

Citizens League
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Minneapolis, MN 55402

#271A
September 11, 1974

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Program Planning Task Force, Richard J. FitzGerald, Chairman

Your task force, created in May to review the organization and program of the Citizens League, presents herewith its final report and proposal.

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Introduction and Summary

We found, first of all, that the Citizens League has been changing -- in program and in process -- throughout its 22-year existence.

The Citizens League was founded in 1952, modelled on the best-existing types of the traditional citizen 'reform' organization: oriented to the municipal 'city' . . . essentially reactive to initiatives from government . . . focused mainly on issues of tax and finance, physical development and government structure . . . engaged in candidate review . . . operating through its own internal structure of standing committees.

Over the years the League has moved rapidly away from this, finding its way toward a new model for a citizen-based public-affairs organization . . . one that clearly is now drawing national attention both for its success in issue-analysis and in the development of proposals, and for its success as a mechanism of citizen participation.

- * By about 1954 the League had withdrawn from the original program of candidate-endorsement, and had made the decision (wise, as it has developed) to specialize in issues.
- * About 1958 it discarded the traditional standing-committee process, in favor of a new system of ad hoc study committees offering far more flexibility.
- * By 1962 it had discovered -- in its review of the Minneapolis Schools' bond proposal -- that it need not simply review proposals offered by government, but could also initiate major ideas and proposals to government.
- * There were also shifts in geographic focus. Originally, the League was a Minneapolis organization, concerned with Minneapolis city issues. By 1963, with the growth and change of population, it had become a Hennepin County-wide organization, concerned with -- and making major contributions to the solution of -- county problems. In 1967, recognizing ahead of most such organizations in the country the importance of the regional city, the League shifted its focus to the metropolitan level -- broadening its base of issues, membership, finance and committee activity to the Twin Cities area as a whole.

- * After 1968 the League began to turn toward a new set of public issues -- having to do much more with housing, health and the rapidly-growing public social services.
- * By 1972 it had perceived that its program in 'public affairs' could not be limited just to 'governmental affairs', but must deal with other, non-profit and private, organizations involved in these same community problem areas.

Each change came in response to a felt need for change -- internally, within the organization; or externally, from a new situation in the community.

This change . . . this pressure . . . continues today.

The issues are becoming larger, and more complex, straining both our own study processes and the community's institutions for the reporting and discussion of public affairs. The environment of community organizations, interested and involved in local public issues, is enormously larger and more diverse than it was just a decade ago . . . and the job of securing understanding about a problem, and the consents for action, is correspondingly more complex. With its expanded programs and regulations the national government is now a major factor -- both in creating issues within this metropolitan area, and in providing solutions.

It is time, again, for the League to respond, with changes in its own program, organization and procedures.

We face no crisis. The League has continued, over its 22 years, to move steadily upward -- in visibility, in size, in accomplishments, in reputation -- locally and nationally. Our problems tend to be related to our success: too much to do, in too little time; more issues than we can possibly program for study; controversies that arise precisely because reports do prove effective.

But needs and opportunities not responded-to can quickly become problems.

We have concluded that if the League is to fulfill its responsibility to the community . . . identifying issues as they emerge, providing the in-depth and objective analysis of problems, and developing relevant and innovative solutions . . . it must now undertake the single most substantial expansive set of changes in its history.

There must be:

- * An overhaul and modernization of our committee-study process . . . to provide a more systematic review of problems and needs in the community, to improve substantially the planning and preparation of study topics, and to strengthen the support we provide for the generalist members.
- * A major upgrading of the services we provide in informing the civic leadership of this community about developments in local affairs, and in maintaining a forum in which the discussion of these issues can take place.
- * A reorganization of internal CL committee structure . . . creating a new Program Committee and a new Operating Committee to replace the Executive and Budget and Finance Committees.

- * A substantial increase in CL financing . . . both from local sources, for our research and study program; and from outside sources, for the expanded information program.

The changes we propose will maintain, rather than alter, what has traditionally been the main effort of the Citizens League: *To help this metropolitan community understand its problems and what should be done about them.*

The needed strengthening of this function has two major aspects. Let us deal with each of them separately.

The Study Program

The research committees are the heart of what we do. The in-depth analysis of public issues, in these committees, is what the League does best. It is done, in this community, almost uniquely by the League.

