

THE CITIZENS LEAGUE IN THE MID-1980s

Approved by

CITIZENS LEAGUE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
September 22, 1982

CITIZENS LEAGUE
84 South Sixth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55402
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recommending updates in the plan and other changes. This group should report to the Board on the continuation of planning at least semi-annually. The past presidents of the preceding four years should be invited to these sessions.

WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

The Long Range Planning Committee was composed of 18 members of the Citizens League who participated actively in the work.

B. Kristine Johnson, president of the Citizens League 1981-82, chaired the committee. The committee members were:

Rollin Crawford
Richard Erdall
Peter Hutchinson
James W. Johnson
Verne C. Johnson
Ted Kolderie
Margaret Lulic
LuVerne Molberg
Arthur Naftalin

James R. Pratt
Leonard F. Ramberg
Hazel Reinhardt
John A. Rollwagen
Allen Saeks
Gordon Shepard
Glen Skovholt
James Toscano

The committee was staffed by Curtis W. Johnson, Executive Director.

The Citizens League Board of Directors approved the report on September 22, 1982.

John A. Rollwagen
President, 1982-83.

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INTRODUCTION

The business that we have been in is basically where we intend to stay; that is, identification and definition of problems and opportunities in the metropolitan Twin Cities area community, and development of recommendations for policies and action. Our distinctive process, that of centering the work around citizen committees, remains our central strategy. In short, planning for our future is not a matter of fundamental rebuilding of the organization; there is no case for starting over.

However, our evaluation of the past several years' experience, and our assessment of the factors which now characterize the present and emerging environment in which we will operate, compels some change. Change, not in the basic nature of our work, but change which strengthens our capacity to meet the new challenges. This plan, then, is aimed at insuring that the Citizens League remains a relevant organization, one that clearly makes a difference. Further, it addresses the prospects for expanding impact. It outlines measures to increase productivity. And, finally, it commits us to establishing financial capacity consistent with our goals.

REVISED MISSION

The Citizens League is an independent, non-partisan public affairs education and research organization in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. As an open membership organization, it is distinguished by the involvement of volunteer members in the development of policy recommendations. It holds the following as its central purposes:

- To assist the community in identifying and defining its problems and its opportunities; to challenge the community with new ideas; and to develop recommendations for change in policy and action.
- To provide community education both as opportunities for members and to raise the level of public understanding of problems and the policy options.

CONTEXT FOR PLANNING

This is clearly an era of fundamental and sweeping change, touching virtually all political, social and economic systems, at all levels. As such, it is both a time of crisis and of opportunity for organizations considering their response to changing conditions. Our plan should be neither to resist nor ignore the changes under way, but to understand and capitalize upon the emerging opportunities.

It is also a difficult time for governmental initiative. Most public policy-makers, conditioned by the dominating experience of years of economic growth and expanding public resources, are not well prepared for decisions to be made under different rules. The need for objective, external, independent recommendations for policy change is therefore even greater than before.

It is also a time of blurred distinctions. What is public and what is private is no longer so easily determined. And issues of policy increasingly cut across governmental levels, so much so that on a content basis it is difficult to differentiate the concerns of a U. S. senator and a city councilman. What is economic is also political, and social, though this mix is not so new as it may seem.

Changing conditions and reforms of systems are not simply structural alterations: they change the lives of people in the community. Our work must reflect an understanding and sensitivity which reminds the community of its commitment to those whose resources typically limit choice and full participation. We must be as concerned about outcomes as with methods.

Capital—resources to be applied to problems and opportunities, public and private—will continue to be more prominent in its demand than its supply. Whether this imbalance is due to real aggregate limits or to an investment pattern which compels some reconsideration is only of interest if, in fact, some redirection is possible. In any event, the likelihood is that new organizations will be more difficult to establish, and established ones will find it more difficult to sustain their bases of resources. The Citizens League cannot reasonably expect its operating funds to be automatically available each year unless we show evidence of our own self-renewal; we will have to make the case for support on our continuing, not just our past, record of valuable service to the community, showing that what we do is distinctive, worth more than it costs, and not provided by other organizations.

about improvements in operation, membership services, as well as support of research program.

