

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

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**League Growth & PR Program
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REPORT OF THE PUBLICITY,
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND
MEMBERSHIP GROWTH TASK FORCE

Citizens League of Minneapolis
and Hennepin County
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1961-1962 CITIZENS LEAGUE PROGRAM
IN THE AREAS OF PUBLICITY, PUBLIC RELATIONS &
MEMBERSHIP ATTRACTION, RETENTION & PARTICIPATION

I. PREFACE

Before stating our recommendations, we believe it helpful to restate the basic objectives of the Citizens League of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.

Perhaps the most descriptive phrase which is symbolic of the work of the Citizens League is "providing non-partisan community leadership." The Citizens League, to a greater extent than many civic organizations, was founded for the purpose of getting results, i.e., the improvement of local government throughout Hennepin County and the Twin Cities metropolitan area wherever independent analysis indicates such improvement is both desirable and attainable.

The League was not founded, nor is most of its vigor furnished, by persons who want to belong to "another" organization. The League's leadership comes from busy men and women who are willing to spend time and effort in League activities only because the League continually strives for, and does obtain, constructive changes in local governmental operations and attitudes.

The fact that the League has proven to be a "results" organization more than a fraternal club or a "theoreticians' coffee house" is what has made the League influential. Time and money devoted to the League are contributed, not for the sake of companionship nor goodwill, but for the specific satisfaction that comes through contributing to the improvement of local government.

The League's public relations program, therefore, should place relatively little emphasis on the League as an institution offering "togetherness" and relatively major emphasis on the League as a means of "achieving."

Past and future results obtained by the League are its reason for existence, and should be the major plank in any League program of selling itself to its members, to its financial supporters, and to the public generally.

In order for the League to achieve results, it must have a strong, participating membership. Accordingly, the League serves its individual members by helping them understand better their local governments and by affording them an additional opportunity to participate in solving local governmental problems.

II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The past Citizens League year has been one of the more productive in nearly every aspect of League endeavor. There has been a modest growth in membership. The proportion of members who have renewed was increased over the rate of the previous year. Weekly "Community Leadership Breakfasts" were initiated and proved most successful. The League's Board of Directors was unusually active, both in the frequency of its meetings and in the number and importance of the issues on which it deliberated. League publicity was improved over recent years, and the League's "image" reached a new high. The high caliber of League research reports and recommendations was maintained. The League's financial condition was the soundest in its history.

The conclusions and recommendations contained in this report reflect general satisfaction with the League's program during the past year, keeping in mind that we should always strive for further improvement. We have limited our recommendations to those we consider realistically attainable during the year in terms of available staff time, volunteer time and financial resources. Therefore, we expect that each recommendation should be accomplished. We urge, in this regard, that the Publicity, Public Relations and Membership Growth Task Force meet periodically during the year to review the progress being made.

We cannot avoid sounding a note of optimism as we approach the coming Citizens League year. First, people throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area seem much more aware of our governmental deficiencies and of the need to strengthen them than in past years. Second, we are convinced the Citizens League is now at the height of its effectiveness and is prepared during the coming year to provide real leadership in attacking the many important governmental problems facing us. Third, during the coming year we will be working with a greater number of elected public officials who are more responsive to the need for change and more sympathetic to the League's viewpoint.

III. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Membership Attraction

Discussion

One of the earliest goals established by the League was a membership totalling 5,000. This goal has not been abandoned officially, but there has been little reference to it during recent years. League membership reached 3,000 several years ago, and has stabilized at about that level. During the past year, approximately 600 new members were obtained, resulting in a slight net addition to total League membership. Most of these 600 members, as has been the case in recent years, were obtained during an annual membership drive. There has been little emphasis on obtaining new members at times of the year other than during the annual membership campaign.

Conclusions

In terms of the objectives of the League and the resources available, we have concluded that a total membership of 5,000 members is not desirable. Adequate servicing of a membership of 5,000 would require additional financial resources substantially beyond anything presently visible, and very likely would weaken, rather than strengthen, the organization.