If this analysis continues to be done well, the other elements of our program will do well. If we fail at this, no amount of publicity or membership promotion or fund-raising will, in the long run, succeed.

The essentials of our committee study procedures remain sound. Yet some trends are visible which cause concern. It will be prudent to take steps to adjust our procedures, to check these trends, at an early date.

- * The strength of the League has been the participation of the citizens of the community . . . lay persons, not professionals or experts in the subjects under study; deeply committed to progress of this area and to the success of its institutions; highly skilled at policy analysis; and willing to invest very substantial amounts of their personal time in studies that can truly effect something fundamental. It is their ability to probe with tough, searching questions, and their willingness to consider new and unconventional solutions, that distinguishes Citizen League committees.

The Board has been concerned that, with the increasing complexity of the issues under review, and the growing impact of League proposals, committees may come to be overly dominated by specialists, professionals and directly-interested parties, to whom membership in the League and in the committees has been fully open. The Board in the spring of 1974 did authorize a new sign-up form for committee service, which will more fully disclose the interests of members in the topic under study. The feeling was that this should be and could be the alternative to restrictions on our traditional policy of open sign-up. This question should be again considered, as the Program Committee undertakes its review. Disclosure, combined with the new procedures to support the role of the generalists, may be sufficient. If not, limitations on open enrollment should again be considered.

- * The League must also improve the process by which it selects projects for study.

It is increasingly difficult to retain the concept of a work program begun in September and finished in June, and prepared during the summer in a series of meetings by a committee. Rather, the League has found itself more and more programming projects around the year.

There must be a fundamental re-thinking of the process by which our work projects are selected. Input must be broadened. Ways must be found to add projects, throughout the year. Others in the community should be consulted-with more fully . . . and the results of our appraisal of community problems should be more fully shared with these other organizations. We need better ways to evaluate proposed projects -- to be sure they are relevant, timely and feasible. Finally, the Board should assume significantly more responsibility for backgrounding itself on a problem area, before sending a study committee out to explore it: Too many such committees have been left too much on their own, to figure out their own charge when they found too little direction in what they had received from the Board.

A recommendation on ways to improve both these procedures -- in program development, and in committee operation -- will be the first responsibility of the Program Committee.

- * Finally, we have been concerned about the quality of the review given to the report of a study committee by the Board of Directors.

This is of critical importance. The committee needs perceptive testing and review, to be sure its report is sound before it moves to the more critical challenge it will receive from the community. The League needs -- since every report is, properly, a Citizens League report -- a thoughtful review in its own interest.

This has been proving difficult to accomplish. Committee reports have come to the Board in final form, with a minimum time available for reading and review. They have been taken up for discussion at a noon meeting, where time is limited. In the discussion, the most critical issues may or may not be raised.

We propose that a new procedure be established that will give the study committee an earlier opportunity to test out, on the Board, the direction of its thinking.

The Board should, routinely, appoint an ad hoc group at about the stage where the committee is firming up its conclusions and is ready to move toward recommendations. The group should be composed of present members of the Board. It should be small -- with about five members. It may meet with just the chairman and staff of the study committee -- or with all members, as seems appropriate. The purpose, essentially, will be to give the study committee some early indication of likely Board reaction, and to give the Board some early idea of the thrust of committee proposals. It would prepare an agenda of questions for discussion at the meeting of the Board. The group would not have authority to modify a study committee report.

Such a procedure is being experimented with, this summer, for the committee on political campaigns. We recommend that, if this proves successful, it be incorporated into the Board review of committee reports as standard practice.

The Information Program

It has become fully clear to us, as well, that the improvement of our process of issue-identification, problem-analysis and proposal-development will not be enough.

We must think, as well, about the improvement of that process through which the understanding gained in our studies -- of public problems, and of the need for action -- passes to the community as a whole.

We have, in the past, tended to take this process for granted. We can no longer do so. We must, now, be concerned explicitly with the system through which our reports and proposals are transmitted to others.

It used to be that League studies related to specific community decision-points, not too far out in the future. The issues were shaped. We simply had to advise the voters, 'yes' or 'no'.

