

New Voices for Youth Program Overview and Objectives

New Voices for Youth is an outreach project of the Leagues of Women Voters of South San Mateo County and Palo Alto. It began as an idea in May 2004 formulated by a group of students, League members and Media Center employees. Today, the New Voices for Youth program has trained some sixty students in the art of media productions. With this training, these students have gone on to form teams and are now producing 30-minute television shows and 30-second and 60-second PSAs to flesh out the facts and stories behind the issues of importance to them.

Why youth? For the most part, young people are not aware of who makes what decisions and who/what can influence those decisions, whether it be political action groups, special interest groups, locally elected officials, state officials, nationally appointed leaders and/or an elected official's key staff person. Without that knowledge, many question, "Why bother to register or vote, let alone get involved in the political process?" It is our opinion that when youth see there is something tangible they can do to make a difference, they are more likely to get politically involved. And, if youth are involved, it is generally not long before they involve their parents, relatives and friends. How do we know? Take the historical example of the student movements with regards to the civil rights of African American citizens in the 1960s. It took the students taking a stand with the Freedom Rides, Sit-ins and Voter Registration drives to "free" their parents and other adults in their communities and across the nation to do the same. Because of their courageous efforts, America finally righted a wrong by passing the Voter Registration Act and ratifying the 24th Amendment to the Constitution.

Thus far, New Voices for Youth students have tackled issues such as Immigration, Gay & Lesbian Families, Underage Drinking, Prop 73 and Prop 85 (parental notification ballot initiatives), the Disparity in Middle School Public School Financing and the impact that has on a student's readiness for High School, and Gangs in the Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Redwood City areas. One team is currently working on a program to encourage public support for immediate actions to curb the genocide in Darfur; a program that should air in early January 2007.

New Voices for Youth television shows reach some 250,000 households through public access channels on Peninsula Television in Redwood City and the Media Center of Palo Alto. Their programs are also available worldwide through streaming on the Media Center's website, www.communitymediacenter.net.

Section 1. OBJECTIVES: To recruit and retain high school and college students interested in using media and visual technologies to achieve the following:

1. encourage students to register to vote;
2. inspire students to vote once registered;
3. educate students not only on the basics of an issue but on how to affect change;
4. help students have their voices heard; and
5. help students reach the broader community, especially those typically underserved.

Section 2. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: The New Voices for Youth (NVFY) program is a partnership between League of Women Voters' members and community youth,

primarily those in high school or college, who have joined the New Voices for Youth program. Any student who has completed a NVFY application and a 16-hour video production training program at the Media Center (paid for by NVFY) or a video production class may participate.

Generally, students are trained in teams of 8 – 10 students, generally from the same school campus. Teams are encouraged to secure the support of a teacher or administrator who will allow them to meet with the NVFY Project Coordinator in their classroom on a weekly basis (generally during the lunch hour). Teachers/administrators will also be trained at the Media Center if they so desire. Generally, sponsoring teachers/administrators are asked to provide their media/academic/computer expertise to student teams as requested and/or available but are not asked to provide administrative/logistical support in any manner – that is the job of the NVFY Project Coordinator.

Trained youth agree to volunteer a minimum of four hours/month to produce NVFY programs as described in Section 3. [Note: weekly meetings count towards the minimum four hour/month commitment.]

Members of the co-sponsoring Leagues of Women Voters will provide their expertise through the NVFY Advisory Committee or as program advisors, and the NVFY Project Coordinator will coordinate the logistics of the program to minimize those impacts on students and school staff/administrators.

Section 3. GOALS

Via this partnership of youth, teachers/administrators, League members and Project Coordinator, youth are encouraged to:

1. Develop and produce 30 minute, 15 minute and/or 10 minute programs that give the highlights of an issue and identify the key agencies, groups and/or political office(s) most directly involved with policy decisions. [Note: Program Coordinator will provide initial research, input on key contacts and assist with brainstorming and script writing as requested/necessary.] Teams are encouraged to produce at least one PSA or show every 4 – 6 weeks.
2. Develop and produce 30 second and 60 second Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that promote voter registration, voting and/or other public service information.
4. Register high school seniors to vote before they leave high school and to register other non-registered citizens to vote.
5. Help with the distribution of their productions to high school teachers (i.e., government, economics, history), Boys and Girls Clubs, student organizations, community groups, etc.

Section 4. LOGISTICS

Youth may shoot their programs on their high schools/college campus using their schools' equipment or they may shoot their programs at the Media Center in Palo Alto. Students may also produce programming using other video / media image technologies (i.e., PowerPoint) provided they convert it to DVD programming. It is hoped that by working on local campuses, NVFY students can generate further interest in the program by calling on drama students, debate students, music students, art students, history and government students and the student body-at-large to help with productions (i.e., as talent, prop designers, writers, music developers and idea generators). Because this is a volunteer program, the Leagues of Women Voters provide a Program Coordinator to assist students with their pre- and post-production needs.