

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT



THE CITIZENS LEAGUE ITSELF

How this regional citizen organization works, in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, to 'help this community identify its problems and what ought to be done about them'.

Based on a conference of regional citizen organizations at Spring Hill Center April 7-9, 1976.

CITIZENS LEAGUE
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Different but essentially comparable institutions for studying metropolitan issues are now emerging in most of the country's major urban regions.

The political ecology varies greatly from region to region. Yet the logic of the situation compels each area toward some set of institutions, and some process, similar to those in the Twin Cities area. No area wants to move simply from crisis to crisis. This being so, every area is driven toward the development of some arrangement for identifying, early, its problems and its opportunities, and for acting on them. Finally, there is a growing awareness—beginning, as it did in the Twin Cities area, in the private sector—that it is the metropolitan rather than the municipal city that forms the logical basis for dealing with major urban problems.

The emergence of such institutions—visible at the Spring Hill meeting—is largely unseen in the country at large. This reflects the organization of the media: There are local media covering local affairs, and national media covering national affairs, but essentially there are no national media covering local affairs.

The evolution proceeds as representatives of particular urban regions exchange information—as they did at our meeting—directly with each other. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Twin Cities area was itself an importer of urban know-how, with its civic leaders and public officials traveling to look at urban renewal programs or metropolitan governments elsewhere. More recently, this area has become a heavy net exporter.

It is a process that deserves much more attention, and assistance, than it has had—especially from national organizations and foundations concerned about the political and social health of the urban regions, and, of course, from the national government.

Reprinted from **NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW**
July 1976

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47 E. 68 St. New York, N.Y. 10021

We are not sure ourselves that we understand all the interrelationships. But we offer the following, with reasonable confidence.

The basic characteristics of the region offer at least the opportunity for a successful performance. It is new, founded little more than 100 years ago. It is prosperous, with a balanced economy and almost the lowest proportion of poverty-level families in the nation. The metropolitan area contains one of the nation's largest universities. It contains also the state capital. There is a strong desire for excellence, and a strong tradition of voluntarism. It is large enough to support expensive, high-quality institutions, yet small enough and isolated enough to develop a strong sense of regional unity. The Minneapolis/St. Paul division cuts across, and in important ways softens, the central city/suburban division. The freeways make it possible to gather people easily for meetings. The entire region is a toll-free dialing area.

Much turns on the character of the business community. The Twin Cities area is a headquarters town. Important financial and intellectual resources are, therefore, available. So are decisions. There is also a receptivity to change: Having itself recently been through a fundamental transition from a resources-based to a new scientific-technical and manufacturing economy, the business community has been open to change in other community institutions as well.

The media of communication play a key role. It is through them that this entire discussion about community problems, and their solution, is carried on. Most of the newspapers and television and radio stations are also locally owned. In the press, particularly, there is a tradition of commitment to the coverage of government as well as of politics. There has been some tradition, too, of their independence within the community, and of a willingness to take strong and occasionally unpopular positions on major community issues.

Government has been a separate, and strong, factor, not simply a glove into which some interest puts its hand. It is dominated at all levels on the policy side: executives are relatively weak. It has been, in recent years, increasingly a young person's activity: People come into office, fairly early in their career, for relatively short periods of time. The system has been, perhaps as a result, remarkably problem-oriented. Politics has been competitive, and open. There has been a willingness on the part of the legislature to take responsibility for the problems of the metropolitan area. Since 1967 there has been the metropolitan council, a legislatively-created institution charged specifically to bring to the legislature a report on problems and recommendations for action.

All these institutions have evolved gradually. And the area is continually changing. Not all the changes are improvements. Some threaten the continuation of what is, as we have said, a fragile system for community decision making. What maintains it, fundamentally, probably is the relative openness of the institutions, and the dispersal of influence, along with a deep-seated recognition of the importance of debate and dissent in the making of sound community decisions.

The Citizens League

Report on Its Achievement of a Record of Cumulative Effectiveness in the Twin Cities Area

EDITOR'S NOTE: In response to a request from the editors of the NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW, the Citizens League has prepared this report summarizing the briefing session on its history, organization, methods and program held in the Twin Cities Area, April 7-9. Citizens from 19 urban regions participated in the briefing which was chaired by the 1975-1976 president, Arthur Naftalin, former mayor of Minneapolis. Presentations were made by some 30 present and past CL officers, board members, committee and task force chairmen and members, including six past presidents and the two former executive directors. The summary language refers to CL, collectively, speaking through its officers, members and staff. The authors are Executive Director Ted Kolderie and Associate Director Paul Gilje.

A private-sector institution—such as the Citizens League in the Twin Cities area—is critically important in helping a metropolitan community understand what its problems are, and what ought to be done about them.

In November 1975 NATIONAL CIVIC REVIEW carried the text of an important report of the Metropolitan Affairs Nonprofit Corporations—*Regional Productivity*—which argued that the development of new institutions, at the metropolitan regional scale, is the first and most fundamental policy action that should be taken in any effort to address the problem of the performance . . . the productivity . . . of urban areas.

That report was made to the National Science Foundation by a panel of executives from private-sector urban affairs organizations in the major metropolitan regions, asked to advise the foundation how to proceed under its charge to improve productivity in the nonfederal public sector.

Briefly, the conclusions of the analysis in that study were that:

- Within the nonfederal public sector the major issues about productivity are to be found in the performance of the life-support systems in the major urban areas: transportation, housing, health care, criminal justice, waste disposal, communications, education, etc.
- No effort to improve these systems can begin, or can be effective, without a framework of decision making within which it is possible to raise and discuss, and to resolve, the issues respecting the performance of these systems.
- This framework of policy discussion, to be effective, must match the scale at which these systems exist, and operate, which is, in most cases, the scale of the urban region as a whole. "It is time," the report concluded, "to move from the municipal to the metropolitan definition of 'the city' as the basis for our urban programs."