In recent years, increasingly, we have been initiating proposals -- not simply reacting to proposals shaped by others. In many cases there is no fixed decision-point: an understanding of the problem, and the need for action, has also to be built, until a decision is forced. The issues themselves are more complex. And so is the environment of organizations, in the community, involved in the debate. The whole process now takes, in many cases, several years.

We believe the League needs to improve and diversify the original distribution of its proposals, at the time a committee report is completed and approved. In particular, it should try to make more use of radio and television, and should explore more systematically the potential of appearances before interested groups.

But the real question here runs far beyond 'better communications'.

An 'Intelligence' and 'Reporting' System

What is needed, now, is a substantially enlarged capability to follow the issue, from the time a report is launched until the time major action is finally taken. We must be able to track the issue, through the twists and turns it takes after our proposal first impacts upon it. We must have a capacity to speak again, sometimes quickly, when the issue reappears -- short of another full-scale committee study. And we must be able to maintain the audience of persons interested in the issue as a result of our original study and report -- through the months and years it may take to secure action.

The League has, for some years now, used its Community Leadership Breakfasts and its Q & A sessions to carry on the discussion of an issue, and a proposal, advanced in one of its reports. We have increasingly been circulating to interested persons copies of documents and memos, or minutes of discussions, bearing on our reports. Most recently, we have begun 'updating' our reports in issues of our own CL NEWS . . . with short notes reporting on developments that represent toward actions recommended.

It is this that now needs to be substantially strengthened. It is not enough simply to improve the distribution of our reports. We must deepen the interest and enrich the understanding of those in the community on whom we depend for support, and for action, so they can follow the issue, closely and with comprehension. And we must now continue this effort, past the release of our reports, through the

period of community discussion leading to action. We must be in much closer contact with the whole new environment of public affairs organizations.

The League should undertake a major program expansion in this area . . . developing a capability both to pull together information about developments related to our reports and proposals, and to move back out to the community -- through a small publication, separate from the CL NEWS -- notes of interest and background helpful to those who follow closely public affairs in this region. This could easily involve an expenditure of up to \$60,000 per year. This should be financed from sources beyond those used for the support of the League's research program. Probably these will be national or foundation sources. The program will almost certainly take the form of an experiment or demonstration, initially. Our hope is that, over time, if successful, it can become self-financing.

We recommend charging the Community Information Committee to begin immediately to develop a specific proposal for such a program, and publication, together with an application for the necessary financial support.

Relations with Other Community Organizations

Over the years since the last re-examination of the League's program and structure, a number of important new community institutions have been emerging. Some have major potential for carrying forward some of the ideas advanced in League reports.

- * Important among these are the private foundations -- local, regional and national -- now developing fairly rapidly in the Twin Cities area. More are likely to appear. They will be increasingly professional in their approach and in their staffing. Most are likely to continue the movement away from sustaining grants to established charities. The shift of emphasis from education and health into problems of public services and community development is likely to continue. Foundations will be trying to understand community needs. They will be looking for innovative proposals.

Many are, already. Some -- in this effort -- have already begun approaching the Citizens League, for suggestions or for judgments about proposals or about applicants. We believe this relationship can be important and useful -- for the foundation, for the community and for the League. Quite apart from any effort to seek financing for this organization itself, the appropriate committees and the staff of the League should begin to think explicitly, and to move affirmatively, to convey to these foundations the understanding of community problems developed in the course of our program work, and the proposals shaped by our study committees.

- * In another category -- but potentially related in much the same way -- are the emerging organizations capable of carrying forward ideas through further research and study. Some are nonprofit research institutes. Some are university-based. Some are commercial consultants.
- * We reviewed again the proposal in the report of your task force in 1967 for an Advisory Council of civic leaders. We concluded the League should not attempt to establish this as a formal part of our structure at this time. We did conclude that a closer, less formal, relationship should be developed with the existing organizations that represent this sector of the community.

The Problem of the 'National Dimension'

We struggled at first over the perplexing question of our reponse to the increasing pressure our organization and our staff is feeling to become involved with activities outside the Twin Cities area.

We were at first negative. The contacts -- the phone calls, the letters, the questionnaires, the conferences, the people wanting to come in and talk, the documents sent in for comment -- are becoming a significant drain on the League's time, which is in many ways our key resource. We are a Twin Cities area organization, supported by this community. And the hard question was whether, beyond some minimum level, 'outside' activity could be justified within our priorities.

