

NLN AFFILIATED CONSTITUENT LEAGUE

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*Reference & Resources*



**National League**  
*for* **Nursing**

# **Guidelines for Advocacy Public Policy & Public Relations**

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## Public Affairs Committee

### *Purpose*

The purpose of a league Public Affairs Committee is to study current issues involving nursing and health care and to formulate position statements to recommend to the league board of directors. The board should review the recommendations of the committee and decide whether to adopt or modify committee proposals. The Public Affairs Committee should develop strategies that will positively impact on nursing and health care legislation and policy in the state or region.

### **Why have a Public Affairs Committee?**

The league is a resource for both professionals and consumers on major nursing and healthcare issues. The league combines knowledge, skills and research abilities not found in other organizations with the stated goal of improving the quality of nursing and health care. It is a unique organization involving consumers and providers and earnestly seeks input beyond areas of nursing expertise.

There will be advantages to the league in establishing this role as spokesperson:

- Performing the genuine service of improving nursing and health care
- Solidifying the loyalty and involvement of current members
- Making the league appealing to potential profession and consumer members
- Increasing the role of nursing in the decision making process of health care
- Providing leadership and educational resources for league members interested in determining the future of health care
- Providing leadership and educational resources for league members interested in determining the future of health care
- Providing support and education for league members active in service, education and community health
- Building recognition in government and industry for the league as a spokesperson for nursing and health issues
- Promoting understanding of the league's relationship to the National League for Nursing

### **What Issues Should Be Studied?**

This depends on the board's charge to the Public Affairs Committee – it may be on specific issue or a blanket charge to look into all permanent issues. Issues may be suggested by membership, may arise for committee discussion or may develop through NLN goals, resolutions and position statements. Once this is settled, the committee should draw up a list of priorities.

Local issues are important. State, county, and city governments are moving increasingly into the field of health care. All members and local units should be encouraged to bring their concerns to the attention of the Public Affairs Committee.

### **The Make-Up Of A Successful Committee**

In order to insure success for a Public Affairs Committee, the league board of directors will want to select a chair who is familiar with current issues and trends in nursing and health care... someone who has had experience in policy making, either with the league or with another community or professional organization and will have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to chair meetings.

Outside assistance on matters involving legislation and the political process is available from many sources, such as the National League for Nursing, and the League for Women Voters. Since the Public Affairs Committee is an active and vital part of NLN, League committee members should have for reference the various official NLN position statements as a resource and NLN public policy materials. Care should be taken not to issue any statements to the contrary.

Committee members should be aware that participation will involve both effort and dedication – effort in doing the research and reading necessary to formulate proposals; dedication to overcome possible resistance to “controversial” positions. It should be a small group with perhaps three to five members chosen from the widest possible spectrum of backgrounds. At least one member should be a lay person to insure involvement of consumer opinion.

## *Policy on Legislation & Political Action*

### **Guidelines**

1. League activities should be congruent with NLN and advance Nursing's Agenda for Health Care Reform.
2. The league may inform its members of proposed legislation, its implications and expected developments.
3. The league may engage in non-partisan analysis, study, or research of certain reforms with the dissemination of the results.
4. In dealing with administrative agencies, it is advisable to present supported opinion in advocating viewpoints, and in each instance to present a full and fair exposition of the pertinent facts.
5. Communications should be of non-partisan and unbiased nature.
6. Whenever possible, the public affairs committee should get involved with presentations to legislators or legislative groups.
7. Factual testimony and information supplied should be given a full, fair, and unbiased basis, thus placing the expertise of the league and its information and services at the disposal of the legislator or committee as a basis for appraisal of the needs and the scope of the legislation required.
8. Use the resource provided by NLN through the Department of Public Policy.

### **Pitfalls to be Avoided**

Since the league is a non-profit, tax-exempt voluntary organization, the league in no way should support or appear to support a political party or a candidate for political office.

This does not mean, however, that a league (once a position has been adopted by the board) cannot support a particular legislative proposal which has goals in accord with its ideas. Expressions of support can be through testimony, written statements, or actions in combination with other invested organizations. Remember that the most powerful influence is not from one organization or one spokesman, but from many organizations and individuals supporting the same stand.