Rather than placing undue stress on the total number of members, we would, instead, direct greater attention to the quality of the League's membership. What is essential is that the League be broadly representative of the community leadership from both political parties, as well as of those who are active civically but not in either political party. The test of membership success for the League should be whether we have as members most of those community leaders and others who manifest a sincere desire to make our community a better place in which to live and want to do something about it. A further test of membership success is whether

there is broad participation among League membership in conducting research projects and in implementing League recommendations. Based on these measures of membership success, we are convinced that the League is healthy and that our principal task during the coming year will be one of strengthening even further the quality of League membership.

Recommendations

To implement these conclusions we recommend the following specific actions:

1. A membership committee should be established. This committee should have an individual membership division and a firm contributions division. Its principal purpose should be to formulate specific membership goals and quotas, and to supervise the achievement of these goals.

2. A goal of 600 new League members during the year should be established.

3. Efforts to obtain new members should be pursued on a monthly basis throughout the year, rather than through a single annual drive as in past years. This will improve the quality of League membership, and is more likely to attain the objective without undue conflict with other important League activities. An annual membership drive should be continued, but on a much more limited scale, and should be for the primary purpose of affording each Citizens League member an annual opportunity to obtain one or more new League members.

4. Immediate steps should be taken to develop prospect lists of community leaders who are not Citizens League members. This should be accomplished under the supervision of the Membership Committee.

B. Membership Retention

Discussion

During the past year the League maintained a renewal rate of 76%, which was an improvement over the 72% rate of the previous year. The general procedure has been to send each member three monthly billing statements, accompanied by an appeal to renew. If this proved unsuccessful, then most members have been contacted personally, either by a member of the League staff or by a volunteer.

Conclusion

The renewal procedures presently being pursued are generally sound and effective. The single most successful element in membership renewal is persistence and personal contact.

Because of deaths, retirements, transfers elsewhere, etc., there is little possibility of obtaining a renewal rate in excess of 90%. So long as members are obtained during annual drives with a degree of pressure tactics utilized, it is unlikely that a rate of renewal much in excess of 80% is realistically attainable. If the more selective new membership methods recommended elsewhere in this report prove successful during the coming year, then it would seem probably that a renewal rate of close to 85% could be achieved in subsequent years.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that no member should be dropped from the membership rolls without first contacting him personally to determine his desire. This contact should be made, as at present, following the third monthly renewal billing statement. Specific procedures for this contact should be prescribed by the Membership Committee.

2. We urge continuance of the present procedure whereby a letter welcoming new members to the League is sent promptly after joining. This letter includes an invitation to participate in League research and gives a choice of projects.

3. In addition to the welcoming letter, each new member should be sent a special letter inviting him to attend Community Leadership Breakfasts. In this way he will feel there is a way of participating, irrespective of whether he becomes a member of a research committee. It also affords him an opportunity to meet other League members.

C. Membership Activity

Discussion

The Board of Directors had its most intense year, both from the standpoint of frequency of meetings and volume of output. The Board held 21 meetings. The Executive Committee met 15 times. The two task forces which formulated the League's research and action and publicity, public relations and membership program for 1960-1961 met on nine occasions. The Legislative Action Committee, which consisted mostly of Board members, met 17 times during a four-month period. The Board deliberated on 27 separate reports during the course of the year.

During the past year, for the first time, a careful count has been maintained of League meetings and attendance. 260 meetings of all kinds were held, at which a total of 2,500 persons, mostly League members, were in attendance. This total was at least equal to, and likely exceeded, that of recent years.

League research committees were about as active as in recent years, but their activities resulted in perhaps more reports and recommendations.

The League's annual meeting was better attended than usual, with approximately 150 in attendance. The principal agenda item at the annual meeting was a debate between Mayor P. Kenneth Peterson and Mayoralty Candidate Arthur Naftalin.

The membership response to voting at the annual election for members of the League's Board of Directors was the heaviest on record, with more than 1200 members returning their ballots. Several questions were posed to League members in the Citizens League NEWS during the year. Response to these questions indicated satisfactory readership of the NEWS and interest on the part of League members.

A series of weekly "Community Leadership Breakfasts" was initiated during the past year. Speakers appeared on an informal basis with a brief message, with the balance of the time being given to questions from the audience.

Conclusions

In general, membership participation in League activities continues to be satisfactory. Meetings should not be held unless there is a specific purpose to be served, and we doubt the wisdom of adding substantially to the present total number of meetings. We are particularly pleased with the results of the "Community Leadership Breakfasts," and strongly urge that they be continued. In general, we urge continuation of present efforts to promote membership activity, with some intensification of the program.