The time has come, and may be even overdue, for utilizing what office technology now makes possible. We literally waste too much valuable time on manual record systems. Moreover, the improvements we can make in quality, speed and sophistication of our work make this sort of change nearly mandatory. An extensive analysis of scale and complexity of our operations has been completed, followed by exhaustive product comparison with expert consultation. The Operations Committee has recommended that we move toward specific negotiations for lease or purchase, and has designated a preferred vendor.

- (1) Move to implement this recommendation, using a lease arrangement with an escape clause pending confirmation of adequate funding.
- B. Direct the Operations Committee to take a long-term look at operational funding for the League, with careful attention to questions of the adequacy of cash reserves, the stability of annual contributions, and mechanisms for receiving bequests.
- C. Seek special funding, regionally or nationally, for acquisitions and developmental costs associated with implementing the organizational changes represented in this plan.
 - (1) Identify a combination of foundations through which the prospects are good for creating a funding pool underwriting a demonstration period for the major features of this plan which require special funding. Project the demonstration period(s) over enough time that an evaluation of each is feasible and a strategy for ongoing support can be designed.
- D. Commission a search for space more suitable to the long-term needs of the League, (including the possibility of space in which to conduct meetings of internal organizational committees).
- E. Establish an ongoing mechanism for continuous planning and evaluation, leading to priorities for action.
 - (1) Designate the officer group within the Board of Directors as the committee responsible for regular evaluation of progress and for

- (1) Explore and if possible experiment with a connection to one or more data services, particularly where the possibility may exist for a reciprocating relationship.

D. Identify means of contributing to a sense in the community of **what needs to be done**. Rarely likely to be a tidy process, or one leading to easy consensus, it is, nonetheless, an important aspect of marshalling the community's public and private resources toward some shared vision of possible results. It is not an area in which we can or should presume to appoint ourselves as the leaders, but we should search thoughtfully for ways to help this process along, working with other organizations who share the concerns.

E. Explore the prospects for making more systematic the bilateral consultations nationally, which stem from our regions's successes.

In a sense, the record of this region's ability to adapt to changes, to lead in innovation, to get things done across constituent sectors, is a kind of natural resource—sort of a public affairs analog to petroleum or precious metals. We should investigate a couple of ways to capitalize on this distinction that would add to our own strength as well as make a more significant contribution to the capacity of other regions.

- (1) Encourage the development of this region as a center for public affairs leadership. As one example, encourage the National Municipal League, with its Citizens Forum on Self Government, to establish a presence in the Twin Cities. Explore the prospects of an invitation made cooperatively with the University of Minnesota, perhaps specifically with the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and the Humphrey Institute.
- (2) Apply for a grant, independent of other costs in this plan, from a national foundation to underwrite the training and consultative activities which enable other cities to establish successful citizen-based organizations.

4. POSITION THE ORGANIZATION FOR MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS IN PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY.

A. Shift to use of data processing and word processing systems to bring

PRIORITIES

Our plan for action for the next several years reflects the following priorities:

- **REAFFIRMING the central strategy through which the organization has rendered its most productive services.**

The distinguishing characteristic of this organization has been its success in *convening concerned citizens* to study problems thoughtfully and recommend practical action. Whatever we do now should be aimed at insuring the continued success of this approach. It should continue in its claim on our resources and our reputation.

- **STRENGTHENING the capacity to respond to the opportunities now emerging in the context of present and predicted changes.**

Doing well under the circumstances which are emerging translates into doing better, more consistent work, and achieving greater impact. This involves finding the *people* to participate whose work will make a real difference, being shrewd in the *selection of what to work on*, and strengthening *the process itself* to insure that it represents the best mechanism for productive citizen participation that we can achieve.

- **POSITIONING the organization for subsequent movement in areas which cannot yet be precisely defined.**

Communicating information and ideas effectively has always been a key to the success of the League. The challenge ahead is one in which the media of communication may be dramatically reshaped. The wiring of the metropolitan community for cable television alters more than access; the potential is there to substitute diversity for monopoly in programming, for targeted rather than mass audiences. Institutional linkages may prove even more consequential in an emerging network of information exchange. Public radio and television, especially as they become more community-based in funding, represent interesting potential partnerships. And, perhaps, most dramatically, the projected purchase of small computers for home use across the next few years is revolutionary in its implications for the way we communicate. We must position ourselves boldly on the threshold of these changes, preparing to capitalize on what technology makes possible, and, increasingly, affordable.