The report stressed the importance of new governmental institutions, com-

petent for the critical function of *resolving* issues on which real interests conflict.

But it also urged attention to the importance of new institutions—which it said must be private—for the separate function of *raising* the issues, and frequently of offering the proposals to which the regional governmental body will react.

One of the most hopeful signs in the effort to improve the performance of the urban areas, and an important trend followed in the REVIEW, is the emergence of regional citizen organizations, performing essentially these functions, in many of the larger metropolitan areas. In some cases they are 50- or 75-year-old civic-reform or governmental research organizations, renewing themselves. In some cases they are spin-offs from a top-level business-leadership group. In some cases they develop as extensions of community foundations. In a few cases, even, they are being set up as an extension of a regional council of governments.

The particular metropolitan area in which this institutional development has moved furthest seems now to be the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. Partly, and perhaps initially, the interest of persons in other areas was in this region's new governmental institutions, especially the metropolitan council and its related agencies. But partly, too, and increasingly, their question has been why, and how, this kind of change could occur. What led to the concern about regional organization? What stimulated the existing governmental system to act?

In the subsequent examination of the Twin Cities area's issue-raising mechanisms, particular attention has been focused on the Citizens League, a private, nonprofit issues-study group.

It proved difficult for the Citizens League to respond adequately to the many individual inquiries about its history, structure and study procedures. Ralph Widner, at the Academy for Contemporary Problems, therefore proposed that representatives from all organizations in all regions interested in understanding the role of the regional citizen organization in the change and progress of the Twin Cities area come together for a single, intensive briefing. The Lilly Endowment agreed to underwrite a portion of the costs. The briefing was held at the Spring Hill Center, in the Twin Cities area, April 7-9, 1976, for about 40 persons from 19 different urban regions.

What follows is a summary of the material presented to those who attended.

The session was consciously and deliberately confined to a discussion about the Citizens League. It was not possible in a two-day session to look more broadly at the whole development of regional citizen organizations. That remains, as a topic for another meeting, and perhaps another report in the REVIEW, as this broad national discussion proceeds, on the question of the reorganization of government, and of the improvement of the major systems in the metropolitan regions of this country.

Essentially, the job is to look ahead, at problems before they

who tend to be well above average in income and in education, and disproportionately (even for the Twin Cities area) in white-collar, professional occupations. We are making increased efforts to draw in members of the minority community. But these also resemble our general membership. The balance that is needed for credibility must be secured partly in our study process, by making sure we hear from the broadest range of opinion; and partly in our process of moving proposals to the community, by making sure we touch base with all major groups.

The League's support from the business community is remarkably broad-based. Our budget for 1976 is about \$240,000. About two-thirds comes from contributions by business firms, heavily, the locally-based firms. We have almost 600 such supporting members. They, too, renew at about a 90 percent rate. There is a maximum level on any single membership. And the funding is to the organization: We do not fund individual studies. This kind of commitment, to an organization that is not a service organization to business but is working simply on long-term and fundamental (and therefore low-visibility) improvements in public-sector systems; and frequently forcing attention to controversial and unpopular questions, is a real tribute to the kind of business community that exists in the Twin Cities area.

In many respects this role is more logical for philanthropic institutions. And we do expect that an increasing share of League revenues will come from this sector—as foundations grow, add to their professional staff, expand their interests from education and health toward general public affairs, and return gradually to the concept of sustaining support for certain important community functions.

The League also performs, quietly, a number of miscellaneous services. We publish biennially the fullest directory of public organizations and public officials in the metropolitan area. We run, willy-nilly, a kind of "placement service" for persons who come to us for advice about work in the public sector, and for appointing authorities, collecting the names of qualified people for public positions. League people—volunteers and staff—are resource persons at others' meetings, give seminars, design programs for conferences, and generally respond to questions, increasingly from elsewhere, about developments in the Twin Cities area.

The Citizens League cannot be understood apart from the "political ecology" in which it lives.

What we have said up to this point should have made it amply clear that ~~it is the whole community—not any single organization within it—that must~~ be involved in any successful effort to understand its problems and what should be done about them. Neither the existence nor the effectiveness of the Citizens League, as a particular organization playing a particular role in the community's system of governance, can be understood, therefore, without some understanding of the major institutions in the Twin Cities area.

No director may serve two consecutive elected terms. This mandatory turnover has been extremely important in keeping the league current with the changes in the community, as new issues, new private organizations and new public institutions emerge.

Responsibility for the organization is centered in the operations committee. Since the reorganization in 1974, which also created the program and community information committees, operations has been responsible for all internal and interorganizational affairs. It prepares a budget for board approval, oversees the financing effort and sets staff salaries.

Most important, it now handles on a continuing basis the job of strategic planning formerly handled by a series of ad hoc program planning task forces. It watches all aspects of the organization—membership, finance, issues, staff, structure, community relationships—looking mainly for areas that seem to be getting out of balance. It must plan the league's response to new demands, such as the requests recently for service to other cities around the country. It advises the nominating committees and, in a general way, the program and community information committees. Its membership (like that of the other two major standing committees) comes partly from the board and partly from outside of it, in order to spread the involvement more broadly among the active members.

Operational duties are also spread throughout the staff. The executive director is principal staff to the operations committee and to the board. The associate director supervises the office force, in addition to staffing the program committee. Another member divides time between committee work and membership/finance duties. Another handles the weekly community leadership breakfasts and the CL NEWS, in addition to staffing a study committee. Two work only with study committees. One writes *Public Life*.