Recommendations

1. "Community Leadership Breakfasts" should be continued on a twice-monthly basis on set dates. They should be informal, and the topic need not necessarily be related to projects of direct concern to the League.

2. Consideration should be given to making the annual meeting a televised report to the membership, in order to broaden the participation. Part of the program should be devoted, to the extent practical, to stimulating questions from the viewers. This type of program should not be attempted, however, unless adequate technical assistance can be provided.

3. The views of the membership should be solicited whenever practical. Those who do not participate by attending meetings or joining a research committee can, in this way, feel a greater sense of being an active member.

D. Publicity

Discussion

The general level of League publicity has increased somewhat during the past year. This has not come about through any major innovations nor policy changes, but rather through the issuance of frequent and sound reports containing specific recommendations for improvements in local government. It is the increased League prestige which has been primarily responsible for improved press coverage. We gained particularly in our press relations and coverage with the suburban newspapers. Rarely has a week gone by during the past year without some mention of the Citizens League in one or more of the suburban newspapers. Some of the credit must be shared with suburban reporter Betty Wilson, who has shown a real ability to sense newsworthy stories. We have also noted increased recognition of Citizens League reports and Director's Diaries on the editorial pages of the Minneapolis Star and Tribune.

During the past year the Citizens League NEWS has been changed somewhat in its format. Change to a "floating masthead" has given greater prominence to the articles contained in the NEWS. In addition, there has been greater emphasis on readability and on the use of pictures.

Conclusions

The Citizens League NEWS continues to serve its purpose well, and we are in general satisfied with its makeup and contents. We would, however, urge constant attention toward improved readability without, at the same time, sacrificing content. The League's publicity program in general also appears to be satisfactory, and therefore no major changes are being recommended.

Recommendations

1. Certain of the farther-out suburban newspapers have not been picking up Citizens League stories. Personal contact should be made with these newspapers during the coming year to improve League coverage.
2. We should emphasize the fact that all League meetings are open to the public and encourage attendance. Several programs on radio and TV feature announcements of coming meetings. A systematic procedure should be adopted which will provide these programs with notices of League meetings. This will increase attendance and, more important, will enhance the League's "image" with the general public.
3. Consideration should be given to regular 5-minute TV reports on Channel 2 on the "state of the community." These programs should be brief but informative. However, these should not be attempted unless they can be done well and unless there is sufficient technical talent available with which to produce them.

E. Public Relations

Discussion

The League has little in the way of a planned public relations program, depending primarily on the caliber of its reports and recommendations and the general soundness with which it proceeds in implementing these recommendations. Of course, many things are done during the year to improve the League's effectiveness in a public relations way, but they have been pretty much "spur of the moment" type of ventures.

Conclusions

The League's "image" appears to be at its highest level at the present time, and we have no basic dissatisfaction with the general public relations endeavors conducted by League officers and staff.

Recommendations

We make no specific recommendations for change. However, we do reiterate the imperativeness of (1) continuing to make sound reports and recommendations, (2) maintaining the impartiality and non-partisanship of League actions, (3) complimenting public officials when merited, as well as criticism when justified, and (4) maximum personal contact with public officials by League officers and members, as well as by the League staff.

F. Printed Materials

Discussion

During the past year the League printed perhaps its most elaborate brochure telling about the organization. Other membership pieces consisted largely of reprints from newspaper articles and editorials, and other assorted items.

Conclusions

We are not convinced that additional printed material about the League would be more productive, and certainly not worth any substantial additional expenditure of funds. The basic brochure, which was printed during the past year, was made appropriate for the coming year also. It would be advantageous to dress up Citizens League research reports somewhat to make them more attractive and to give them additional status.

Recommendations

1. The basic brochure should continue to be used during the coming year, and it should not be necessary to broaden the number of printed pieces.
2. An inexpensive cover should be designed to dress up Citizens League research reports.

G. Miscellaneous League Projects

1. Voters Guide

Discussion

During the past year the League continued its participation, along with the Minneapolis League of Women Voters, in preparation of the Voters Guide published in the Minneapolis Tribune. In addition, the League staff cooperated with the suburban newspapers in preparing a suburban Voters Guide.