- **FOCUSING on what we are trying to do in the community.**

We have always resisted and must continue to be wary of the mentality which suggests that the organization should persist because of its history or because it has become a kind of established institution in the community. Its case for being must rest on its continued success in *concentrating on things worth doing*. While diversity is appealing, especially when applied to opportunities for participation by members, we should avoid so spreading out our effort that we lose our concentration on the work by which our success will most likely be measured.

- **REGARDING planning as a continuing and dynamic process.**

Typically, organizations engage in planning somewhat episodically, giving ad hoc attention to the production of a master plan, then either ignoring it (going back to the real work) or pursuing its literal implementation with slavish devotion. A calculated review, from time to time, when assumptions are questioned and mission and goals are renewed and refined, is a worthwhile thing for any organization. Just as important, however, is having some mechanism through which looking ahead happens with regularity. We need to regard *planning as something we are doing continuously*, adapting to changes and pursuing opportunities as they develop. The plan, in its more formal, documentary state, serves best as the context in which we will make organizational decisions and the collective conscience reminding us of what we have committed the organization to accomplish.

secures funding for and establishes a special assignment area regularly covering public affairs in the region, beginning with, but not limited to, the activities of the principal cooperating organizations.

- (3) For lengthy reports, produce *executive summaries* either for alternative distribution or as a complementary piece.
- (4) Identify at least one citizen research project which concentrates on a topic suitable to audio-visual treatment of findings, conclusions and recommendations. Produce the report to the community in this form, taking advantage of the alternative applications a report in this form could assume.

C. Stay close to the emerging possibilities for utilizing the institutional network of area **cable television**, and especially to the proposals for the program management of the regional interconnect channel. Position the League to consider what contributions we might make to programming. Perhaps more important, watch for changes in the potential for information exchange through this medium.

3. CONCENTRATE MORE ON THE CONTENT OF THE AREA'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENDA.

Too centrally important not to be a strategic emphasis in a plan for improvement, we must invest as much as possible in the continuous monitoring, consultation, and analysis that results in the League's being active in the issues most worth doing. Beyond that assessment, we can at times succeed in helping to identify and raise the visibility of concerns in the community, even when it is not our intention to work directly on them.

A. Continue the practice, used in 1982, of **broad consultations** with area organizations and individuals in preparation for the annual program adoption activities.

- (1) For 1983 add a sample of neighborhood and minority organizations to the consultation list.

B. Invest more time in monitoring and interacting with **governmental bodies**.

C. Pursue more systematic access to and use of information available from **national data-generating sources**.

A. Establish a public affairs information service.

In a sense, this tactic amounts to packaging and sharing something which is already substantially available. Interesting, non-in-print-elsewhere type of information already flows through the Citizens League organization. What we have lacked has been the practical, efficient means of compiling and distributing these data and the clear decision to make this activity a continuing priority.

- (1) Building on the base of issues we have been active in, and are still following (as in the UPDATES we have done previously), add data from staff and volunteer sources which is worth logging in for distribution. Periodically, as the currency and volume of data indicate, edit and print short summaries showing source for follow-up. Using capacity of data and word processing, and a broad team effort in capturing and recording information, this objective adds much more proportionately to regular output than it does to expense.
- (2) Experiment for a demonstration period with a to-all-members distribution. During this period, survey real demand and create a plan for making the service an optional feature of membership on a cost-recovery basis.

B. Diversify the media through which reports and recommendations are represented to the community.

The range of possibilities here extends from alternative print forms, at limited expense, to more costly audio-visual projects requiring special financial assistance. The traditional report, while it represents the work and decisions of the committee, is often somewhat archival and sometimes proves insufficient as a means of communicating about both problems and proposals.

- (1) *Attract coverage* of issues under study and Citizens League recommendations for change, where possible, on an in-process basis. Get journalists to follow some projects as they develop, either as background or as material for feature treatment.
- (2) Promote a *cooperative arrangement* among public affairs organizations (including, at least, Citizens League, Spring Hill Center, and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute) in which Minnesota Public Radio

A PLAN FOR THE MID-1980s

GOAL: TO EXPAND THE CONTRIBUTION WHICH THE CITIZENS LEAGUE MAKES TO THE COMMUNITY.

