**Application for the LWVUS “*Strengthening Democracy”* Award**

**Submitted April 14, 2018 by the LWV of Anchorage**

**Strengthening Democracy: 2018 Award Application**

This category is to showcase the work of Leagues that activate their grassroots network to empower voters and advocate change around key issues such as protecting voting rights or increasing voter registration and turnout.

1. LWV of Anchorage, P.O. Box 101345, Anchorage AK 99510

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2. Please provide the name of the project/program you are submitting as well as a brief description that could be used when the finalists are being voted on. (300 words or less)

Title: Voter Engagement through Voter Registration and Vote-by-Mail Education and Outreach

Brief Description: A project to register new voters, inform current voters about the need to update address and name information, educate Anchorage citizens about the new Vote-by-Mail (VBM) voting system, encourage and facilitate meaningful conversations about voting logistics and highlight the purpose and nonpartisan role of League. These goals were accomplished by conducting voter registration drives; facilitating for the Municipality of Anchorage requests for speakers and speaking at various venues; drafting and distributing a nonpartisan pamphlet – *Ballot Review* – outlining the voting process, listing candidates and ballot questions; expanding Facebook posts; creating a new web site; drafting and creating a voting PSA for youth by youth; partnering with and assisting the Municipality of Anchorage Clerk’s office with pre-election, Election Day and post-election activities; and participating in the Anchorage Elections Stakeholder Group from July 2015 through April 3, 2018 with two League members chairing various subcommittees.

3. What was the date of the program/project, what types of communities and populations were being served and what was the participation level. (500 words or less)

Date: July 2015 through April 2018

Community Served: Municipality of Anchorage

Populations Served:

Youth – High School: League Voter Registrars visited government classes at three high schools twice and four others once, including one recognized as the nation’s most ethnically diverse, to register students 18 years old and those within 90 days of their 18th birthday. Seven of eight high schools were served. VBM information was also disseminated. 314 students registered to vote. The Government teachers of the non-participating high school, with our urging and supplying voting materials, registered their students.

Anchorage LWV Youth Vote: YV (since 2004) is a nonpartisan venue for empowering youth to vote and be involved in the democratic process. A grant was received to create a multi-faceted campaign to educate peers and Anchorage residents about VBM through a video PSA and social media messages. The PSA, placed on various social media sites, was created entirely by the student planning team of seven students – four from Anchorage Schools, three University of Alaska students – with help from a graphic artist and video production support from student producers at Alaska Teen Media Institute. The social media messages featured youth created messages using some graphics from the PSA.

College Students: The twice-yearly University Campus Vote, spearheaded by a University professor and LWV member, occurred in the Fall and Spring. 295 voters were registered. All venues also included information on VBM.

Newly Naturalized Citizens: League Voter Registrars provided voter registration services at nine naturalization ceremonies over the last year and registered 318 new citizens.

Low Income Residents: League Voter Registrars participated in the Food Bank Holiday Gift of Food event over a two-day period and registered or updated the registration of 47 attendees in addition to providing VBM material and answering questions.

Anchorage Residents: League prepared the eight-page *Ballot Review* pamphlet (25th year of production) distributed to every Anchorage household (122,000) the weekend prior to the Municipality mailing ballot packages to 212,000 registered voters. The pamphlet was posted on various websites. The extensive explanation of VBM, non-partisan information on ballot questions and candidate contact information was well received based on many positive comments via phone, email and Facebook.

Special Needs Residents: League members serviced 15 special needs residents at two hospitals and health care facilities by delivering ballots the day before Election Day and on Election Day assisting the resident with the voting process and delivering the voted ballot to the Election Center.

Vote-by-Mail Presentations given by League members to various populations through the community along with voter registration services:

Businesses: Three major oil company employees.

Political Party Chapters: Three presentations.

Church Groups: Three presentations.

Organizations – both for-profit and nonprofit: Eleven presentations. Groups included: education association, woman’s club, Lions Clubs, Federation of Filipino Americans, State Department employees, veterans group, and outdoor clubs.

Community Councils: Fifteen presentations. Anchorage is divided up into 38 community council areas.

*Approximately 1,100 attendees participated.*

Community Events: Six presentations with hundreds attending and one event had thousands attending.

4. Describe the priority issue that your League worked on to strengthen democracy and the impact/outcome of your work. (500 words or less)

The League’s priority issue was to be involved at the grassroots level with the transition to a Vote-by-Mail system while reassuring voters the new system was trustworthy, safe, secure, convenient and accessible by delivering nonpartisan educational information to all age groups, all economic groups, underrepresented groups, citizens of every background, location and work schedule. The League’s role expanded over the course of this last year to include a partnership with Municipality of Anchorage Clerk’s office in a variety of areas. Additionally, our goal, through our concentrated education and outreach efforts was to assure a sustainable future election process. A by-product of our education and outreach effort was to increase the number of citizens registered to vote and inform currently registered voters of the need to update their registration address and/or name. During the last year, we registered close to 1,000 voters. Our efforts were necessary since only registered voters, residing at the address listed on their voter registration address, received a ballot package. Registering voters does not always increase voter turnout. Our second priority was to increase voter turnout. By disseminating information on the convenience of voting in the comfort of your home with ready access to ballot information along with pointing out three convenient methods to return a voted ballot, we encouraged citizens to become more engaged in the decision-making process of government. The League’s mission statement of “encouraging informed and active participation in government and influencing public policy through education and advocacy” resonated throughout this project. Last year’s Municipal election turnout was 24.77% with the highest turnout in a Municipal election at 35.82% in 2012 with 71,099 ballots received. The turnout for the April 3rd election is still to be determined but as of this submission 79,284 voted ballots. We have concluded our voter engagement effort was a success!

