. The goal was to reach high school students in underserved Allegheny County High Schools with comprehensive new voter information.

During the first few years, the core group came to realize that students in Pennsylvania did not have the **context of sufficient civic education** to become active, informed citizens. It seemed that there were at least two major reasons for this: Social Studies assessments were not part of the Standards Aligned System (PSAS) assessments and therefore over time the Social Studies curriculum lost significant emphasis; and the most common curricular schedule called for Civics in 9th grade.

The **Act 35 Civics Toolkit of 2018** made a civic education assessment a requirement for all 7th-12th grade students to raise civic education standards for all Pennsylvania students. Through a collaborative relationship available to all school districts, especially those that lack the resources to deliver vibrant, civic education to all students, we believed that the League of Women Voters could help address this civic education gap with a quality youth-centered voter outreach program.

Another key discovery in the early years was that the **optimal setting** for both voter registration and civic education was the *individual classroom*. Most other high school outreach programs offered large-group settings like the auditorium or cafeteria and promoted peer-to-peer outreach. While peer-to-peer programs are also effective, our program favors small-group instruction with knowledgeable LWV members who work to *"empower voters and defend democracy"*.

The current presentation, **#Make Government Work for You***, is the third iteration of a base program in PowerPoint that continues to evolve and strives to remain relevant with each current election cycle. We have used the valuable feedback from students and teachers to continually improve our program to better meet their needs. Consistent high points of the presentation are the interactive nature of the program and the nonpartisan context for civic engagement. It has been presented with positive results in all current educational formats including *all in-person, all virtual, and "hybrid" classrooms, where*

during synchronous instruction students are divided between virtual and in-person settings.

This program model is developed and presented by trained volunteers. While the cooperation of the classroom teacher is essential, the Civic Education Team is the driving force of the program. The LWVPGH Team currently has eight active members. Each of our team members brings a certain expertise and each is committed to reaching young voters with opportunities both for voter registration *and* civic education.

This Civic Education Program is presented free of charge. Funding for its development and the printing of supporting, hard copy materials has been made possible through grants written by LWVPGH members, with the continued support of the LWV Education Fund and local charitable foundations,

This program model has been guided by best practices for high school instruction. It has been endorsed by the League of Women Voters Greater Pittsburgh Board of Directors and complements the LWV of Pennsylvania's *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* and *Nonpartisan Political* policies. **It is hoped that local Leagues of the League of Women Voters will adopt this model as a support for the development of their own civic education programs.** The model offers suggestions based on classroom and virtual educational experiences in Allegheny County. While there may be subtle differences based on region, the underlying themes and the overall content are rooted in the nonpartisan mission of the League of Women Voters.

Preview of Student Responses to #Make Government Work for You (See Appendix #12, Student Feedback PowerPoint.)

*The fourth version, the 2023 classroom presentation entitled, "Why Vote" is available in the Appendix #9.

I. Components of the LWVPGH Civic Education Model

This section outlines the basic components of the model as developed by the LWVPGH. It provides guidance for the essential elements needed for a relevant, interactive civic education program.

A. Forming a Civic Education Team

1. Staffing and Recruitment

The Civic Education Team is comprised of a small group of League of Women Voters volunteers in good standing committed to the belief that young voters are essential to the continuing strength of our democracy. **A Team Chair willing to lead the group through the content development and the administrative organization of the program is essential.** *(See Appendix #1: Team Chair Job Description.)*

a. Selected Characteristics of Team Chair

- Demonstrates a solid understanding of the LWV's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Nonpartisan Politics policies and understands the need to implement concrete strategies that advance the goals of both.
- Demonstrates the ability to create and be guided by the mission and goals/objectives of the Civic Education Committee.
- Demonstrates strong communication and organizational skills.
- Demonstrates background knowledge of voting, elections, government, and civic education.
- Demonstrates knowledge of "best practices" in education/instruction
- Demonstrates background knowledge of developmentally appropriate student behavior and trauma-informed practices.
- Completes all clearances: Act 33 Child Abuse, Act 34 State Police and Federal Criminal background check, if required. *Submits photo ID to enter schools.*

The Team Chair is supported by a **team of presenters**. The presenters are the *in-person or virtual face of the program; there is no right number of presenters.* While it can be beneficial, and at times necessary, to have a larger pool of presenters from which to draw, what worked for us was a smaller group to manage the development of the presentation and to mentor other presenters.

Members of the Civic Education Team are very public ambassadors of the LWV and as such, must embrace the mission, policies. and guidelines of the League. This is non-negotiable as the LWVPGH Team has witnessed school administrators and teachers seeking assurances that the presentation is nonpartisan. Presenters must

"stick to the script" to maintain the fidelity of the program as well as the nonpartisan reputation of the League.

While Act 33 Child Abuse, Act 34 PA State Police, and if required, Federal Criminal Clearances are absolute requirements for in-person visits, we recommend *all Civic Education Team members* complete and pass the clearance processes and maintain copies in one location (Civic Education Team Chair), even if presentations are virtual.