The office staff includes a secretary to the executive director who is office manager, a bookkeeper/membership assistant, two persons handling records, notices, minutes and mailings for the study committees, a person maintaining files and records, and one person handling printing and production and general mailing.

The CL office has continued in downtown Minneapolis. Small meetings can be held in a conference room there. Almost all League meetings, however, are held in facilities available in the community.

The membership maintains itself at about 3,000. Individual dues, which began at \$5 in 1952, are now \$15, and \$25 for a family. The renewal rate is about 90 percent. This means that, on the average, one new member a day will maintain the present level. Regularly, over the years, the league has reappraised the question of the size of its membership. To date, the decision has been that to move for a substantially larger membership would not add enough, either in revenue or in credibility and impact, to offset the costs. We are giving more attention, instead, to the composition of the membership, to be sure that it is as representative as possible of the community.

It is a struggle to get enough diversity. This kind of work attracts persons

become crises and at opportunities before they are lost, and to create a climate of opinion in which the community and its governmental system will respond.

The Citizens League is a metropolitan organization with about 3,000 individual members and with the support of some 600 business firms, nonprofit organizations, foundations, etc., doing in-depth studies of major community issues through committees of lay persons, drawn from its membership, serviced by the professional and clerical staff.

This central concept has remained constant. Around it, however, the structure and procedures of the organization have been continuously changing. The evolution of the league and other community organizations for issue-raising, and the evolution of governmental bodies for issue-resolving, have in fact proceeded together, as interrelated parts of the institutional development of the Twin Cities area into more advanced and complex forms.

The changes that produced the Citizens League had their beginnings in the passing of an older generation of civic and political leadership in Minneapolis, about 1940. Younger persons in the locally-based business firms were moving toward leadership positions. For about 10 years they met informally, usually for lunch at the YMCA, to discuss public issues. They were organized only loosely, in a network of "Good Government Groups," without staff.

In 1951, in the revival of public life that took place around Hubert Humphrey's time as mayor, an effort was begun to strengthen this capacity to provide careful, objective research on important local government problems. After discussions with persons in Cleveland and Seattle, a Citizens League was formed in Minneapolis. It was guaranteed \$30,000 a year for three years by local firms. Its first staff was hired early in 1952. And it quickly began the evolution into its present form.

The function of reviewing and rating candidates for local office proved difficult to do well and credibly. This was quickly dropped.

Early, during the original membership-building, there was an emphasis on retailing information to the community. There were large public meetings (2,700 for Frank Lloyd Wright in 1956), publications, and radio and television programs. Gradually, as the league got more into depth on the issues, its role changed toward that of a wholesaler, relating to persons working in public affairs issues in other organizations.

Early, too, the league was essentially reacting to proposals initiated by local government. "Should there be an additional 3 mills for parks?" "Should the new library be located at 4th and Nicollet?"

A key change occurred in 1962. The league had taken under review the proposal of the school board for the first major building program since the 1920s. The league found, and criticized, a program basically aimed at rehabilitating old buildings. But it did more. It laid out, alternatively, a replacement program involving the closing and demolition of whole schools, the selling-off of sites and the construction of new schools at new sites. The com-

munity rejected the school board's proposal. A new proposal for a replacement program was prepared. With league support, it passed. The whole experience taught the organization an important lesson not only about finding the key points of timing and leverage in public issues but also about its own ability to generate proposals as well as to critique proposals coming from government.

There was also an evolution of name. It began as the Citizens League of Minneapolis. It later became the Citizens League of Greater Minneapolis and then (finding that impolitic) of Minneapolis and Hennepin County. By the mid-1960s, it was fully a Twin Cities area organization, and became simply the Citizens League.

It is, in practice, a leadership-training program, but as a by-product of its primary mission which is to help the Twin Cities community understand its problems and what should be done about them. We do this by moving our understanding to the community and to the people in government. All our experience is that the most effective change takes place as a result of forces impacting on the governmental system from outside. Initiatives need to be taken, and are taken, from within the system as well. But, fundamentally, government does not rush out to meet what may or may not develop as real problems some distance down the road.

Basically, the Citizens League and the other groups performing essentially the same function act to identify these forces, to show how they will develop into problems, and to design possible responses which government can make early.

It is an important virtue of this arrangement—as one of the participants in the Spring Hill meeting pointed out to us—that it also serves largely to remove the partisan/political element from the issue side of local public affairs. In many cities, the group that sets the agenda, with issues and proposals, is the staff of the central-city mayor. The agenda is thus, from the start, partisan. In the Twin Cities area, much of the issue-raising function is handled by nonpartisan institutions. This becomes an expense, carried by the private community. But, in enlarging the potential for bipartisan agreement on problems and for early action, it is worth the investment.

The trick is finding a substitute for visible crisis, as a spur to policy action.

At Spring Hill, we laid out a concept of this whole process or cycle of decision making that we've found useful in thinking both about the community and about our own role. It goes something like this: *Events* occur. In time the symptoms (*Data*) appear. When recognized, this leads to corrective *Policy Action* which in turn produces new *Events*.

In the simplest model, the events that cause government to act are crises. Flood waters may be inundating homes. Sewage may be running in the streets. Or taxes may be rising, because the city's deteriorating credit has led to a lowered rating on its bonds. In any case, what is happening is visible (particularly, now, through television) to the average citizen; and, if it is happening where he lives, directly threatening, government acts.

the board of directors. While the study committee chairman carries the load in the early round of presentations, the committee itself has dissolved. Through its community information committee, the board can keep in touch with developments, and can update its statements in support of a report and proposal.

