

# “Leaning In to League Power” Award Application Form

Response ID:3 Data

**1. Award winner in this category will be selected for their effective use of promoting the League's mission and work through activism and education.**

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**1. Your Name**

Vallerie Steenson

**2. Your Email**

vgsteenson@gmail.com

**3. Your League Name**

San Luis Obispo County

**4. What was the name of your project?**

Redistricting: Ensuring Fair Representation in SLO County

**5. What were the beginning and end dates of your project?**

From April 2021, with the first redistricting hearing held by the Board of Supervisors, until May 2023, when, as a result of a settlement reached in the lawsuit challenging the adopted map, the Board of Supervisors is required to adopt a fair map to replace the previously adopted map.

**6. What was the visibility goal you wanted to achieve and did you meet it?**

Our initial goal was to educate our members and the general public on the importance of the redistricting process. We emphasized that the Board of Supervisor district lines being drawn now would be in place for ten years, and that they needed to be drawn in a way that would ensure fair representation for everyone in the county. We were guided by the national and state Leagues' positions on redistricting, and by an analysis of the proposed SLO County supervisorial maps provided by our Voter Service Chair Julie Rodewald. We urged our members and others to follow the process and showed them how they might get involved. Once a map that violated the Fair Maps Act was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in December 2021, our goal was to educate and inform our members and the community at large on the failings of the adopted map and to fight for its repeal. We did that by joining the lawsuit filed by a local community group organized for the purpose of repealing the map, the SLO County Citizens for Good Government. We joined the lawsuit as an Intervenor, which allowed us to be an active participant. The lawsuit eventually resulted in a settlement that set aside the illegal map and requires the adoption of a map that complies with the Fair Maps Act and the California Constitution. By mobilizing our members and influencing public opinion, advocating relentlessly for repeal of the illegal map, and collaborating with community groups to multiply our impact, we achieved our goal to ensure fair representation in SLO County. In addition, we raised the profile of the League in our county and increased our membership significantly. Membership went from 161 in February 2021 to 261 in February 2022. In September 2022 we reached 409 members – an all-time high for our League.

**7. Who were you trying to reach, and what specific media platforms did you use to extend your message to each of the targeted outreach communities?**

We were trying to reach decision makers such as members of the Board of Supervisors, influencers such as local Chambers of Commerce and other civic organizations, our members, the media, and the general public. We presented public comment at all of the redistricting hearings beginning in October 2021, and ending in January 2022. We issued a "Call to Action" to our members to submit public comment at the hearings. We published letters to the editor and opinion pieces and gave interviews to local media explaining why we opposed the adopted map. We provided webinars for our members and our wider audience on the redistricting process and the implications of the unfair map that was adopted in 2021. We provided nearly monthly updates on redistricting in our Voter newsletter and on our website. Approximately 1,000 local people and organizations receive our newsletter. We collaborated with SLO County Citizens for Good Government in the lawsuit to overturn the illegal map and in

presenting the case for repeal to the general public.

## 8. Briefly describe the results of your work.

Our efforts to ensure fair redistricting in SLO County contributed to the repeal of an unfair map that violated the Fair Maps Act. We were deeply engaged throughout the County's redistricting process in 2021. We maintained that the Board's adoption of the flawed map in December 2021, violated the California Fair Maps Act by dividing long-standing communities of interest (COIs), disenfranchising large numbers of voters through voting deferrals (and accelerating many others to partisan effect), and failing to even consider evidence of partisanship in the redrawing of districts.

When in January 2022, the SLO County Citizens for Good Government and several individuals ("Petitioners") filed a lawsuit against the County alleging that the adopted map was in violation of the Fair Maps Act, we looked for ways to join the lawsuit. After a lengthy search for legal counsel, we secured the pro bono services of premier law firm Manatt, Phelps and Phillips, LLP and filed a motion to intervene in the lawsuit. The League's reputation as a leader in efforts to ensure fair representation enabled us to secure these services, as well as the pro bono services of our local legal counsel David Juhnke. In June 2022, the Court granted our motion to intervene, making the League a party to the lawsuit with Petitioners. In the months that followed, we worked in coordination with Petitioners to overturn the adopted map due to violations of the Fair Maps Act and the California Constitution. The League's 103-year history of supporting fair representation and voting rights strengthened the case and working with the national League's Chief Counsel and legal staff we brought forward arguments from redistricting cases litigated elsewhere in the nation that strengthened the case. In March 2023, all parties involved in the redistricting lawsuit, including the League, agreed to a settlement that sets aside Map 74786 (the previously adopted map) and requires the Board of Supervisors to adopt a map that complies with the requirements of the Fair Maps Act and the California Constitution by no later than May 15, 2023.

## 9. Do you believe that this project has potential to be a model for use by other Leagues? If yes, tell us the critical elements for success.

Yes. We believe other Leagues facing unfair redistricting can learn from what we did. Critical to our success were:

- Our efforts to educate the public on the Fair Maps Act and the importance of redistricting from the very beginning of the process in our county. We worked to make sure the general public was aware of the vital importance of a fair redistricting map to effective, representative government.
- Our success in mobilizing our membership to get involved. We not only mobilized our existing membership, but we also increased our membership by 250% (from 161 to 409) due to our visibility in the fight to ensure a fair map.
- Our use of every media tool we had to get the message out. We used our Voter newsletter, our website, webinars focused on redistricting, and our Facebook page to reach our members and community supporters, and we published letters to the editor and opinion pieces and gave interviews to local media to reach a wider audience.
- Our ability to rely on the support of state and national Leagues and to tap into their experience and expertise. We are especially grateful to the national League's Legal Counsel and staff and to LWVC redistricting experts Chris Carson and Helen Hutchison for their support and guidance.
- Our capacity to leverage the reputation of the League as a leader in the defense of democracy and protection of voter rights to bolster our position vis-à-vis the proposed maps and to strengthen our case in opposition to the flawed map that was adopted.
- Our success in working with other community groups, in particular the SLO County Citizens for Good Government, that shared the same goal. The League alone could not have won this battle.

## 10. If you have any photos or flyers from your project you'd like to share, please upload them here. (Limited to images and PDFs only; maximum of 5 files)

[LWTL\\_-\\_BOS\\_Needs\\_to\\_Hear\\_from\\_You\\_-\\_08Nov21.png](#)

[LWTL\\_-\\_BOS\\_Needs\\_to\\_Hear\\_from\\_You\\_-\\_08Nov21.png](#)

[LWTL\\_-\\_Redistricting\\_What\\_Now\\_-\\_02May22.png](#)

## 2. Thank You!

Confirmation Email

Apr 10, 2023 18:55:07 Success: Email Sent to: sstone@lwvc.org

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**Thank you for submitting an award nomination**

Apr 10, 2023 18:55:07 Success: Email Sent to: vgsteenson@gmail.com

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