### **Spreading the Word**

Information of league public affairs should be made available to all members; in other words, the Public Affairs Committee should make a plan to "market the thinking of the league." Through the use of the league newsletter, or a separate public affairs bulletin, all league members and associates can become concerned, aware, and participating citizens. Also, the league can inform members to write in support of important public issues by distributing names of appropriate local, state, and national officials and elected representatives. The

league can influence policy by contacting staff government committees with offers to provide information relevant to the topic under consideration. Circulation of the league newsletter should include governmental officials and key community and state leaders.

League members should be encouraged to participate actively in other organizations and groups in order to make them aware of league thinking on relevant topics and insure input by nursing leaders in the decision making.

Your league might consider conducting legislative workshops together with other nursing organization, the League of Women Voters or consumer groups.

### **Legislative Committees and Sub-committees**

The real work of any legislative body is done in committees. It is from these committees that actual legislation is drafted. In order to influence law-making, this is the place to start.

Public Affairs Committee should know which committees receive and work on bills affecting nursing and health care issues. This information can easily be obtained by writing to your own representative and asking for a list of the various committees, and sub-committees, their membership, and which bills they consider. This information is also published in the official publication of the legislative body.

### **What to Tell a Public Official?**

There are several important “rules” to follow when attempting to get your positions across to public officials:

1. Be familiar with the proposed bill under consideration.
2. Any written statement should be as concise as possible, usually not longer than one page.
3. Prepare a summary of your testimony to leave with members and staff.
4. Prepare a press release highlighting your testimony.
5. Simple visual aids can be effective.
6. Know who the committee members are and where they come from.
7. Constituents from a representative’s own district carry more weight than if from another district.
8. Arrive early and be prepared to stay late or come back the next day – committees are often interrupted.
9. Oral testimony is preferable to written statements.
10. Always identify yourself and the organization you represent.
11. Be prepared to answer all questions, but be honest if you can’t. State you can get back with the information.
12. Don’t waffle on where you stand.
13. Always thank the officials for letting you appear, and follow up with a letter of good measure.

## Public Relations Committee

### *What is Public Relations?*

NLN and its constituent leagues are unique organizations with goals and objectives unlike any other in the nursing field. We cannot assume however, that this fact is universally understood.

Leagues, therefore, need constant and articulate exposure in order to:

- Attract new members.
- Be of service in the community—often the only way to reach groups who can assist league programs or benefit from league services is through direct communication – person-to-person and group-to-group.
- Serve the member's needs—they will be active and give support only if they understand what the league offers and how it works.
- Receive credit for a job well done.

We must define public relations in order to understand the duties of a public relations committee. Public relations is an ongoing and continuous program to produce understanding and good will, to interpret goals and objectives, to build an image, and to publicize the activities of the league necessary for continued public support. It is a management function. It is designed to appeal to identifiable groups for each specific effort.

Public relations programs should be designed to appeal to prospective members, related professional groups and organizations, other community and service organizations, and members.

### **The Public Relations Committee**

Every league needs a public relations committee to develop a program to publicize league activities. It is important that the committee be composed of people who have a background of working with the public. The ideal chair would be someone with experience in public relations, the communications media, or with other voluntary health organizations. Most hospitals have public relations departments and a good director might serve as a voluntary chair. The person selected should have the time necessary to devote to the job and be able to report to the league board as required.

Members of the committee should be recruited by looking at the tasks to be assigned; it is to the league's advantage to have a committee member who knows

how to write a release and place it; who can communicate easily with members of the press; who can work effectively with other organizations; and who can do the job smoothly and effectively. Good contacts are an important asset.

Once a committee is formed, the members should develop objectives and a workable public relations program. A written system for clearance of publicity items should be approved by the board. Remember that a good committee divides its duties; one person can't do all the work. The chair should be responsible for receiving the approval from the president or board before implementing the ideas developed by the committee.

### **Relation to Programming**

A close relationship between public relations and programming is vital. It is the program that will be promoted. Committee members should have input into program development and receive information on planning for league activities. This liaison should be a task for the committee chair.

An essential for organizational self-renewal is member involvement. They must be an active part of the planning, so that it is "our" program, not "theirs." Since they are involved, they will then tell others about "our" activities, thus creating the best kind of publicity—word of mouth.