Since about 1974 the league has been increasingly involved in studies of community systems that are heavily non-governmental: health care, housing, transportation (most doctors and hospitals, dwelling units, and vehicles and drivers being private). There is no single, central agency for system change. And action by a public body may not be most appropriate. In such situations, local foundations have occasionally given the league a short-term grant to support the next stage of follow-up work. The Minneapolis Foundation, for example, supported a one-year effort to develop model agreements for "neighborhood maintenance associations," to experiment with group purchase of maintenance services, and to conduct a "Parade of Neighborhoods," all toward implementation of the report "Building Confidence in Older Neighborhoods."

Effectiveness is cumulative. A regional citizen organization is, in effect, a kind of consultant to the community. As for any adviser, time and experience are required to develop confidence in one's credibility and judgment. It makes sense, therefore, to begin with smaller and simpler issues, and move on gradually to the larger and more complex.

The Citizens League cannot implement its own recommendations. It cannot act, directly. It contributes ideas. But it has neither the official status nor the financial resources which are also essential ingredients for implementation. Action depends on the response and, therefore, on the attitudes of the people in state and local government, and in the civic, business, labor and other organizations to which government looks for concurrence.

In some ways it is a complication to have these major elements organized separately in a community. Yet it is also a strength, a check-and-balance that, by forcing a process of open debate and testing, helps ensure the soundness of decisions. We have little doubt, in the Citizens League, that we do a better job because we have no power other than what comes through the soundness of the job we do in analyzing issues and developing proposals.

In the interest of making the most effective use of volunteers' time, the "support structure" of the Citizens League has been kept as lean, and as flexible, as possible.

Citizens volunteer their time mainly for work on issues. The staff is there to lift off of them the detailed operational work. Still, the running of the organization requires strong policy supervision.

The board is a working board. Each year eight members are elected for three-year overlapping terms by the CL membership in a mail ballot. Annually, in June, the 24 elected members select an additional 14 directors, including a president, for one year. There is a different president every year.

the report. The discussions in committee are an educational experience, for members and for resource persons. The minutes are circulated widely. And the report is written, formatted and titled in an effort to communicate the central message of the proposal. Still, an effective presentation is essential.

The first step is simply to get attention. Up to 100 copies of the report will be sent to key individuals ahead of the release date. Its recommendations will be summarized in the CL NEWS. And from 1,000 to 3,000 copies of the full report will be mailed within a couple of weeks. Relatively few persons will read the entire report, early. But they will scan its recommendations. And they will know it is around.

Its reception by the media is critical. We work mainly with the city desk and with the reporters. Copies go to them as soon as possible after the report is approved. The release date is set ahead, to give them time to read the report. We have an informal session with reporters. The study committee chairman explains the report and answers questions. For television, we tend to avoid the "talking head" press conference. Given time, and perhaps a suggestion, they will illustrate the report's proposals with film—which is better for their medium and for community understanding.

The live, oral presentation is perhaps the most important. Time is short. Everybody's mail is overloaded. Persons in public life learn more by listening, and questioning, where they can get a feel of the competence and soundness of an idea, and of its proponents. So we move quickly to those other groups that are involved in the problem we have been studying. The study committee chairman will be busy on a round of presentations before public and private organizations, further developing attention and understanding.

Our reports make specific recommendations as to what should be done, and by whom. As a public body begins to respond, league volunteers and staff will help with additional information. Sometimes—as in 1970 when a report recommended the development of a new public hospital by Hennepin County jointly with the development of a private hospital complex across the street—members of the league study committee will be asked to become members of the public review body, which carries the idea the next step of refinement. (In the hospital case, the study committee of the metropolitan health board did recommend a "co-located and contiguous" development; and a multi-story, shared-service facility, linking the two hospitals like Siamese twins, opened in the summer of 1976.)

We sponsor public breakfasts weekly in Minneapolis and every other week in St. Paul. These hour-long sessions are held at cafeterias, which saves money for the people who attend and saves us administrative work in setting up the meetings. A resource person is invited to speak at each meeting, for about 20 minutes, and then answer questions for about 20 minutes. The topics will cover the range of public affairs in the Twin Cities area. But occasionally we'll invite someone in to discuss an issue spotlighted in a recent Citizens League report, which helps in the community education about our proposals.

Longer-term, the follow-up on CL proposals becomes the responsibility of

In a community that does not want to operate by crisis, or is performing at a level where it need not, a much more complex and difficult linkage is obviously needed between *Events* and *Policy Action*. Somebody, somehow, has got to be able to look at what's happening in such a way as to spot the signs of trouble when they first appear, or, at least, to note the kind of change in trends that might signal a need for some kind of adjustment in public policies.

For this, a community needs a more elaborate kind of record-keeping and data-reporting system: one that measures, for example, not the rise in river levels in March but the depth of the snow pack upstream in December. It needs a process for consulting with itself to identify those changes that represent issues, potential problems, or opportunities, on which somebody should be put to work.

There should then be a careful analysis of the problem, or opportunity. In a crisis it is the immediate causes that are most visible: When the flood is upon you, the problem is that the dikes are not high enough. Ahead of the crisis, there is time to think through to more fundamental causes: to understand, for example, the way floods are caused by improper development in the watershed, or the way environmental destruction is caused by the local property tax in a metropolitan region. Finally, proposals must be developed. And all of this discussion must be carried on in a process that is open and broad enough to create the level of community concern, and understanding and consensus that, like the crisis itself, will stimulate government to act.

It is, clearly, a fragile and vulnerable arrangement, dependent on the community support of independent public affairs organizations in the private sector, on the willingness of public officials to take controversial actions on problems that are not yet directly visible to a majority of their constituents, and—in ways we are only now coming really to understand—on the performance of the institutions of information and communication in the community.

