

**The Citizens League:
The No Nonsense Advocate for the
Common Good in Minnesota**



Business Plan 2003 -- 2006

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Acknowledgments

Following the Citizens League tradition, this business plan reflects the vision and work of many people. The significant contributors are listed below.

The Citizens League Strategic Program Committee

The Citizens League Board of Directors charged this committee with charting a course for the organization's future. The committee of citizen volunteers met frequently throughout the spring and summer of 2003. Their conclusions laid the foundation for this plan and their recommendations are incorporated throughout this plan.

The Business Plan "Core Group"

Citizens League Board chair Gary Cunningham along with Executive Committee members Dee Long, Keith Halleland and Sean Kershaw met regularly from July through November 2003 to discuss the outline, content and financial assumptions behind this plan.

The Citizens League President

Sean Kershaw is the visionary behind this plan and was involved in every stage of its development.

The Citizens League Board of Directors

The Board commissioned this plan, gave guidance to the Core Group and President, and reviewed the plan's progress.

Corporate and Community Leaders

Board members Mary Pickard of the St. Paul Companies, Sharon Lim from Cargill, and Andrea Walsh from HealthPartners graciously consented to be interviewed for this plan. Former Citizen League Board chair David Durenburger and Board member Edward Driscoll also provided important feedback during the business plan's development.

I. Executive Summary

A. Introduction: Ideas. Involvement. Impact.

“Our city, county and state need a strong group devoted solely to good government, effectively organized to compete with many pressure groups already long entrenched and now aggressively functioning in behalf of self interests. Our organization will make effective and magnify the influence of its individual members – for good government.”

-- Statement by the Citizens League's Founders, 1942

Much has changed in our region since then. The Twin Cities is larger, more diverse, and more complex. However, citizens' desire for good government, good governing, and policies that serve the common good, has stood the test of time. Today there is still a critical need for a **common place to do the common good, and a critical need – and opportunity - for the Citizens League!**

The League traditionally has been that place where Minnesotans joined to contribute ideas, think, debate, and forge pragmatic public policy solutions. It is from that place that citizens' ideas and efforts transformed this region. The Citizens League has been the incubator for dramatic innovations in areas that impact our daily lives, including metropolitan governance, education, health care, transportation and tax policy. The Citizens League brought good ideas to the public policy marketplace, and contributed to the overall civic capacity of our policy community to do good work.

The Citizens League has helped to 'set the agenda' and frame many of the most critical public policy issues and agendas in the region, and we will continue to do so.

The most successful organizations chart a course for their future. Building off its storied past, this plan offers a bold strategy for the Citizens League to thrive and remain relevant in today's turbulent, increasingly partisan environment and deliver substantial **ideas, innovation and impact** that make our region one of the country's best places to live, work, and learn.

B. The Plan's Research and Development Process

This business plan is the result of a two-year strategic planning process, which included:

- 1. Doing the Common Good Better Report:** This report urged citizens and policy leaders to re-imagine and reinvigorate the key civic institutions and practices in Minnesota.
- 2. Personal Interviews:** The Citizens League conducted more than 100 small-group evaluation and strategy meetings and one-on-one interviews with community and business leaders to obtain perspectives on the League's current status and future opportunities.
- 3. Strategic Program Committee:** The Citizens League Board charged this committee with examining this research and charting a blueprint for the organization's future.

4. **Business Plan Core Group:** Board chair Gary Cunningham and executive committee members Dee Long, Keith Halleland and Sean Kershaw met regularly with Susan Hammel Joyce, CFA, and president of Cogent Consulting Inc., to develop this plan. The Board regularly reviewed the work, with specific input from Sen. David Durenberger; Ed Driscoll, vice chair of WAM!NET Inc.; Andrea Walsh, exec. vice president and chief marketing officer, HealthPartners; Mary Pickard, vice president of community affairs, The St. Paul Companies; and Sharon Lim, director of public affairs, Cargill Incorporated.

C. *The Citizens League's Niche in the Community*

The Citizens League cannot and will not be all things to all people. However, it can – and will – develop provocative, thoughtful policy analysis (***ideas***), engage a broad base of citizens in developing policy recommendations (***involvement***), and advocate for common sense solutions to these policy issues (***impact***).

In these increasingly uncertain times, people are still hungry for new ideas, new places to connect with each other, and new opportunities to make a difference. In these times, we also must rebuild and reinvent notions of citizenship, civic leadership and civic capacity. The League is poised to fill this gap in the marketplace, and has substantial strengths to help it fulfill its mission, including:

- **Policy Leadership and Integrity.** The League identifies and defines problems, and sets the policy agenda. The League frames key policy issues with authority and visibility.
- **Independent and Credible:** The League provides an inclusive, balanced and long-term view that is well-researched, and not wedded to a single issue or biased by a particular partisan ideology. The League has the freedom to recommend the best issues and solutions from across the political and ideological spectrum.
- **Creating Civic Capital and Capacity.** The League connects people from all sectors of the economy and builds civic and leadership capacity in the community. The 'return on investment', for individuals, institutions and the community as a whole is substantial!
- **Citizen-Driven.** Citizens are the League's foundation and the core of its existence and relevance. In other organizations, paid researchers conduct policy analysis. In the League, citizens develop the ideas, conduct the research, and shape public policy.
- **"Common Space to Do the Common Good!"** The Citizens League is uniquely positioned to create the community space for conversation and work on key policy issues. The League will remain focused on its core competencies while extending involvement and impact by partnering with other organizations.