5. Describe how your League mobilized the grassroots network to impact and promote change. (500 words or less)

We mobilized the grassroots network of our League. This project energized our League members and resulted in members volunteering to register voters and give presentations who previously were paying members only. Eighteen League members participated in these activities. Additionally, seven LWV Youth Vote planning team students mobilized to create a voting PSA and social media messages. Our project was successful because of members’ commitment to League and our principles. In October of 2017, the Municipality of Anchorage asked the League to partner with them on their Vote-by-Mail project by taking on additional activities. We took on the daunting task of coordinating VBM presentations for the Municipality. League gave the majority of the presentations throughout the community which allowed Municipal employees to focus on the logistics and internal operations of the VBM process. A total of 41 presentations were given by eight League members as described in Question 2. Our education and outreach to these groups increase our visibility and name recognition in the community as an organization that is non-partisan and willing to tackle a major project. League members wore League buttons at each presentation and were introduced as League. We worked as a conduit of information to and from the Municipal Clerk’s office by sending questions asked at the presentations and disseminating information quickly back to these groups. Based on our feedback, several of the Municipality’s posters, Vote-by-Mail logo and handouts were changed accordingly. While conducting presentations, we asked attendees to spread the word that the League is available to give presentations to other organizations. Several requests were received based on these recommendations. The Anchorage Elections Stakeholder Group, organized in July 2015 and comprised of over 30 community members (a fluid group), relied on the League for input especially during the time period of the presentations. Two League members were members of the Stakeholders Group. Many committee and subcommittee meetings were held over this time period. One League member was chair of the Procedures Subcommittee, and another League member was on the Education and Outreach Subcommittee. Both the Municipality and the League benefited from this liaison and we hope to continue this positive relationship in future elections as well as with other areas of the Municipality government. Additionally, one League member was on the RFP committee to review bids for three separate pieces of voting equipment and make the final decision on which vendor to choose. How exciting for League to be a part of this historic decision. By mobilizing both our League members and members of the community we became part of the titanic effort to implement a new successful voting system for the Municipality of Anchorage, specifically Vote-by-Mail.

6. Describe the types of community outreach, how underrepresented communities were reached, and visibility efforts that were undertaken to make this project a success. (500 or less)

As you can see from answers to the other questions, we engaged in a variety of community outreach and education venues to promote Vote-by-Mail and increase visibility of all aspects of Vote-by-Mail; the creation and timing of our *Ballot Review* mailing, mailing of ballot packages information, return of voted ballot options and contact information for questions to name a few. All League presenters commented that the interaction with the different community groups was very positive and informative. We brought back a variety of issues that League could focus on in the future; i.e., by providing more information, being a conduit for pro/con forums or taking a position on the issue.

Our League discussed what groups were underrepresented in our community during an election and determined that one group was definitely “youth.” Our Youth Vote coordinator took on the project of working with the Youth Vote planning team to create a voting PSA with VBM information aimed at youth but also meaningful for every age. One theme was the ability to vote while wearing your slippers! The PSA was posted on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – all social media sites frequented by teens. During the course of this project, the Alaska Teen Media Institute became involved in producing the PSA. The ATMI provides teens with the tools and training needed to produce stories and with the opportunity for their stores – told in their own voices – to be shared through a variety of media. ATMI believes the teen perspective is valuable and is under-represented. ATMI was a perfect resource to engage youth in the voting process. The youth are our future.

Another group that is under-represented during an election are those who suddenly find themselves in a hospital or nursing facility. The League volunteered to provide “Special Needs” ballots to these citizens as they do not readily have access to voting options. Five League members offered to provide these services and become Special Needs Representatives. The Municipal Clerk’s provided training and fifteen requests were received from two facilities. These individuals would not have had the opportunity to vote if not for the League.

Because the Anchorage Mayor’s office worked closely with groups with language barriers to provide ballots in different languages, the League did not pursue this area. Anchorage is a very diverse community with over 99 languages being spoken.

By updating our web site, increasing our visibility on Facebook with information on VBM, promoting our voting PSA, providing social media messages on VBM and giving VBM presentations throughout the Municipality, we definitely feel we contributed to the overwhelming success of the first Vote-by-Mail election. Our hope is to continue to work closely with all government entities as the new voting process evolves and expands. The State of Alaska is also looking at Vote-by-Mail as an option to polling place elections. One Anchorage League member is a member of the Work Group exploring several voting options with the goal of implementing a new voting system for the 2020 state-wide elections.

7. Please upload any photos and supporting materials related to this project.

(up to 4 files)

Submitted four Word files:

1. Link to *Ballot Review* 2018 pamphlet and link to Youth Vote 30 second PSA along with three pictures of League members serving residents/newly naturalized citizens: Food Bank Neighborhood Gift 2017, Eagle River Naturalization Ceremony 2017, and Women’s March 2018.
2. October 2017 newsletter, TheVoter.
3. January 2018 newsletter, TheVoter.
4. February 2018 newsletter, TheVoter.