> **Please note:** *Some, but not all* school districts may require Federal Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) clearances for all visitors (requires fingerprinting). **Almost all schools employ a rapid State Police check (Raptor) upon entering a school building. Volunteers must wear the Visitor Badge at all times and sign out when leaving the building.**

The strength and success of our Civic Education Team lies in the diverse experiences and skills of its members. Included in the group are a former experienced Social Studies teacher, a former K-12 school counselor, a non-profit administrator, a nurse practitioner/educator, an IT specialist, a mediator, and a professional disaster emergency trainer. All the volunteers who make up the team have *experience teaching in classrooms or teaching/training groups* of people. *This is a critical prerequisite when recruiting presenters.* A comfort level with public speaking and an understanding of group/classroom dynamics is essential. It is highly recommended that at least one *current or former teacher* be part of a new Civic Education team as the understanding of *how schools work* is another critical component of a successful program.

We have recognized that diverse backgrounds of presenters bring added richness to the Team. In addition, there are common characteristics of presenters that contribute to the smooth running of the Team as well as to spirited student engagement. These identified characteristics can form the basis for a Team Presenter job description and also guide presenter recruitment. *(See Appendix #2: Team Presenter Job Description.)*

b. Selected Characteristics of Team Presenters (In-person or Virtual)

- Demonstrates a solid understanding of LWV's policies of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Nonpartisan Politics and demonstrates a willingness to advance the goals of both.
- Possesses some experience teaching in schools or teaching/training groups of people.
- Demonstrates an openness to new learning and direction.
- Demonstrates good communication and social skills.
- Willing to learn or has some background knowledge about developmentally appropriate student behavior and trauma-informed practices.

- Demonstrates the ability to "think on their feet" and stay calm if challenged in the classroom.
- Demonstrates willingness to commit to time requirements of the Team and to attend weekly meetings (as needed) during each planning and presentation season.
- Completes all clearances: Act 33 Child Abuse, Act 34 State Police (including Raptor in school buildings) and Federal Criminal background check, if required

c. Forming a Key Volunteer Support Team for In-person Visits

In-person Instruction: (Paper Voter Registration Applications)
For in-person school visits, the LWVPGH Team found that recruiting a support team of volunteers to assist with voter registration (paper applications) was helpful. These "Key Volunteers" were drawn from LWVPGH Volunteers who regularly supported voter service events and were familiar with the paper application. **Two presenters** and **two-three Key Volunteers** to assist with voter registration paper applications is suggested**. Partnering with the local League Voter Service Chair to meet Key Volunteer Support Team needs is helpful. Creation of a Key Volunteer team would only be necessary if schools require paper voter registration, as opposed to online registration with phones, laptops, or computers.

Virtual Instruction/In-person Instruction: (Online Voter Registration) In the new world of virtual lessons during the pandemic years, the LWVPGH Team shifted to using **TurboVote.org for online registration.   With all in-person classroom presentations commencing in 2023, **ONLINE voter registration** has become the norm. **Rockthevote.org** is the preferred platform, because it is also used by Vote411. This nonpartisan website links eligible students to their state's voter registration site (vote.pa.gov) and *sends students text or email reminders about upcoming elections and voting information.* Some schools also block certain sites, so it is important to determine in advance of the school visit exactly what security protocols and online procedures are in place. Both Turbovote.org and Rockthevote.org are widely used by local college/universities and are extremely useful for our program presentations in those settings, also, where inter/intra state students are common.

2. Presenter Training

The focus of presenter training is to instill confidence with program material and to cement an understanding that a **high standard** must be met when speaking with students in classrooms. Training is provided by the Team Chair or a Chair-recognized team member to ensure that Team standards are met. Presenters must complete training before

presenting to students. New presenters observe experienced presenters in the classroom (in-person or virtually) before new presenters are assigned to a school visit. The first-time classroom visit for a new presenter is always supported by an experienced presenter/mentor who may assist when needed.

Team members have two trainings: one for best practices for high school classroom instruction and one to increase team members' confidence using the virtual platforms.

a. PowerPoint Training: (For In-person or Virtual Instruction)

- The designated trainer, a teacher or former teacher, if possible, should conduct **PowerPoint practice sessions** for team members. These sessions can be conducted virtually or in-person. Practice sessions can be repeated until each presenter has demonstrated they can present to students both in the classroom or virtually with fidelity to the program. *(See Appendix #3, Guidelines for Presenters.)*

- **In practice sessions,** team members should be able to demonstrate that they: can speak clearly, can follow the scripted "notes" so presentation objectives are achieved, can maintain a positive demeanor, can pace themselves to stay within time limits, can facilitate open-ended questions, and can "think on their feet" to respond positively to students in the classroom if challenged.

b. Additional Materials for Training Sessions

Inclusive instruction: In the training, the **LWV Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy (DEI)** as well as the **LWV Nonpartisan Political Policy** are reviewed. Additional webinars such as **LWVUS DEI Webinars** and other training or complementary readings can be suggested to further an understanding of differing viewpoints. We have worked with students with situations like homelessness, or religious affiliations where tact and sensitivity are called for. Team members are highly encouraged to share relevant materials with the Team. The incorporation of any of the shared data or information into the program script is at the discretion of the Team Chair.

Note: Details matter and one way to demonstrate inclusiveness is for Team members to list their pronouns on their virtual profiles. *Example: Amy Kleissas (she, her).*

Things to Remember for Volunteers: This very important document is reviewed to provide guidelines for classroom situations involving: student behavior; the teacher's role and responsibilities; the team leader's role and responsibilities; and

the Child Abuse mandate. While Act 33 Child Abuse and Act 34 State Police Clearances (and possibly Federal Criminal clearances) are an absolute requirement for in-person visits, we recommend *all Civic Education Team members* complete and pass the clearance processes and maintain copies in one location (Civic Education Team Chair). *(See Appendix #4, Things to Remember for Volunteers.)*

c. Virtual Platform Training:

The entire team can use time during a team meeting to learn about the features of the virtual platform to be used. Practicing with platforms like Zoom or Google Meets, *prior to the classroom visit*, will help ensure the visit runs smoothly.
When possible, a practice session with school personnel raises the team's confidence in seamless access for presenters.