The problems facing the community must be identified, preferably early, before they reach crisis proportions. Each year the Citizens League selects a few of these for study.

Annually the board of directors selects approximately six projects for study by Citizens League committees. The assignment from the board to a committee is quite specific, not just to look at education, housing or transportation issues in general. After about six to nine months of work, a committee submits a written report with recommendations to the board. When approved by the board these reports become official league positions.

Because we can undertake only a few projects each year, and because such a substantial commitment of volunteer and staff time is taken, we must be extremely careful in deciding our priorities.

The first step is ascertaining community needs and problems. This means that we need the broadest possible system of keeping in touch with what is

going on in the community, on a continuous basis. We are always putting items into a file as we run across ideas in newsletters, journals and the media. We poll our membership from time to time on subjects that might be considered. On occasion we have sent letters to selected public officials and others who we know are closely following issues in their respective fields. We also will have informal visits with such persons. We talk with research and planning people in public agencies. Our weekly public breakfast forums always turn up a list of possibilities.

Many other groups need to do this also. For example, foundations need help in their grant-making programs; other study groups, for their own research or action programs; and news editors, for planning coverage of public affairs. In recognition of its common interest with other groups the league has begun a new information services project, with assistance from a local foundation. We are now publishing a twice-monthly newsletter (separate from the membership newsletter, the Citizens League NEWS) called *Public Life*, which helps us keep in touch with developments in a host of fields that require in-depth exploration. We share *Public Life* broadly in the community. As of mid-1976, approximately 2,000 persons were on the mailing list, about two-thirds of whom were not members of the Citizens League. *Public Life* still is distributed free. A subscription policy must be established soon.

Once a year we compile a list of issues, from which we will select the issues for our own research program. This is done usually in February, which is a convenient time because it gives the program committee about three months to prepare recommendations to the board of directors. The board takes action on the research program for the coming 12 months in May or June. Our program committee is one of three standing committees appointed by the board of directors. It is mostly, but not entirely, made up of members of the board.

The staff puts together a list of issues, organized within about 15 different categories, such as education, health, housing, transportation, public safety, and so forth. At this point, descriptions of the issues are brief one-liners, giving only a hint of their scope. Any topic which has been suggested to us is included along with those we have identified. We know that some topics have only the remotest possibility of being picked, but at least they are included in the first list. Members of the program committee then add their own suggestions. After this step, there may be as many as 150-200 possibilities in front of us, which the program committee immediately trims down to about 50 that are deemed appropriate. Usually if about three of about 15 members of the committee believe an issue belongs on the list, it will survive the first cut.

~~The staff then takes the projects which have survived and writes about a~~ 10-line description of each. That memo becomes the basis for further consideration and really constitutes the issues that are deemed to be important to the community and which have some possibility of being programmed by us. Writing this description is a good discipline for us, because it forces us to

Minority reports are not uncommon. Sometimes a committee member will lose a significant vote in committee and submit a minority report to the board of directors. The member is allowed to make a statement to the board which then decides what to do. The board will always make a notation of the minority report and, if it is not too lengthy, probably will arrange for it to be reproduced as an addendum to the majority report. In one recent case a motion at the board level to adopt the minority report lost by one vote, the closest a minority has come to winning. If the board were to override the majority, it is likely that the complete report would be referred back to committee for further work.

The board of directors assumes full responsibility for league reports. Once a Citizens League report has been submitted to and approved by the board, the research committee goes out of existence. The board has full control. The usual pattern is for the committee chairman to make an oral statement on the report, which will have been mailed in advance. Then the board questions the chairman, considers any minority statements, and debates among itself. About 50 percent of the time the board is unable to complete action in one meeting. In such cases, another meeting is scheduled.

Ultimate approval by the board is almost inevitable. At least for the last 10 years no report has been rejected. In 1970, however, the board required that a report be rewritten because the findings and conclusions did not support the recommendations. Subsequently, that report became the foundation for a major reform of municipal and school aid accomplished by the 1971 legislature.

Most of the time the board will make slight changes. Even if uncomfortable, the board is reluctant to change a recommendation if it follows from a conclusion which is based on fact.

When approved the report becomes the board's report. It is henceforth an official Citizens League position.

The understanding that develops—of the problem, and of its solution—must be concurred in by a broad range of organizations and individuals, public and private, whose support is essential if action is to result.

The effectiveness of a proposal is inherent in the proposal itself. If it is timely, relevant, realistic, constructive and understandable, and if it emerges from an independent and credible study in which all points of view were heard, then it will be a powerful proposal in a community committed to solving problems. It will, that is, when it is received, known and understood by the community. Unknown, or misunderstood, it will have no impact. A critical stage in our process, therefore, is the one in which the perception of the problem that develops in the study committee, and the solution, is communicated to that broader community of persons deeply involved in the public life of the region.

Again: this communication is in part built into the study process, and into

about. Moreover, a specific recommendation is much more likely to be picked up by others, and placed in ordinance or bill form for implementation.

One way of determining whether a recommendation is specific enough is to ask if it is clear who is responsible to carry it out. A recommendation ought to involve action by a specific body. Simply urging that something be done, without specifying who, doesn't spotlight the proposal. In our report on the Mississippi River, we specifically urged the metropolitan council to initiate the process for designating the river, as it passes through the metropolitan area, as a critical area under the Critical Areas Act. That was far better than expressing a desire that the river be designated a critical area.