### **Creating the Image**

In order to win the "friends you deserve"

- Pick your targets – those you want to influence.
- After targets are selected, determine appropriate media to reach them.
- Don't communicate too much at one time; use a simple message.
- Communicate your message over and over; saying something once is not enough. State the message differently to reach different audiences.
- Use every means available to relay your message.
- Emphasize the service you are providing to your members and to the community; boost your future plans too.

### **Keeping Members Informed About League Activities**

Good public relations begins with the membership. Understanding why members join the league and what they expect will assist in formulating this step. There are basic human needs met by people belonging to any organization. These should be emphasized in the publicity to recruit new members and to inform them and the public about league activities:

- The need to belong
- The need to give oneself to a worthwhile cause
- The need to communicate
- The need to identify with a group concerned with people's welfare
- The need to help solve the specific problems
- The need for an outlet
- The need to grow, to mature, to learn, to improve
- The need for hearty fellowships
- The need to know your colleagues
- The need to exert leadership in a voluntary effort.

Members must have an opportunity to communicate—with each other and with the leaders. Under this category would come such public relations tasks as league newsletter, annual reports, program flyers, etc. For a major undertaking, bulletins on a weekly basis might be considered. This would keep membership informed, help get them involved in local activities, and give them something to tell their friends.

### **Working With Other Organizations**

The PR committee should become familiar with other organizations, and establish liaisons for interpreting league programs and coordinating mutual undertakings. Offering speakers and nursing and health care topics is an excellent way to achieve the goal of cooperation. Participation in nursing organization coalitions and health fairs are other methods.

### **Working With The Media**

Members of the committee should be assigned to establish and maintain contact with the media in order to:

- Let the media know the league's long range plans
- Keep them up-to-date on present activities
- Interest the media in featuring league people in human interest stories

- Ensure that when the media needs information, the league is contacted.

### **Issuing News Releases**

When the league has an important meeting coming up, a release should be prepared. The release calls the attention of the media to the fact that a meeting is scheduled, its content, site and participants. Don't forget to say WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and WHY. Many of the news releases and position statements your league receives from NLN can also be localized-tied into activities within your state. For instance, promoting Nursing's Agenda for Health Care Reform can serve as a background for a release on problems in your area, or the announcement of a league educational program discussing the topic.

Reporters prefer to deal with only one person who can give additional information desired. The public relations representative's name should be on the release as contact, with the telephone number. The media representative also should make a phone call to remind the media contact of the meetings and give additional information, such as suggested story ideas, background information on the speaker, pointing out the importance of the meeting in terms of health care in the state, etc.

### **Feature Stories**

News does not have to wait for meetings or other events. Some ideas on which feature stories might be based are:

- What the league does on a yearly basis—what type of educational programs it sponsors; how it reaches the citizens and how the league works for better health and nursing care throughout the state.
- How many health professionals the league has reached through workshops and meetings and how their work may be strengthened by league programs.
- Why it is important for nurses and other interested in patient care to take part in league activities; in other words, what does the league offer that is unique.

### **Developing Exhibits**

Materials to promote the league should be part of every PR program. A talent for preparing visual materials is needed. Many tools are available from NLN to use in exhibits – posters, publications, sample catalogs, CEU flyers, etc. Assistance can be requested from the NLN Membership team.

### **Producing a Good Newsletter**

Give one person, and only one, the responsibility of being the editor. The editor should have some writing talent and be able to recognize a good news item and can separate fact from opinion. Let the board make suggestions, but not dictate contents. Keep the editor informed by:

- Participation in board and committee meetings
- Inclusion on the mailing list for minutes, reports and correspondence
- Share coming events (a calendar in the newsletter can be very valuable).

Work out an attractive standard format and design for publication. Use your customized NLN league logo. Your budget will determine style of printing, type of paper, whether photos are used, etc. Small printing firms are available which specialize in providing low-cost service. Have your editor get bids before making a decision. Don't overlook the possibility of getting free assistance in printing; a corporation, an association, a business, a health care institution may be willing to run it for you.