B. Developing a Dynamic Civic Education Program

Key to the success of student voter engagement is developing a dynamic program that inspires the student **to choose to register to vote**. The LWVPGH Team experience shows that presenting relevant, relatable topics in an interactive, engaging, and where appropriate, humorous style, is effective. While developing a Civic Education program may seem daunting, we believe it can be an exciting and rewarding process if you are guided by a few basic components: **define your audience; do the research; and identify key topics to address.**

Define Your Audience:
The target audience for the LWVPGH program is eligible high school students who are or who will be 18 years of age before or by the next election. These students, who would be first time voters, are usually in their senior year, while there may be a small number of additional eligible juniors. While we have presented in the fall of the school year, the most active time is the **late winter/spring** when more students have turned 18 years old. Due to the size of Allegheny County, the corresponding number of school districts including Pittsburgh Public Schools, and the varying needs within these school districts, program presentations are offered first to **school districts with underserved student populations.**

It is also helpful to have a sense of the school's **Social Studies curriculum**, which might include history, political science, government, and civics programs. It should be noted that in 2018, **Act 35 of 2018** (the Civics Toolkit) was signed into law. It required all PA public school entities to administer a locally developed assessment of US history, government, and civics at least once to students in grades 7-12, beginning with the *2020-2021 school year*. Covid-19 may have delayed the implementation of this directive. **The Act 35 Civics**

Toolkit offers comprehensive resources based on three pillars, Civic Knowledge, Civics Skills, and Actions and it is significant that the League of Women Voters is listed as a resource in "Actions". (See Appendix #5, #6, and #7.)

Typically, the LWVPGH Team found that most of the students we visited had completed a mandatory civics class in 9th grade. For many that class was the **first and last time they were presented with civics/voting information.** We have found that basic, quick reminders of the branches of government and the breakdown of the kinds of elections within and between years are very helpful to include in almost every presentation. Engaging with the classroom teacher ahead of time and learning about the background knowledge and makeup of the class can help direct the content and tone of the presentation. Across the board, the LWVPGH Team found that being somewhat aware of what students had already learned was beneficial.

Also, please consider the uniqueness of different populations. First time voters can be found in other settings as well, including middle schools, technical schools, colleges, and universities. The LWVPGH Team has presented in a variety of these locations and found that with just a little tweaking, an effective program crosses all audiences.

KEY Classroom Logistics: **For in-person and even for virtual classroom visits, we have found that the most productive, successful visit is presenting a 40minute presentation** *(30-minute PowerPoint; 10 minutes for voter registration)* **to 25-35 students** *in a classroom*. This allows for authentic engagement with the students and enough time for each student to share some requested feedback. (One hour classroom periods are ideal to slow the pace as well as cover more material.) The teacher is asked to remain in the classroom and to assist with facilitating student questions and respond to student behavior, if necessary.

Do the Research
Sourcing accurate, nonpartisan information is essential in the development of the classroom program. The *nonpartisan commitment* of the League of Women Voters cannot be emphasized enough; it serves as a guidepost for program development as well as a marketing point when contacting potential schools for presentations.

The program also benefits from well-rounded perspectives in a variety of subject matter. Joining trustworthy civic education websites and using reliable election, voting, and political information websites for content are essential. It will often be necessary to distill the information to an appropriate high school level. Information is ever-evolving and continual updates from a variety of resource outlets is highly recommended. *Resources for Civic Education, is a detailed compilation of reliable and trustworthy websites*

used in the development of the LWVPGH program and is provided for teachers as an essential support. *(See [Appendix](#) #8.)*

Identify Key Topics to Address

Identifying the most salient topics that can inspire students to register to vote may be the most difficult but most exciting part of developing a program**. Forming a small team** (3-4 members) to work on the development of the PowerPoint presentation is recommended.

The small team should meet initially to brainstorm *what might be* the content of the program. One individual in this team is assigned **"editor"** with the final say on what is included or excluded from the presentation. *The editor must be knowledgeable about maintenance of LWV's nonpartisan standards and best-practices for instruction.*

Next, the team should sort through the ideas from the brainstorming session to identify which topics rise to the surface as the most relevant in supporting the overall theme and goals of the program. For the LWVPGH Team, the most important, overarching theme of our program has been "**YOUR VOTE IS YOUR VOICE**". The iteration below of the LWVPGH program is the third in what will be an ever-evolving program. But the overarching theme of "Your Vote is Your Voice" has been consistent throughout each version of the program. Once a theme is agreed upon, the team can begin to define the goals/objectives for the presentation.

1. Defining Goals/Objectives for the Presentation

The small team needs to define a short list of goals/objectives for the presentation. It is understood that encouraging voter registration is the primary goal, but there can be others that support your mission. Although the theme of "Your Vote is Your Voice" has not changed over time, what *has changed* through new versions are other goals/objectives of the presentation and how best to present the information in each *current* educational climate.