Conclusions

Some feeling has been expressed that the League might perform a more valuable voter service than is provided through its arrangement to cooperate in publication of the Voters Guide. Most recently the staff of the Minneapolis Tribune indicated some reluctance to make available without charge to the League sufficient copies of the Voters Guide to mail to all League members. We make no recommendation to discontinue the present arrangement, but do express our reservations and the opinion that the entire subject should be reviewed during the coming year.

Recommendation

The League President should appoint a special committee to review the League's participation in the Voters Guide and report back to the Board shortly after the first of the year. By early spring we will again start work on the Voters Guide for the September state primary election. If a change is to be made, a decision should be reached well in advance of that time.

2. Citizens League Directory of Public Officials

Discussion

The Citizens League Directory of Public Officials which has been printed biennially, is again scheduled for this fall. Most of the statistical work has already been accomplished, and the Directory should go to press in late September.

Conclusion

The Directory of Public Officials is one of the most valuable public service endeavors the League performs. This project should be continued, perhaps on an annual basis, and we suggest a few minor improvements in its content.

Recommendation

The Directory should contain a page listing the place and telephone number of each suburban city hall. It should also include maps showing the new Minneapolis ward boundaries and the new Hennepin County legislative district boundaries, and perhaps maps of County Commissioner and Minneapolis Park Board Districts.

3. Citizen-of-the-Year Award

Discussion

The Citizen-of-the-Year Award, which was recommended for inclusion in last year's program, never got under way because of the press of other important projects.

Conclusion

There has never been overwhelming League support for this project, even though it was included in last year's program. We conclude that this project is not justified, considering the limitations on volunteer and staff time.

Recommendation

The Citizen-of-the-Year Award should be dropped from the coming year's program.

H . Finance

Discussion

The League's financial condition continued to improve during the past year and at year's end the League was in the soundest financial condition in its history. Receipts have exceeded expenditures in each of the past three years, and a substantial balance of funds on hand has now been accumulated. However, recent Board action authorizing the hiring of an additional research assistant will require additional revenue, and it will be necessary to expand further our financial base during the coming year by approximately \$3,000.

Conclusions

The sound financial condition of the League must be preserved. Specific ways to raise the necessary additional revenue should be devised immediately. We urge that the additional revenue come primarily from contributions rather than basic memberships. This conclusion is based on the assumption that it costs about as much to service the additional membership as the dues will produce in revenue.

Recommendations

1. We urge procedures which will encourage family memberships. This provides additional revenue and additional memberships without corresponding increase in expenditures.
2. We urge that a substantial portion of the additional revenue come from broadening the base of financial contributions by obtaining additional new firms and organizations as contributors. We specifically recommend a goal of about 160 new firms at an average of \$25 per firm between now and December 31, 1962. To attain this objective, we urge that a monthly quota for new firm contributors be established, so the effort will be year-around, rather than solely through an annual drive as in the past. These monthly quotas should be in addition to, and not in lieu of, annual September new firm drives. At least half the total goal should be derived from these once-a-year campaigns, with the balance coming from persistent monthly efforts.
3. A careful review should be made of the amount contributed by each firm and organization to see if the level can justifiably be increased. For example, certain firm contributors have never increased the amount of their contribution since the League's formation in 1952. We recommend consideration of efforts to raise the level of contributions from certain of these firms.
4. The basic quotas for new firms and increases from existing firms, as well as the supervision of these efforts to secure additional revenue, should be under the direction of the Membership Committee.

I. Staff

Discussion

We have made no attempt to make an intensive review of staff operations. However, we continue to feel that we are getting good output from the staff. The staff attended 325 meetings of official public agencies during the year, which marks a high point in staff contact with public bodies. There has also been a substantial increase in the degree of inquiries and consultations with the League staff by public officials. This is attributable partly to the growing confidence in the League by public officials and partly because of the recent election of many new public officials.

Conclusions

The League must respond to inquiries from public officials if it wishes to obtain favorable action on its own proposals. Therefore, a way must be found to provide requested information. Our major conclusion is concurrence with the recent Board of Directors decision to authorize the hiring of an additional research assistant.

Recommendations

We make no specific recommendations for change, other than to call attention to the responsibility which rests with the League President and the Chairman of the Executive Committee to check on staff operations.