Establish a folder for suggested items and insist that they be submitted in writing. Nothing discourages an editor more quickly than not having material; there should be a "smorgasbord" of items to choose from.

Monitor the results. Proofread each issue. Put yourself in the reader's shoes and see if the effect is as planned. Make sure facts are straight and opinion is labeled. Watch out for preachy pronouncements and stilted language. Review the finished product with the image of the league in mind. Ask yourself, "Does this tell what we are all about?"

Review the distribution of the newsletter with the board. Make up a mailing list of their organizations which should be informed of league activities. In addition to current members, mail to prospective members, government officials, and

community and state leaders. Don't forget to mail copies to NLN national headquarters and the NLN Membership team.

### **Goals, Objectives and Assessment**

Each committee should have goals approved by the board of directors. Of course, the overall objective of the public relations committee is to build a greater acceptance and recognition of the league, resulting in strengthened image, and increased membership. Your goals will be steps to reach this objective.

They should be simple and easily measured steps to facilitate assessment. Some sample objectives for a league might be:

- Establishing a speaker's bureau
- Contacting ten new organizations each year
- Developing a league newsletter to be sent out quarterly
- Printing an attractive annual report for the members
- Placing news articles about league-sponsored workshops.

### **A Final Word on Marketing**

Those in the field of marketing are versed in the axiom: "Sell the sizzle—not the steak." Promote the advantages of having a product or service, not just the physical properties of it. For your league, promote the services and benefits of what the league can mean to its members. Doing this type of selling is different than putting a new package around an old product. Excellent vehicles for your league in this promotion are: well-chosen written materials, visual representations, and personal participation.

### **Think About**

**A fact sheet about your league.** Be proud of what your league has accomplished. List the activities that illustrate why your league is the organization to join. Include a contact's address or phone number.

**An audio-visual presentation.** Through pictures and words, viewers will see why your league offers so many advantages of improving the community health picture and benefits of joining as members.

**Selling the league through speaking before other groups.** Student groups and nursing students are natural seekers of information. Offer your services to speak before them about the league; why they should join; and what the advantages will be in their professional life.

**Promoting health care, nursing, and improved services and education-** and the role the league plays in all three – by presenting a program at other association meetings. Program chairs welcome guest speakers.

**Participation in health fairs, career days, or other planned public events which focus on health and health care.** Good public relations will help spread the name of your league throughout the community.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS CHECKLIST**

#### **Within the League**

- Does your league have a coordinated public relations program?
- Do you think community leaders are well informed about the league?
- Have league leaders identified any weaknesses that create unfavorable relationships and have they taken steps to correct them?
- Are members and staff aware of public relations responsibility and how to handle it?
- Has public relations training been given to members and staff?
- Are members kept informed on activities through a regular newsletter?
- Is the league office identified by appropriate signs?
- Is the league headquarters pleasing in appearance and atmosphere?
- Is the telephone answered courteously and helpfully?
- Is mail answered promptly and thoughtfully?
- Is everyone thanked appropriately? Are special services acknowledged and appreciated? Is recognition given to all who deserve it?

#### **Group Cooperation**

- Does the league contribute to community leadership in its field?
- Does the league carry its share of responsibility in the community?
- Are league members fully informed on other community organizations?
- Does the league keep other organizations informed on league activities?
- Does the league cooperate with other groups rendering service?
- Does the league give credit to other groups in cooperative endeavors?
- Does the league look for new avenues of service?

**Communications Outside** (Newspapers, Radio, Television)

- Does your public relations committee keep up contacts with the media and handle requests for information promptly?
- Are these outlets regularly sent information about the league's work and material supplied by the national organization?
- Are the league events covered by news releases?
- Are suggestions made for special feature stories, interviews, etc.?

**Speaking Program**

- Does your league have an organized speaking program?
- Are your speakers effective?
- Are speakers kept informed on current league activities?
- Do you recruit new speakers from time to time?
- Do you have a list of all potential audiences?
- Do you actively promote the use of speaker with community groups?

**Exhibit and Displays**

- Does your league have an exhibit and display program?
- Are exhibits planned well in advance?
- Are exhibits placed in strategic locations?
- Are appropriate signs posted at league activities?
- Are members identified at meetings and workshops?