As we thought through the issue, however, it became clear that the 'local' and 'out-of-town' distinction was not really the meaningful one. Unproductive uses of our time can easily be found at home. And contacts elsewhere can at times be enormously productive -- in ideas and experience useful in our study program and, with the growing involvement of the national government in urban affairs, in transmitting our problem-analyses and proposals to persons who may be able to put them usefully into effect. Rather, the test is the usefulness of any particular trip or telephone call or conference or interview . . . to the Citizens League specifically, and to the Twin Cities area in general.

We think the 'community' of persons with which we work, on public affairs of the Twin Cities area, will continue to expand beyond the geographic limits of this metropolitan area itself. Where these are important to our central mission, and provide clear benefits to the Twin Cities area and to the League, we should continue to develop these relationships.

Fortunately, it appears we can. The cost of distance could be a problem. But, so far at least, the League has been fully compensated for its travel. The out-of-town activity is, in fact, beginning to make a small positive contribution to our annual budget.

The 'Reference' Program

This leaves us with the remaining problem of what to do with those requests for assistance which we feel do not bring accompanying net benefits either to the Citizens League or (if from out of town) to the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

This also represents a growing burden on our time. Some of the requests are for help with substantive questions of urban policy. Many seek our assistance in organizing or expanding citizen-based public-affairs study organizations in other cities. The total volume of this contact is now quite significant, and has been increasing rather rapidly.

All this is flattering. It is interesting. It is, we assume, useful to those who invite us or who come to see us. And to some extent we have an obligation to respond which we cannot evade: We, also, ask time and assistance, for free. We should help others who need what we have and who will benefit from it.

We felt we must, however, set some kind of priorities. And our judgment had to be that, in the overall allocation of staff time and effort, service primarily to others must come behind our primary mission of helping this metropolitan area move toward the solution of its critical local problems.

The problem is that these contacts, and requests for help, are not halted simply when we decide, ourselves, that this service should rank lower in our own priorities. The phone calls, the questionnaires, the invitations, the visitors continue to arrive. It is difficult to turn them away.

The Prospects of a 'Network'

We are simply seeing here . . . perhaps sooner and more clearly in the Twin Cities area and in the Citizens League . . . the consequences of the rapid emergence of the state capitals and the major metropolitan areas -- rather than Washington -- as the centers of action and innovation in urban affairs.

Between and among these major centers of activity there is now a heavy traffic of information moving -- sometimes by wire, sometimes by mail, sometimes by airplane.

The Twin Cities area has been involved in this activity intensively. For a time during the 1950s we were, probably, net 'importers' of urban know-how . . . on urban renewal, for example, or even governmental structure. Heavily since about 1960, however, we have been 'exporters' . . . about urban renewal, and shopping malls, and 'new town' developments, and school-aid formulas, and higher-education systems and metropolitan governmental structure and regional planning.

The Citizens League is involved partly with respect to the substantive issues, but particularly with respect to the technique of organizing and operating citizen-based institutions for research and action in local (particularly regional) public affairs.

Some of this is formalized. We have been for some years the correspondent here for the National Municipal League, which is a kind of clearing-house for information of both kinds. Since about 1972 we have been a part of a loose grouping of metropolitan affairs nonprofit corporations -- organizations in about a dozen major urban regions that work in fundamental ways on major community institutional development. We exchange publications routinely with a growing list of public and private agencies.

Most of it, however, is informal, ad hoc, fragmentary and accidental.

It is not necessarily bad for this reason. Most of us are loaded heavily enough with information, as it is. It is a positive efficiency to have information move only when it is needed, and desired.

Still, some more systematic arrangement probably would be beneficial, and is in a real sense needed. It is time for some agency -- concerned from a national point of view with the improvement of urban systems and with the improvement of the methods of citizen participation -- to undertake, gradually and skillfully, the development of a more formalized linkage among at least those metropolitan areas where real progress on urban problems and in regional citizen organization seems both desired and possible.

A key consideration, however, as we indicate above, will be the arrangements for covering the cost of this service -- where this is not offset by benefits to the League and to the Twin Cities area. There are some organizations in some cities that can afford to compensate the League for its time and efforts -- and some have. Not all, however, can -- including some who perhaps need help the most.