> **As an example,** the LWVPGH Team determined that the underlying objectives for the **2020-21 #Make Government Work for You** PowerPoint would be to:
> 1. Recognize the very unique situations due to Covid-19 that students have experienced in their 2020-21 school year and to express empathy and encouragement.
> 2. Inquire about what it means to be a citizen *in* a democracy.
> 3. Present the right to vote as a gift *and* a civic duty.
> 4. Encourage thinking about what government does for us and who influences those decisions.
> 5. Discuss the importance of reliable, accurate resources and how to tell what and where they are.

We preview content by sharing three goals/objectives at the beginning of the presentation and then check for comprehension of the three main ideas students should know by the end. *"Tell them what you are going to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them."*

In the Classroom--Three Goals/ Objectives at the *beginning* of the presentation:
Our goal today is to talk about:
1. Why VOTING is a powerful way to Make Government Work for YOU!
2. How to Understand Elections
3. How to Register to Vote

"Things to Remember" for students at the *end* of the presentation:
1. VOTE to be HEARD; *Your VOTE is a GIFT and a DUTY!*
2. Participate in our DEMOCRACY to Make Government Work for <u>You</u>
3. Do ALL you can to be an ACTIVE, INFORMED VOTER

2. Create the Program Outline and the PowerPoint:

A **PREVIEW** of the **#Make Government Work For You** and *From Student to Active Citizen, and* **Why Vote 2023 (entire PowerPoint presentation can be downloaded) (See** Appendix **9.)**

A Note to LWV Members: Local Leagues are welcome to use the LWVPGH PowerPoint as the foundation of a civic education program. ***For the entire PowerPoint, please contact us at civic.education @lwvpgh.org.*** However, we include some Allegheny County-specific information that may need to be changed to reflect your area. *We have added a "copyright" line to each slide which must be removed if a slide is altered. Before revising this PowerPoint, we make a friendly request that all users adhere to the League of Women Voters' nonpartisan position and standards. The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is not responsible for revisions that might not meet the nonpartisan and reliability standards of the League of Women Voters.*

The small team creates the first draft of the PowerPoint. This effort represents a substantial amount of work for the small team, and it can take a significant chunk of time**.** Once a good foundation is laid, the program is easily fine-tuned. The program outline includes a **visual presentation**, *the **PowerPoint slide deck,*** and a corresponding ***script for presenters in the "Notes".*** The script is essential to ensuring that all presenters are sharing the same, accurate information. Personalizing the PowerPoint to your location and including personal stories where appropriate and approved by the team can be helpful in providing easily understood context/content for students.

- **Begin the outline**: Start searching for words and pictures that represent the goal statements. Meaningful **visual content** for the slide deck can be found in a variety of on-line resources when you type key topic words into your browser. Please note that any photographs/graphics used need to have appropriate attribution and it may be best practice to only use photos that are free with or without attribution. The LWV has free Flickr photos and brand information at **LWV League Management;** *"LWVUS Flickr Site" and "LWV Brand Standards and Logos".*

  The more you research your goals/objectives, the more your **textual content** will develop. Identifying key word phrases such as *"What does it mean to be a citizen"* or *"Young people voting"* can lead to sources that provide structure for the outline, as well as ideas for an interactive presenter's script.

- **Begin team review:** Once an outline has been completed and a draft presentation prepared, present the program to the entire team for feedback. This can best be done at **weekly team meetings** with all team members participating and their feedback considered. The small team and the editor have final say on what should be incorporated.

- **Continue revisions to the PowerPoint until the final version is created:** This process can take weeks. Begin PowerPoint creation at least **4 weeks** before outreach begins.

- **IMPORTANT: Save the final PowerPoint in a** *"Notes" format PDF***.** This creates what we call our "script". We feel that creation of **scripted instruction in a PDF format** facilitates instruction (it is easier to read as a *separate document* than as "Notes" underneath individual slides during the PowerPoint presentation). Scripted instruction is key to maintaining the fidelity of our program.

3. Gather and Create Supplemental Documents and Tutorials

Supplying additional resources for students and teachers is a key feature of our dynamic program. These documents, explained below, may be created to supplement instruction and may include *a Pre-test, Post-test, Resources for Students, Resources for Teachers, Tutorials, and Zip Folder of digital documents.*

- The **"Pre-test"** is a series of 2-3 open-ended questions posed at the beginning of **in-person instruction,** as time allows, to establish rapport with students and preview content. The Pre-test was not used in virtual presentations, due to time constraints, but does reflect a "best-practice". *(See **Appendix #10, Pre-test Questions.**)*

- The **"Post-test"** is the **feedback form** we created for students. It can be completed on paper or in a Google doc created by the teacher. Feedback from students helps the team determine if students have retained a positive message about voting and elections. The team should incorporate reliable feedback from students and teachers into continual improvement of the PowerPoint. *(See Appendix #11 for **Post-test** Questions and Appendix #12 for **Student Feedback** PowerPoint.)*

UNIQUE RESOURCES FROM LWVPGH: The LWVPGH Team has created a menu of unique resources that can be found in the LWVPGH *Explainer and Graphics* web page. Local Leagues are welcome to tap into these ready resources. *The most **current version** of infographics and other documents can be accessed from this web page and **viewed, downloaded, or shared**. Under "Resources" in the Menu, users can also access the **Video** and **Slide Decks** web pages.*

> **A Note about Infographics: Venngage** was used in the creation of some of these infographics. This graphic design tool has comprehensive applications and has 24/7 support available. Different levels of paid subscriptions allow multiple team members to create infographics, social media graphics, and documents in other formats. **Canva** has also been used and has a nonprofit, free version.