The organization of the report affects how the proposals will be received in the community. League reports don't look very glamorous. They are typewritten, single-spaced, on both sides of the paper, with some graphs and charts, but no photos. Some critics believe we should adopt a more professional approach to graphics, while others believe such "frills" would detract from the overall quality and credibility of the reports. Even though the typical Citizens League report is such that you must want to read it, we try to talk in straight language so that the average person can understand. In the front of the report is a summary for the busiest reader. We underline summary sentences at the start of each major paragraph, which also helps the fast reader.

The exact format may vary somewhat, depending upon the committee, but usually a league report will include the following:

- *Introduction*—in which we outline the current setting in the community on the issue in question.
 - *Summary of Major Ideas*—no more than two pages; for the busy reader.
 - *Findings*—a major section; the facts about the issues in controversy.
 - *Conclusions*—a major section; our value judgments drawn from the findings.
 - *Recommendations*—a major section; the specific proposals for change which grow out of the conclusions.
 - *Discussion of Recommendations*—in which we elaborate on how recommendations would be carried out and explain why certain recommendations were rejected and others adopted.
 - *Background*—selected information to assist the lesser informed reader in understanding the subject matter; also charts and graphs.
 - *Charge, Membership, and Work of the Committee*—short sections in which we outline the assignment, list the members, and describe the work schedule of the committee, including a listing of the resource persons.
- The title of the report is a major vehicle for communication.* We think very carefully about the title, and try to capture the central message of the report in no more than six or seven words. The title is the last addition to the report, written just as we make the report public. Our report on neighborhood preservation was titled "Building Confidence in Older Neighborhoods"; on controlling land use on the suburban fringe, "Growth Without Sprawl"; on transportation, "Building Incentives for Drivers to Ride."

define each issue with some degree of precision. If the issue can't be described adequately, it probably means we don't yet know what we're talking about.

We very carefully trim the list down to the six or so projects we will include in the research program. The trimming is done in a series of about three or four meetings. Usually, after the committee has picked the six it will recommend one more meeting to agree on the wording of each project. There is no formula for trimming the list. In the second cut-down from 50 to 25, not much time is available to discuss each project individually. The focus tends to be on the more popular topics. The staff prepares a fresh memorandum for each meeting, including a rewrite of the project descriptions as deemed appropriate.

The most critical cut of all, of course, is the last one. In 1976 a new procedure was added to help with that step. The staff scheduled a series of briefing sessions in advance of the meeting with persons knowledgeable about each topic under consideration. Members of the program committee were encouraged to attend with the staff. This enabled us to improve our knowledge about the status of each issue in the community before final action.

Over the years the program committee has assembled criteria to help members decide on projects:

- *Importance.* Is the project of importance to the community?
 - *Urgency.* Is action needed now or can the project be delayed?
 - *Necessity.* Will, or can, other organizations carry the responsibility?
 - *Cost-benefit.* Is the estimated impact of the project worth the amount of staff and volunteer time required? Is the project of manageable size?
 - *Effectiveness.* What are the prospects for ultimate implementation of the recommendations which might be made?
 - *Expectation.* Is this a project which the community expects the Citizens League to take on?
 - *Awareness.* Is the public generally aware of and interested in the subject?
 - *Interest.* Is it likely that Citizens League volunteers can be recruited for this project?
 - *Membership.* Will the project attract members with a broad, general interest in the subject, or is it more likely to attract only committee members with expertise and involvement in the subject area?
 - *Definition.* Is the problem adequately defined so that a Citizens League committee would have a clear understanding of its assignment?
 - *Emotion.* Is the problem capable of being resolved by reason based on fact, or are the emotional overtones too large to permit reasoned analysis?
- Acceptance of the committee's recommendations by the board of directors is not automatic; there are occasional substitutions of projects.

Using committees from our own membership, we first educate ourselves and intensively analyze the problem, before we start talking about solutions.

We strongly resist the temptation to focus on answers before we know what

the questions are. Too frequently, a problem may be stated in terms of the solution, for example, "the problem with transportation in this region is that we don't have a subway system." The answer may be a subway system (although we have recommended another approach), but the problem is something else (in our case, we concluded that too many people were driving, not riding, regardless of the vehicle).

The formation of each committee and the selection of the chairman are very important. All members of the Citizens League are notified through the bi-weekly CL NEWS of the opportunity to volunteer for a new committee. Usually, between 35 and 70 persons will volunteer. The only requirement for committee membership is that a person be a dues-paying member, unless the board of directors makes a specific exemption.

We encourage League members with no previous involvement or interest in the subject matter to volunteer. These generalist members bring fresh thinking and an ability to raise questions from a different perspective than persons who have been intimately involved. But we also welcome members who are knowledgeable about the project under study, because they can offer valuable insight on the nature of the question.

The sign-up form asks members to identify their interest in the subject matter under study so that others may know what occupational or other involvement someone may have. Members are informed that if their involvement is closer than they feel would be appropriate for actual committee membership, other types of participation in the study are available, such as receiving minutes or receiving both notices and minutes of meetings and being welcome to audit committee meetings in person. The program committee monitors committee sign-up and arranges for additional recruitment of members to accomplish whatever balance is deemed necessary, such as for geographic, female-male, occupational or other reasons.

A typical committee will have at least 50 members at the outset, with some as large as 100. Size has never been a problem. An inevitable "shake-down" occurs, with a typical committee having about 35-50 active members.

The chairman of each committee is named by the president of the Citizens League. Prior knowledge of the subject under study rarely is a major consideration in picking a chairman. Someone with no previous involvement may be picked deliberately, to assure a fresh approach. A person with an analytical mind and an ability to perform as an effective moderator and to move the committee toward a conclusion is more important.