We concluded, therefore, that the League ought not to proceed by charging fees for our assistance. Rather, we should raise this question this fall, in discussions others have with us about a 'network', or with some other, appropriate national organization, and seek their financial assistance on a basis related to the type and amount of service we actually provide to others.

The Membership Program

In this area, as in others, our preference is to leave a thorough review to the Board committee responsible for this area -- in this case, to the new Operations Committee.

We did, however, discuss briefly again the major issues that present themselves with respect to the individual-membership base of the Citizens League.

We concluded again that a large membership is not a primary objective, in itself. Our preference is for a stable membership, showing a slow and steady growth. The emphasis should be on the distribution of members. We should emphasize non-Hennepin membership. We should continue to work for a better representation of racial and other minorities. We should have a fuller participation by labor, though perhaps not primarily the professional staff of the movement. We should continue to encourage the active participation of women. We should arrange the location and timing of our programs and study committees so as to increase the ability of these groups to participate effectively.

We are aware the League has not had, for some years, a large individual-membership drive. The membership has held stable, without this, even through a substantial increase in individual dues. We believe the Operations Committee should, nevertheless, review the procedures for the solicitation of members . . . with an eye particularly to improved ways to identify and recruit individuals with high potential for active and effective participation in League committee work.

Most of the revenue for the support of our activities will continue to be derived from sustaining contributions and memberships by a wide variety of organizations -- business firms, associations, nonprofits and foundations, local and national. High priority should continue to be placed on maintaining the broadest possible base of this membership and finance. This can be a difficult policy to maintain, in a period of rapidly-rising costs. The basic guidelines, this task force believes, should be to relate the maximum single contribution (which has existed in Citizens League policy, informally, for many years) not to a fixed dollar amount but to a percentage of the total annual sustaining budget. The Operations Committee will, under our recommendation, be drawing up a program for an expansion of League revenues, to cover the budget increase approved in August. We recommend that, as it proceeds, the committee set 5 per cent as the limit for contributions from any single source toward the sustaining account of the organization.

Staff

We did not go deeply into the question of staff organization, believing that to be the responsibility of the principal staff officer. We did feel it essential, however, to address the major changes in the role of the senior CL staff that will be produced by the very substantial changes we propose in the role of the organization.

It seems clear to us that the expansion of our community information activity -- a major new dimension of CL activity, locally and nationally -- requires substantial staff efforts -- on an ongoing basis, and particularly over the next 12 months, in its original design and financing. New staff will have to be added. And, for the first time, some existing staff will have to be assigned to this function explicitly.

At the same time, the need to improve our process of committee research -- to spread it more fully around the year, to deepen the background exploration of community issues, to support better the generalist citizen member, and to enrich the discussion process both in the committee and in the Board -- requires a heavier staffing of this traditional CL activity. We will need a person concentrating substantially his full time on the study program as a whole, freed, except in rare cases, from the responsibility for direct service to a particular study committee.

These changes in the organization thus create both the need and the opportunity to specialize the roles of the senior CL staff . . . with the Executive Director assuming direct responsibility for the community information activity and for service to that committee of the Board; and for the Associate Director to take direct responsibility, under supervision of the Executive Director, for the expansion and operation of the research program and for service to the new Program Committee of the Board.

We believe, too, that the staff should begin to play a more aggressive role in moving proposals to the Board of Directors and to its standing committees on certain kinds of issues. This is a citizens organization, and it is both proper and essential for the initiative, as well as the decisions, to rest with the citizen members on all questions having to do with the issues of community policy which the CL exists to address. We concluded, however, that this organization is now at the point where it would be both useful and appropriate for the Board to look to the staff for a greater degree of initiative on questions having to do with issues of internal structure and procedure. We think the Board is entitled now to expect, and should be getting, proposals from the staff for changes it feels are needed to respond to opportunities and to problems -- especially from the Executive Director, out of his responsibility as staff to the Operations Committee. There should be alternatives presented, and the Board will of course make the decisions. We look simply for an adjustment in the responsibility for initiatives, which should leave the Board freer to explore the community policy issues that come before this organization.