> **ZIP FOLDER:** Prior to visiting a school, we discuss our resource options with the school contact and decide which number of infographics to include in the student's zip folder. **A sample of infographics/documents accessible from the "Explainers and Graphics" web page that we might include, follows:**

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** *Diversity and Inclusion Terminology*
- **Invitation to vote**: *18th Birthday Card; Be Heard; Rack Card; Cynicism vs JQ Citizen*
- **How to Register to Vote:** *Online vs Paper Registration; Annotated Voter Registration Application (Instructions)*
- **Current Election Information**: *Municipal Elections; Make a Plan to Vote, Democracy Time, How to Pick a Candidate, Know Your Rights*
- **Civic Education**: *Power Part 1 and 2; Understanding Elections; Bill of Rights; Labels; Harrisburg 101; Tracking a Bill; PA Judicial System; Founding Principles of Democracy*
- **Combating Mis-/disinformation:** *Fact or Fiction; Additional resource documents linked from this infographic*
- **How to be an Active Citizen: Your Government Officials**: Facts for Citizens Directory, *(How to) Contact Elected Officials, Contact Officials Rack Card*

Additional *Paper* Resources for Students (For In-Person Visits):
Besides the zip folders for students and teachers, which are sent via email, the *Make a Plan to Vote student handout* provides polling place voting information for the new voter, including approved ID and the annotated voter registration application helps with the registration process. The popular LWVPGH resource, printed **"Your Government Officials" pamphlets,** can also be shared.

- **Resources for Teachers:** The **Resources for Civic Education** is an incredibly powerful list of trustworthy websites and classroom-ready lessons which is provided to all classroom teachers via email. We would also send teachers the "Your Government Officials" digital version and might include an infographic made into a poster for the classroom. **(See Appendix *#8, Resources for Civic Education*)**

Feeling Overwhelmed? No Need to Reinvent the Wheel. Here are a few elements of the program that have been consistently successful.

4. Sample Program Elements
While it is very important to have content that is particularly relevant to your area, there is no need to completely reinvent the wheel! Dozens and dozens of presentations to students all across Allegheny County have shown a few consistent threads that resonated with students and teachers.

Interaction: Getting the students engaged and involved in the program as quickly as possible is key. The "Pre-test" questions mentioned previously are a great way to break the ice, but the goal is to maintain two-way dialogue throughout the presentation. Asking students for their reactions to different slides or *"Have you heard this before?"* and *"What do you think?"* are helpful verbal cues.

However, we found that getting students' *direct responses* on what matters to them personally was particularly informative for us and well received by them. In all versions of the LWVPGH program, one slide is dedicated to identifying a number of different topics that are often political issues at the federal, state/local, and school levels. Allowing for time, **each student** is given the opportunity to name one or two issues that are **important to them**.

What are the ISSUES YOU Care About? 13

NATIONAL
- Climate Change
- Systemic Racism
- Healthcare
- Foreign Policy and the Military
- Economic Policy
- Immigration
- Judicial Appointments
- Taxes
- Student Loans
- Freedom of Speech
- Social Security

► **STATE**
► Minimum Wage
► Healthcare
► COVID-19
► Community Police Relations
► Voting Rights
► Judicial System
► Animal Rights
► LGBTQ+ Issues
► Gun Safety
► Environment
► Fair Housing
► JOBS
► School Regulations

SCHOOL
- School Safety
- Bullying
- Cyberbullying
- Over-testing
- Curriculum Choice
- Police in Schools
- Social Media
- Bathrooms
- Access to Tech
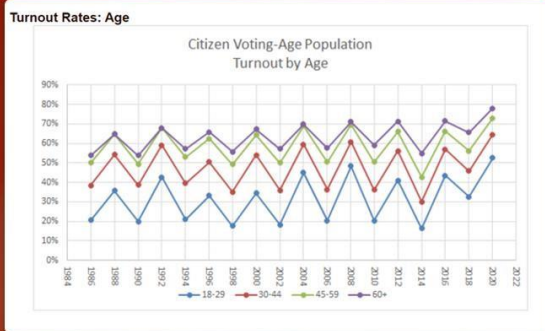- Suspension Policy
- People with Disabilities

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This activity requires sensitivity and tact as presenters process how responses are similar but also different. We then asked each student to look at the same list and respond as if *they* were the *older adults* in their lives. You can see light bulbs go off as students realize the differences in perspective.

This "issues" activity was even more meaningful *during -in-person visits,* when coupled with the next quick interactive exercise. Eight students, representing the number of young people registered in the most current election went up against eight older adults (played by us and the teacher) who were also registered, to see *which population turned out more voters* at the polls. Our charts of statistics (below) closed the case that older adults are *"supervoters",* while younger voters' turnout has room to grow. We ended the exercise by asking, *"Which group of voters are elected officials listening to?"* This simple exercise was almost always commented upon in student feedback. It was unfortunate that this activity did not translate well to virtual presentations and instead we included the statistics and conclusions in the script.

New versions of these activities and charts are available in the **"Why Vote" PowerPoint** in the **Appendix** #9.