STRATEGIES

1. Strengthen the citizen participation process.
2. Capitalize on the emerging advantages of communication technology.
3. Continue to concentrate on the content of the area's public affairs agenda.
4. Position the organization for major improvements in productivity and efficiency.

The remainder of this document describes these strategies and suggests the principal tactics (lettered under each strategy) through which we will make them happen. As specific objectives are identified, they then show up under each of these tactical areas. The plan is intended as a dynamic record; *it is never really finished*. In ensuing months, each area of planned action becomes more fully developed and objectives take a more specific shape.

1. STRENGTHEN THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROCESS.

Here our concern is the process we use to get results from our research and action program. While the medium is not the message for the League, the medium does matter. The range for potential improvement extends from the recruitment of participants to the utilization of the experience they gain in the process. Renewed strength lies in attracting from a representative, broad base citizens who care enough about making good public policies and who understand their community, that we get results from our process reflecting consistently high quality.

- A. Recruit new members whose interests and talents fit the work of the League. Concentrate on finding the emerging network of leadership in the community.

- (1) Continue selected mail solicitations to targeted groups. Given the generally effective record of this approach, the Operations Committee should identify these groups from which we will seek new members based on factors of needed breadth and balance and probability of interest. We should average one mailing each quarter.
 - (2) Develop a specific mechanism during the 1982-83 year for locating prospective participants/members within the environment of supporting business firms. This objective interfaces with emerging emphases in firms on promoting and accounting for volunteerism activities. It is not only a good source of new members, but an important factor in strengthening our appeal for corporate financial support.
 - (3) Maintain liaison effort with the Corporate Volunteerism Council (CVC) and any other promising networks concentrating on the mobilization or focusing of volunteer activity.
 - (4) Enlist appropriate involvement of key community opinion-makers. Competition understandably continues for the time and interest of those most-in-demand community leaders. The sustained presence within CL ranks of some of these, particularly those now emerging, offers deeper penetration into the informal decision-making arrangements in the community. It is an aspect of membership development that deserves renewed attention.
 - (5) Reach out for participants whose special experiences bring new perspectives to the citizen study process as we have practiced it, whose backgrounds will add new dimensions of relevance, credibility and quality. Within a two-year period, show measurable evidence of a significant increase in the participation of minorities on research committees, standing committees, as resource persons, and as active members of the Board. In addition, encourage the participation of neighborhood leaders.
 - (6) Improve the materials used to describe the organization. Complete by the fall of 1983 a redesigned brochure with appropriate supportive information.
- B. Develop a **program of orientation** to the Twin Cities area—its special history, traditions, characteristics, and its ways of conducting public affairs.

This proposal has its roots in recommendations for the 1981-82 Program Committee, and is seen as an important service for new members, and as a program which would be used by business and other organizations whose personnel have an interest in accelerating the pace of their understanding of the community.

- (1) Publish a package of reading materials for general background. Much of this work is done, lacking only final editing, publication, and a systematic distributional purpose.
- (2) Develop a seminar as the principal orientation form, drawing on the informational resources of the Metropolitan Council and using experienced members of the League as the faculty. Explore the prospects for a cooperative administrative arrangement with area institutions, such as the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute or Metropolitan State University.

C. Extend the program of **single-evening seminars**, moving to a frequency of four to six each year, combining the preliminary research interests of the Program Committee with the provision of a more diverse participation opportunity for members.

- (1) Experiment with audio and audio-visual extensions of these productions for distribution or utilization by radio or television.

D. Make fuller use of the experiences and energy of committee participants.

- (1) Maintain contact on issue progress after the report is approved.
- (2) Make greater use of potential speakers within the committee.

2. CAPITALIZE ON THE EMERGING ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY.

More than just improvement, basic survival actually, is largely a matter of how well we communicate information and ideas. With modes of communication now changing in ways regarded as revolutionary by many, it amounts at least to a serious, missed opportunity, and perhaps a strategic mistake, if we fail to adapt to these changes. We need to add the capacity to exchange and process data, to publish and disseminate efficiently, to establish linkages with cooperating media, capitalizing on the opportunities presented by technology.