Mechanical aspects of committee meetings are taken very seriously. Probably most important are the minutes, which typically run six or seven pages, single-spaced. Our professional staff takes the minutes. They are dictated from notes and transcribed directly onto photo-ready masters by our very capable clerical staff. Once a staffer catches on, dictation takes about two hours, with another two hours required for transcription. We repeat this every week for every committee. The minutes are designed to convey a complete sense of the meeting for someone who was not present. They are much

proposals on the table advanced by other committee members. If the less desirable proposals had not been put forth, it is possible that the individual never would have suggested the base-sharing concept.

The lesson here, therefore, is that no one should be ashamed to make a proposal. If nothing else, it may serve the invaluable function of stimulating the emergence of better ideas.

It is important to keep in touch with the community during proposal development. As the committee is nearing the end of its work, members and staff sometimes have a tendency to turn inward on themselves. But precisely the opposite should occur. At this time the committee needs to be fully informed about the status of the issue in the community. Informal conversations by phone and in face-to-face interview are very important. It is not necessary to ask someone on the outside for a reaction to a specific proposal. But skillful questioning can elicit feelings which will serve to anticipate how a proposal may be received. These outside contacts must be made very carefully. We discourage sharing preliminary drafts of reports. That is an open invitation for suggested changes which, if not made, may irritate the outsider whose advice was sought, and which, if made, may compromise the report unnecessarily. Compromising can be made in the political process.

Close contact with the league board of directors is important, too. In 1974 the board of directors began a new program of liaison with its research committees. A five-to-seven member panel from the board is appointed on an ad hoc basis for each committee. The panel meets two or three times, very informally, with the chairman and members who wish to attend. One meeting is usually held when the committee is working on findings, and a second during the time conclusions are being discussed or just as alternative recommendations are being explored.

The board panel does not second-guess the committee, nor does it issue its own recommendations. It simply serves to raise questions early. "Has the committee explored this issue?" "Do you have findings to back up this conclusion?" The ad hoc panel process was started because the board was finding it increasingly difficult to raise questions after the research committee had completed its work and submitted its report. In a sense the board panel serves the same function as other contacts with the community. It gives the opportunity for some outside input at a time before all decisions have been made.

In addition to the panel, the chairman of a research committee may meet with the entire board with a progress report. This is not always possible, however, because the board agenda usually is full.

Details are critical to a recommendation's acceptability. We stimulate the committees to be as specific as possible in their recommendations. For example, a recent report on the appointment process in government outlined the precise steps that would be taken. Without those precise steps it was not really possible for the reader to get a complete idea of what the committee was talking about. Details also help establish a report's credibility. A recommendation with enough specifics means the committee knows what it is talking

Committee members will throw out possible solutions while we are working on drafts of findings and conclusions. The ideas must not be ignored because they happen to be advanced at a time which doesn't fit neatly into our schedule. The ideas need to be recorded, and preserved, for full discussion during the stage of recommendations.

Sometimes a member will make it known very early in the discussion that he or she intends to press hard for committee adoption of a particular recommendation. The member is informed that all recommendations must grow out of conclusions. A recommendation won't stand by itself without a conclusion which itself is based on facts of the findings.

During the debate on findings and conclusions—and, in fact, during almost all of the debate on recommendations—the committee works mainly on a consensus basis. Very few votes are taken. Usually one is taken on a critical pivotal question, and may be very close. In two recent committees the critical question was decided by one vote (whether to relate the property tax to income and whether to support operating subsidies for arts organizations; in the first case, the majority said no; in the second case, yes).

Without question, the most difficult period for a League committee is developing the findings and conclusions. We try to get through this period in no more than two months. But it usually takes about three months. Once the conclusions are wrapped up, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, with one major task remaining—deciding what we are going to recommend, which requires another month. Thus a typical league committee requires about six to nine months from start to finish.

An imaginative, realistic, specific proposal should result from the study. It is not enough to express vague desires for change.

By the time we turn the corner and set our first meeting for discussion of alternative recommendations, the committee is almost bursting with enthusiasm. Inevitably, the committee has been flirting with ideas that have emerged from time to time. Now the opportunity arrives for debate.

Good ideas can emerge from bad ideas. We try to devote the first meeting on recommendations to brainstorming. Everyone who has an idea may bring it forth without fear of having it shot down immediately. This meeting is designed simply to get the ideas on the table. In this fashion, no proposal, however undesirable, is rejected out of hand. All the ideas are put together in a memorandum which then forms the basis for serious discussion of alternatives at the next meeting.

Sometimes an individual will have an idea but be afraid to bring it forth. Seeing others' suggestions advanced may stimulate the individual because he may believe his own is better than theirs. In 1969, a Citizens League committee report recommended the concept of metropolitan tax-base sharing, which now is law in Minnesota and which has received considerable national attention. A committee member who came up with the unique concept of sharing tax base rather than tax revenue did so only after seeing about four or five

more than a verbatim account. Underlined lead-in sentences summarize the content of each paragraph to enable the reader to skim the minutes if necessary.

Weekly committee meetings, alternated between Minneapolis and St. Paul, are usually held in public libraries or other locations which make meeting rooms available without charge. The most popular meeting time is 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (when the libraries close). Some committees meet from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m., which avoids conflicts with night meetings of other organizations but produces conflicts with household duties or employment hours. Once in a great while a committee will meet for breakfast or lunch, but the time available is limited. Moreover, with members coming from throughout the metropolitan area, such an hour is very inconvenient.

We try to arrange meeting rooms with tables, rather than in rows of chairs. Cardboard name plates on tables are used to identify persons since name tags on persons are not large enough to be read across the room. Non-members are invited to sit in a different part of the room so it is clear that, if they enter the discussion at any point, they are resource persons, not regular members.

In the past we mailed first-class notices to every member weekly, but higher postage rates in 1976 forced us to take two different approaches. With some of our committees, notices are now mailed every other week; with others they are still sent weekly, but only to absentees.