Vocabulary: In engaging with high school students the Team was encouraged to use as accurate and adult-toned language as possible. We made sure to check frequently for comprehension for what might be unfamiliar words, like "cynical" and "skeptical". Yet we were reminded that even with the most rigorous approach, one can never assume what a student will hear. During a virtual presentation to seniors, one of our presenters shared her experience of being a poll worker. Afterwards, the teacher apologized if we heard the laughter. Some of the students needed a few moments to understand the difference between a senior citizen "poll" worker and a "pole" worker.

Personal Stories: If and when appropriate, lightly seasoning a few personal stories into the presentation can build rapport with students. Sharing a story about participating in the Viet Nam War protests in the '60's (that led to the lowering of the voting age from 21- to 18-years old through the 26th Amendment), seemed to humanize the presenters for the students. We make the point that today's young people are the beneficiaries of our previous civic involvement. The stories need to be relevant, approved in advance by the team, and shared if time permits.

5. General Technology Requirements and the Special Needs of the Virtual Format
Whether it is an in-person or virtual presentation, technology will continue to play an important role in our high school outreach.

In-Person Presentations:
The classroom needs to be equipped with a large screen or smart board. Using a thumb drive to share the PowerPoint with teachers is easy. Although we have tried to maintain the ownership of the PowerPoint program to prevent unauthorized alterations, lately we

have become more flexible about this. If the PowerPoint is shared via email, a back-up thumb drive is still recommended in case of a technical glitch.

Virtual Presentations: Although in-person presentations are highly recommended whenever possible, being able to access classrooms remotely throughout the 2020-21 pandemic-academic year was an *amazing opportunity*. It is not known what educational options will be retained post Covid-19, but virtual presentations may be a meaningful alternative moving forward. For the short term, schools may be hesitant to allow in visitors. Virtual presentations may be a solution for schools in more far away areas where traveling is time-consuming, and they may also give full-time cyber-educators classroom-ready programs.

When presenting in a virtual format, it is essential to know what the school's platform is ahead of time and to train your Team to use it. Zoom and Google Meets/Classroom were the most common platforms we experienced, but each school had different rules for access to these platforms. Helpful questions to ask your contact: *How to gain access? When will that access be granted? Who to contact if it fails?* Although it was not always possible, it was preferable to have a dry run with the teacher and the presenting Team a day or two ahead of time to insure best chances for smooth access.

It is also helpful to recruit a **tech-savvy Team member** who can train novice, anxious virtual format presenters. Because a new team may include presenters with varying knowledge of technology, training time for just this purpose can be very beneficial.

Presenting in the virtual format requires two people on the presenting team; one to present and the other to monitor the chat. Because the virtual format does not easily allow for the use of paper registrations, it is recommended that the Team use the nonpartisan website **Turbovote.org** or **Rockthevote.org** to complete voter registrations. It is important to make sure that the school's firewall will allow access to these comprehensive platforms. Turbovote and RocktheVote will register students through **vote.pa.gov** but have the added benefit of reminding students via text or email that an election day is coming. It can also be bookmarked, and the teacher can assist students post presentation.

 A word about gathering data and Trackable QR Codes: With paper voter registrations our practice was to keep an accurate count of all new voter registrations gained during the school visit. This data has been used for required reporting to foundations about the success of the program goals which were defined in the awarded grants. In the virtual environment, it was still important to try to count or ask the teacher to report how many students immediately (or eventually) use Turbovote or RocktheVote to register. **Now that we are back in-person, Trackable QR Codes** on our postcards, posters, and PowerPoints help us **keep track of scans** during or just after a classroom visit. While it

is not certain that a student registered, we consider these scans as a **probable voter registration**.

Most teacher's have an electronic platform available for their students. The student zip folders, the Google Feedback form, and even the PowerPoint itself may be posted for easy student access. Sharing digital resources via email for these platforms is a beneficial cost saving measure as color copies did not need to be printed either by the League or the school. As we return to in-person presentations, there may be a need to share a few items via paper for students without access to reliable technology, like paper registration applications and printed infographics. However, classroom technology makes the infographics and other resources we share easily accessible for students.

Overall, virtual presentations will remain in the LWVPGH toolbelt as an option, even though in 2023, we have shifted to all in-person presentations**.**

C. Structuring High School Outreach

1. Prioritizing Student Populations
As previously suggested, defining the student audience is an essential component of a successful program. Counties within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are all shapes and sizes with varying population densities and demographics. School districts within the counties reflect this. Therefore, one recommendation for prioritizing student outreach will not necessarily fit all regions. It is recommended that each local League determine what is the best way for reaching students in their area's school districts.

Due to the size and number of school districts within the reach of the LWVPGH, choosing which schools to visit required **using data**. Ideally, we would hope to reach every school and every senior class, but with 43 school districts in our area, that is unlikely. Guided by the commitment to the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters DEI Policy, and by the desire to address the well-publicized inequality in educational funding of public schools, the LWVPGH determined that our initial effort for outreach would target **underserved students.** Specifically, this meant reaching out to school districts that seemed to have limited options for voter registration and/or for enhanced civic education. It should be noted that this deliberate reach to underserved districts was a meaningful point in securing grant funds for the program.

To determine the schools/districts that met our criteria, the **Free and Reduced Lunch statistics** for Allegheny County were reviewed. To be included in our targeted school list, **40% or greater** of the student population needed to be receiving Free and Reduced lunches. Original outreach **included 19 schools**. As bandwidth of our program increased from 2017 to 2021, we lowered the percentage so that our outreach increased to

approximately **40 Allegheny County high schools, including charters.** With our current Team, we can send three teams to a school and present simultaneously or alternately, as needed. For example, we have visited schools where two teams took turns in one classroom, but each taught three or four periods for a full day of presentations. We have also presented simultaneously with two or three teams teaching in different classrooms during the same period. At this point, requests for visits have not yet surpassed our ability to deliver.