Building on these strengths, the Citizens League is poised for growth, and prepared to build an effective and successful future that stays true to its mission.

- The region faces a long list of critical public policy challenges, from transportation to healthcare to higher education, that demand credible, independent, innovative, and non-partisan analysis and recommendations. The community needs the League's ideas.
- Citizens are tired of extreme partisanship, and eager to find new ways to become engaged in civic affairs. The community needs involved and educated citizens.
- The League is the only remaining independent, citizen-based, multi-issue policy organization left. Using this strength, the League will partner with other organizations to accomplish its key objectives. The community, and our members, need impact!

D. Target Market and Services

The Citizens League will focus on three target markets for membership and involvement:

1. Existing policy leaders, ensuring innovation and impact on key policy issues;
2. Emerging leaders, rebuilding civic capacity and leadership in our community; and
3. Engaged citizens, increasing the number of connected and informed citizens.

The Citizens League will gradually and thoughtfully integrate existing services with new ones to adapt to and succeed in a 21st Century marketplace. The focus will be to make the League as user-friendly, entrepreneurial and relevant as possible and ensure better ideas, increased involvement and stronger impact. Approaches over the next three years will include:

- Identifying and framing the key policy issues, problems and opportunities. The League will regularly survey policy leaders on the most relevant issues and solutions.
- Intentionally developing emerging leaders in the community, including leaders under 40 and leaders from diverse communities that have not traditionally had significant membership levels within the League.
- Testing new study committee approaches and adopting wider use of technology to increase participation and improve implementation, and focusing on discrete (more manageable aspects of overwhelming policy problems to ensure impact and results.
- Revamping the Minnesota Journal and making it more interactive.
- Creating convenient, fun engagement and educational events.
- Creating strategic partnerships with other organizations to increase participation and resources and protect against duplication.

E. Marketing the Citizens League

The Citizens League will launch an aggressive but cost-effective outreach, visibility and membership campaign, built on our core strengths, target audience and unique market niche.

- **Our “People” are the Best Advertising:** The Citizens League is first and foremost “a league of citizens”. The League will develop a cost-effective relationship-based membership and involvement strategy. New League events will mix fun with substantive discussion, and test ‘edgy’ and new formats to appeal to young people and new members.
- **Corporate Membership Campaign:** The League will redefine for corporations the benefits and ‘return on investment’ that they will gain by investing as a Citizens League member.
- **Building Partnerships:** This effort will include reaching out to existing corporate, government, grass-roots and not-for-profit leaders; and building relationships with emerging leaders through existing leadership development programs such as Civics Incorporated, Chamber of Commerce programs and the Humphrey Institute’s Policy Fellowship program.
- **Ambassadors and ‘Welcome Back’ Programs:** To give of their time, talent and treasure, people must feel welcome. The League will develop an “ambassador’s” program where current members will greet and introduce new members. Former Citizens League members, who might have let their memberships lapse, will be welcomed back to the League.

F. Management and Operations

- The League must continue to maximize the efficiency, effectiveness and involvement of its staff and Board, which are major contributors to its success and have primary responsibility for implementing this plan.
- By August 2004, the League will hire a membership director and a junior program associate. The League also will leverage staff work through a new internship program.
- Focus focus focus. This business plan is premised on a belief that implementation must be extremely focused. It recommends a follow-up ‘implementation strategy’ that ensures that competing demands – and opportunities – don’t cause the League to stray from its core mission, or lose its effectiveness and relevance by trying to do too much at one time.

G. Citizens League Funding: Sustainable and rational!

- **Recent success:** In recent months, as word of the Citizens League’s revitalization has spread, membership and revenue have increased. The recent funding

campaign in 2003 exceeded its goal, and key stakeholders are engaged in the process.

- **Growth in outcomes and impact -- not budget:** The financial projections for the next three years focus on achieving accountable results, expanding the League's base of members from 1400 to at least 2000, and producing more ideas and impact – *all for a budget that remains substantially less than its peak in the last five years.* The point is to build an organization that achieves 'exponential' growth in outcomes, with only 'incremental' increases in inputs.
- **Sustainable revenue and expense targets:** The League will adhere to a prudent financial plan to move toward long-term sustainability over three years. This will be accomplished by:
 - Covering a substantial portion of the League's budget through earned income activities.
 - Creating opportunities for private-sector funded special projects and programs.
 - Holding the line on expenses by functioning with a lean staff and making maximum use of skilled interns and volunteers, obtaining less expensive office space; and outsourcing projects that require high-level skills for short periods of times.

H. Measuring Success

This business plan establishes measurable goals and benchmarks that will allow the League to chart its progress and success. These benchmarks (built on the fundamental categories of ideas, involvement and impact) may include the following:

- Citations and mentions in local media;
- Number and length of study committees;
- Earned income from study committees and related projects;
- Number of members, and increases in membership (by category);
- Average contribution of members (by category);
- Number of sponsored events;
- Number of strategic partnerships (both short and long-term) initiated.

The plan also proposes a new budget that makes it easier to categorize funding by type of support (operating, special projects, etc.) as well as proposing a regular yearly increase in earned income.

I. Our Future Begins Now!

Together, we will ensure the Citizens League's long-term success and a common place for the common good. We will deliver thoughtful, innovative policy ideas. We will do it by building on the League's legacy, adapting to today's marketplace realities and providing opportunities for citizens to join together, contribute ideas, think, debate, and forge pragmatic, effective solutions. The League will generate substantial value by having a direct impact on the people and policies that shape our region.

Ideas. Involvement. Impact. Welcome to the Citizens League! The future begins now