We believe the openness of the committee process is an important part of our overall credibility. We distribute the minutes widely—even to persons who do not request them, in order to keep them informed of our activity. In some cases we also send notices of meetings, knowing that some public officials or others particularly close to an issue are anxious to follow what we do. It is not unusual for our meetings to be monitored from start to finish by an interested party or agency. We also send minutes and notices to members of the news media. Only rarely does a reporter show up at meetings.

The first phase of committee activity, orientation, brings members to a common level of understanding about the facts and issues before they begin debate among themselves. Regardless of the current level of knowledge among committee members, we always go through an intensive series of orientation meetings. If committee members were to do nothing more than share previously accumulated knowledge about a subject, they would severely limit their ability to be exposed to new ideas or different ways of thinking about a problem. Under such an approach the most vocal and persuasive committee members would be able to capitalize on the situation to advance their own interests.

The orientation is accomplished chiefly by inviting resource persons to appear personally before the committee to present information and to have interchange with members. A typical committee will bring in an average of three per week over a period of three months or more; they constitute the Citizens League "faculty." We don't pay compensation or expenses, except

that if a meal is involved we'll probably pick up the check, but that's a rare situation. Over the period of a year, probably 250 to 300 resource persons meet with committees. The function of the resource person is to provide background information on the subject under study and give insight on issues. Usually, resource people will give about 20 minutes of opening comments, followed by 20 to 25 minutes of discussion. They have been briefed by the staff in advance and given minutes of previous meeting. A detailed letter sent in advance spells out what we are asking. Copies of the letter are made available to committee members so they can see if the resource person is responding as requested.

Our committee members are busy; even though we faithfully reproduce the resource persons' comments in the minutes, we consistently find that members learn mainly by listening and questioning, and less by outside reading.

We solicit committee members' ideas for names of resource persons or subject matter that should be covered. Usually the decision on who to invite is made by the committee chairman working with the staff. Committee members soon learn that every effort is made to expose the committee to the widest range of viewpoints possible.

During the orientation phase, the committee occasionally will spend part of a meeting in internal discussion; after six weeks or so of input, members get anxious to share ideas with each other.

Each week during orientation an agenda packet will include a substantial amount of written material, including staff memoranda and reprints of articles. Most of the facts and figures get placed into the committee record in this manner. By the time a committee has completed its work, the written material can fill a two-inch-thick notebook for each member.

Next the committee develops agreement on findings (the facts about the issues in controversy) and conclusions (the value judgments drawn from the facts). We discipline ourselves very closely to make sure that the committee does not jump ahead to recommendations as soon as the orientation stage is completed. We insist that the committee first develop general agreement on a draft of findings and then draw conclusions. Often study groups move to recommendations too soon. When a person advances a recommendation, one of the best ways to test whether the problem has been analyzed is to ask: "If this is the solution, what is the problem?"

When the committee begins its deliberations, the staff first prepares a summary of what has been learned so far. Such a summary may be quite lengthy, running 12 to 15 pages, single-spaced. (We've never been able to keep the drafts as brief as we would like.) The summary is an extremely valuable tool. It assembles in one place and in somewhat organized fashion the relevant material presented over the previous months. Many members may have forgotten some information. Others will have had a difficult time sorting things out.

We find that a committee tends to do a lot of nit-picking when a long draft is first presented. This is frustrating, because the draft admittedly is

preliminary. The chairman presses the committee to spend more time talking about big issues. Often we will supplement the long draft with a one-page list of central questions. This serves to move the committee more effectively. Not that committee members' comments about draft language aren't taken seriously. We encourage members to mark up their drafts and make them available to the staff for assistance in redrafting.

The summary of what the committee has heard usually evolves into the first draft of findings. The committee may spend a month or more on findings, going through two or three different drafts. Findings should not contain the value judgments of the committee.

Then the committee begins discussing conclusions. At this stage the nature of the problem is defined. Usually, a great deal of "conventional wisdom" exists in the community about what the problem is. The committee's job is to arrive at its own value judgments, which usually means subjecting the conventional wisdom to critical analysis. We have discovered time and again that a major obstacle to solving a problem in the urban area is that the problem has been misstated. A Citizens League committee frequently makes its best contribution in coming up with a new way of looking at the problem. For example, in housing we concluded that lack of new construction is only a small part of the housing problem in the Twin Cities area. Much more important was the stock of existing dwellings. Fully eight times as many households move into existing dwellings each year as move into new buildings. Or, to take another example, the arts, the problem is not deficits in the budgets of arts organizations, the problem is a lack of broad involvement by the general public.

Our conclusions sometimes are more important to the long-range impact of a Citizens League report than are our recommendations. The recommendations may get the attention of the press, but if others can come to define the problem as we have, we aren't too worried about the kind of solution that will emerge. In fact, more often than not we find that they come back to our recommendations as a sound middle ground.

It is not always possible, but we try to keep our conclusions relatively brief, perhaps four pages. Organizationally, we try to have the conclusions follow the same outline as the findings, thereby setting the framework for the recommendations to parallel the findings and conclusions. Unfortunately, things don't always work out that neatly.

Sometimes, too, definitions become confused. A conclusion differs from a finding in that it represents a value judgment about the issue in controversy. A recommendation differs from a conclusion in that it represents the specific steps to be taken to solve the problem expressed in the value judgment. A conclusion may read "We no longer can tolerate the inequities in property tax assessment." Or "Inequities in property tax assessment must be reduced." The recommendation then becomes how to reduce the inequities.

We must be careful not to stifle innovation in our insistence that the committee discuss findings and conclusions before moving on to recommendations.