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The Task Force recommends the Board now take the following specific actions:

Committee Structure

1. Effective October 1, 1974 there shall be as a standing committee of the Citizens League a Program Committee. Under the supervision and direction of the Board it shall be responsible for continuously observing community needs and problems, for identifying issues in which the Citizens League can and should become involved, for designing and recommending to the Board a proposed program of research and study, for maintaining and improving the procedures on which these study committees shall be formed and operate.

The Program Committee shall consist of from 12-15 members, to be appointed immediately following the regular June meeting, by the President, with the approval of the Board. Members may be, but need not necessarily be, members of the Board, but should be experienced in the Citizens League research and study process.

2. Effective October 1, 1974 there shall be as a standing committee of the Citizens League an Operations Committee. It shall be responsible for proposing to the Board, and for implementing at the direction of the Board, policies with respect to the organizational structure, including the Articles and By-Laws; operating policies; relations with other organizations; personnel and hiring; membership; finance; budgets, including the preparation of regular financial reports to the Board.

The Operations Committee shall consist of from 12-15 members to be appointed following the regular June meeting, by the President, with the approval of the Board. The committee shall consist primarily of members of the Board of Directors.

3. Effective October 1, 1974 the Executive Committee and the Budget and Finance Committee, previously existing, are abolished.
4. Effective October 1, 1974 the Community Information Committee, as a standing committee of the Citizens League, shall become responsible, under the direction and supervision of the Board, for the dissemination of Citizens League reports to the affected public, and for the information and educational efforts that contribute to the adoption of their proposals.

The Community Information Committee shall consist of six previous presidents of the Citizens League, and 12 other members to be appointed by the President with the approval of the Board. The latter may, but need not necessarily, be members of the Board. In addition, the chairmen of Citizens League study committees shall sit with the Community Information Committee as ex officio members on any occasion when the report and proposal from their committee is under discussion. At the option of the chairman, some other member of the study committee, to be appointed by the President, may represent the study committee on the Community Information Committee.

5. Each such standing committee shall have the authority to define its internal organization and procedures.

Charge to the Committees

1. The Program Committee is hereby charged to begin at the earliest possible date an in-depth review of the formal and informal policies and practices with respect to the development of the Citizens League research and study program, with respect to the formation and operation of Citizens League study committees, and with respect to the preparation of reports for presentation to the Board. The Program Committee shall analyze problems that do now, or may in the future, exist with respect to the existing procedures, and shall make recommendations to the Board for changes and improvements that are generally consistent with the direction set out in this report of the Program Planning Task Force.

2. The Operations Committee is hereby charged to begin at the earliest possible date a study leading to recommendations to the Board for steps needed to provide the Citizens League with a balanced budget for its sustaining activities for 1975. The committee shall review the existing policies and practices, formal and informal, for the financing of the organization, and shall consider changes and new sources of revenue that may be appropriate and desirable. This report shall be presented to the Board by December 1, 1974, as a part of the Board's consideration of the annual budget for calendar year 1975.

The Operations Committee shall also review the Articles and ByLaws of the Citizens League, and shall make recommendations for changes that could be accomplished at the Citizens League annual meeting in 1974.

3. The Community Information Committee is charged to begin, at the earliest possible date, a detailed review of procedures for the distribution of Citizens League reports and proposals, and of the relationships between the League and other organizations interested and involved in issues of public affairs in the Twin Cities area. Consistent with the findings and conclusions of the Task Force, and with priority always to the objective of helping this metropolitan community toward a solution of its problems, the committee should design an expanded program of information and education needed to promote the understanding of the analyses and recommendations issuing from League study committees, and seek financial support for a demonstration effort to enlarge our ability to transmit out reports and proposals to others.

The Board is aware two specific recommendations have been presented, and acted upon, previously.

- * In July your Task Force proposed that there be a test of a new procedure for the submission of reports from study committees to the Board. This is presently under way, with respect to the report of the committee on political campaigns, which should come to the Board about October 1. This test should be evaluated by the Program Committee, and a recommendation for continuance or discontinuance made to the Board subsequent to that time.
- * In August we brought to the Board a second recommendation, for a change in the level of the 1974 budget, to make possible certain adjustments in the compensation for members of the Citizens League staff.

Respectfully submitted

RICHARD J. FITZGERALD
Chairman