Our last high school visit just before the Covid-19 shutdown was to **Westinghouse Academy (part of the Pittsburgh Public School System)** and met a goal for us that was years-long in being realized. Building upon the success of that visit, new connections and opportunities evolved. For the November 2020 General Election, we worked collaboratively with the PPS administration and Board members to deliver
"Ready-Set-VOTE" bags of printed voter materials to PPS seniors who may have had limited access to technology. These materials included voter registration applications, instructions, and educational infographics. The distribution was achieved through delivery of bags to the student lunch pick-up points ("Grab and Go") that were active throughout the district during the pandemic. **Over five elections**, we have now created, assembled, and delivered **18,000 Ready-Set-VOTE bags** to Pittsburgh Public Schools and to other community partners.

In the early years in getting the program off the ground, it was helpful to tap into established school relationships of LWVPGH Board Members. Early on and currently, the LWVPGH Team will consider visiting *any educational setting that requests a visit*. The LWVPGH Team strives to be as inclusive as possible and does not limit presentations to high school seniors only, as we have also presented to 5th graders, 7th-8th graders, sophomores and junior classes, and to college/university students. These other groups of students not only demonstrate good comprehension, but also have given our Team enthusiastic, positive feedback. We have also considered reaching out in the future to *community groups* who may appreciate the nonpartisan content of our presentation.

2. Communication with Schools
Key personnel and reliable procedures improve the chances of successful outreach to high schools. Email is the primary medium for communication as it allows for easier distribution and follow-up and multi-optional response times. **Communication with schools should be handled by one Team member—the "High School Outreach Coordinator".** The Outreach Coordinator is responsible for *all correspondence* with school personnel as well as with the presenting team. Good communication and organization skills are essential in this position. *(See Appendix #13 for the Job Description, Appendix #14 for sample correspondence, and Appendix #15 and #16 for sample virtual and sample in-person schedules.)*

One of our core beliefs is our **respect for school hierarchies**. The LWVPGH Team determined that the **primary contact** is with the **school principal**. Our first emails are sent to principals only and serve to introduce the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh, provide information about our presentation, and include classroom ready resources. This has worked well because bypassing principals can put teachers or counselors in the uncomfortable position of authorizing a visit that requires administrative or Board of Directors' approval. Once a relationship is established with a teacher or group of teachers within a school, contacting the teacher(s) directly works well for future visits. However, since personnel do change and because it is most respectful of school hierarchy, best practice is to copy the principal when emailing teachers.

In this initial email we ask principals to determine which classes would be preferred to reach the **maximum number of eligible students** (which may include some juniors and some students in other educational settings, like special education or tech/prep). We ask principals to forward our information to the designated teachers and/or to a primary contact.

As Pennsylvania civic education happens for most students in 9th or 10th grades, usually only higher level, elective Social Studies classes contain seniors. **Our best strategy has been to cycle through *senior English classes*** so that we reach all seniors, including special education students and others who may be in various settings within the school. Eligible juniors may be given permission to attend. Suggesting this strategy to the principal is strongly recommended.

In our communications, we vigorously promote the value of ***classroom presentations.*** Schools have requested cafeteria or assembly/auditorium voter registration drives, which we will accommodate, but we feel these settings do not support students with the thoughtful context they need to be active and informed new citizens.

A New, Effective Way to Spread Our Message
In fall, 2022, we gained funding to implement one of the Civic Education Team's very best ideas. The **"[Happy 18th Birthday]"** poster was printed and **sent to principals and lead teachers in every high school in five counties**: Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Washington, and Westmoreland. We estimate there is the potential for 10,000 students to be exposed to these posters. Hearing from high schools in Allegheny County where posters found their way into libraries and lunchrooms and an seeing an increase in Westmoreland County high school requests for classroom visits, proved the efficacy of this project.

3. Suggested Timeline

The "when" of contacting schools is an imprecise art that requires flexibility and patience. The school year calendar is jammed-packed with established commitments for teachers and students working to achieve their academic objectives. It can be difficult for teachers to find time to interject a new program or to "give up" class time. However, giving principals/teachers an introductory email early in the school year (October/November) makes programs in January through May much more feasible.

Guided by the requirements of the Pennsylvania voter registration laws and with the goal of reaching as many eligible, 18-year-old students as possible before the next election cycle, it makes sense to do most presentations in the late winter/spring semesters. The LWVPGH Team begins making contact with an initial invitation to schools in the fall. However, most communication occurs with a series of three different emails to principals/teachers from mid-January through mid-March, with "friendly reminders" about all our nonpartisan, free resources, including classroom visits. Requests for visits might come from any one of these invitations including the initial email sent in the fall. *Presenting* in the fall is a viable option if your program is ready and if there is a highly visible federal election. Most of our classroom or streamed presentations to college-universities occur in the fall.

More than likely, requests for presentations will come in slowly--at first. When we were starting out, we even used snail mail in the late summer to get our information in front of principals. It takes time to establish a program but investing in positive relationships with school staff will lead to successful school visits year-after-year.

II. Getting the Word Out

Along with the development of the program is the need to get the word out to school districts and community partners at large. This is a two-fold campaign with a general and a specific targeted approach.

Local Leagues can kick off a wide-reaching, general campaign to announce the availability of the program on the local League's website and through **any and all** communications with volunteers. Depending upon the local League's approach to meetings, High School Outreach can also be a featured program for general membership. Word of mouth can be a very effective tool for getting the word out. Accordingly, notices to community partners and advocacy groups encouraging them to apprise school principals/Board of Directors of the program can be helpful.

We have just begun exploring the reach of Public Access TV stations. The day before the May Primary, our Chair appeared on a local show to talk about our program **([Moon Landings Episode 11](#).)**

The direct target approach to schools is another component. Developing a list of the school districts within the geographical area of your local League is the first step. Checking school websites to identify principals as chief contacts and gathering their emails sets the foundation for contacting schools.

III. Funding Civic Education in Schools and Community

Any discussion of funding for the development and presentation of this program needs to be driven by local Leagues' guidelines and procedures. It is possible, as it was for the LWVPGH, that funding this program might be part of a larger grant for voter registration support. However, it is also a strong program that could receive funding on its own.

A. Defining Goals

Before seeking any sort of funding, the goals of the program must be established, and consideration given to how the goals can be quantified or measured (outcomes). Exploring local foundations and reviewing what their funding habits and requirements are will help identify the fit for this kind of civics-based education program. Civic and fraternal organizations may be seen as an untapped resource. It should be noted that nonpartisanship also needs to be a requirement from the funding source.   The goal for the LWVPGH team was determined by what was seen as the greatest need within the community; *to reach underserved high school students with both civic education and voter outreach.* Filling a gap for an underserved community is often an attractive funding point for foundations and organizations. The goal for your local League may be similar to the LWVPGH or completely different depending upon the needs of students in your community.

Projecting program outcomes is another excellent opportunity to identify what you want to accomplish with the program. Regular review of outcomes provides valuable data on the progress of the program. Even more important, reviewing outcomes can help direct not only what needs to be adjusted within the program but also what future funding needs may be. Measuring sticks such as the number of schools to be visited or the number of students to be registered are good, easy, and realistic measures. It takes time to build a program so keep expectations reasonable. Depending upon the size of your area and number of visiting teams you have, visiting 2 to 4 schools your first year may be quite realistic. *(Appendix #17, Sample [Grant Writing](#))*

B. Creating a Budget

A brainstorming session on potential program costs is beneficial. As always, it is important to define the unique needs of your area and the financial resources of the local League. Facilitating discussion by contemplating a wide range of possibilities can help to pin down what is really needed.

Budget considerations:

Program Development: any materials that are needed for the development of the program should be included. This is the time to inventory the resources that are already available and to determine what additional resources are needed for successful program development. This can include software purchases (like Venngage) for creation of graphics or hardware purchases, like thumb drives and laptops.

Volunteer Support: What do the volunteers who are driving the program *need* to make it workable and enjoyable. Wherever and whenever possible, participating in a program should not come with additional expenses to a volunteer. If it is not possible to financially cover an expense, volunteers should know up front what is expected. Consider paying for identification badges; school clearances; mileage reimbursement for school travel.

It should be noted that the **amount of time** a volunteer gives to the program either in its development or presentation should be captured. The volunteer can use it as a tax deduction and the organization can quantify it as a show of savings to the funder *("this is what the local League is donating")*. The amount of time will also vary depending upon volunteer position, commitment level, and time of year. The Team Chair may donate as much as four to six hours per day three to five days per week for several months, or more, to the program. Presenters may donate four to six hours per week for a few months, or more. A local League should have a best practice identified in its fundraising procedures for how this is recorded. Our local League has created spreadsheets for Civic Education, Voter Services, Administration, and Website Development. We have captured donated volunteer hours in these spreadsheets, which will help us with our grant-writing and reporting.

Classroom/Student Support with Printed Materials

In-person presentations required **printed materials** including paper voter registration applications, civics education infographics and "Facts for Citizens" pamphlets to be produced and distributed. For our program we used $1.50 per student as an estimate for printed materials. Having time to find the best price and a workable delivery schedule for printed materials can conserve grant money.

Community Outreach

To reach students when presenting in-person was not possible due to Covid-19 and to support community members who may have limited access to technology, the LWVPGH Team created **Ready-Set-Vote! doorhanger bags of printed materials.** The approximate cost of $1.25 per person included in-color civics infographics, voter registration and mail-in ballot applications, and corresponding line-by-line instruction sheets. Over the **past five election cycles, 18,000 bags** were distributed to Pittsburgh Public Schools and to community partners.

C. Maintaining Record of Costs

The local League as well as the funding organization will want to know how the dollars are spent. Maintaining an accurate report of dollars spent including receipts where needed is essential. Again, the local League should have a best practice in place for how this is achieved.

Conclusion

Developing and presenting a nonpartisan, fact-based civic education program that encourages new voter registration is in alignment with the mission and vision of the League of Women Voters. This model is designed to guide local Leagues in the development of their own program. "Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy" for the future begins with engaging our youth. By helping to fill the civic education gap we hope to increase the likelihood that young voters become active, informed citizens who vote in every election. The LWVPGH Team is available to answer any questions and to offer additional support for the successful development of your program.

See the attached APPENDIX for a complete list of links to our resources.

Please take a minute to give us your feedback HERE.