

Dear Members of the YWCA Women of the Year Nomination Review Committee,

I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to recommend Whitney Oxendahl for consideration in the category of Community & Volunteer Service. Whitney and I were first acquainted almost 4 years ago when she reached out via email with the subject line "I heard you are good at things." In that email, she shared her newfound passion for the League of Women Voters and its mission and, having been given my name by a mutual friend, asked if I would consider helping her work on projects that would enhance voter education in our region and connect citizens to their local governments. Her enthusiasm was infectious; I was hooked on her vision for engaged citizenship from our very first phone call. My League story is not unique—Whitney is a naturally gifted connector and has been a catalyst for building grassroots power for our local and state chapters.

However, Whitney is more than just a visionary thinker and dynamic leader. She's also a capable strategist. She builds new systems and resources to fill unmet community needs—e.g., connecting families to municipal government by creating family-friendly city hall tours; utilizing the national VOTE411 interface to create the first nonpartisan statewide voter guide, empowering voters in their decision-making at the polls; and producing an ND "how to run for office" video resource, along with info packets and trainings, to increase accessibility to candidacy. She connects volunteers to projects that align with their interests and talents, providing thoughtful guidance and training along the way, e.g., leading a team of legislative advocacy volunteers who had a passion for championing voters' rights at the ND Capitol during the 2023 session. She develops procedural documents that enable others to replicate successful events and initiatives. It is a rare person that can combine big ideas with boots-on-the-ground execution, but that is precisely what Whitney regularly accomplishes in her dedication to the League's mission.

This powerful combination of leadership strengths has had meaningful impacts for our metro, region, and beyond. Locally, our chapter membership has almost doubled over the course of her involvement, with palpable new energy at our events. Due to her initiative, over 20,000 North Dakotans utilized VOTE411 in 2022, an incredible achievement for voter empowerment and election information access. Candidates from all parties now have a greater platform than ever to reach their potential constituents. With her focus on greater-ND chapter development, LWV Plum Valley has been officially organized and other cities have expressed interest. Her enthusiasm for collaboration has also fostered stronger links between state League chapters and inspired community coalition-building with regional non-profits (e.g., ND Native Vote, AARP, the ND Library Association). She tirelessly seeks opportunities for idea and resource sharing and partnered events. These collaborations embody the philosophy of "a rising tide lifts all boats."

In addition to all of her achievements, Whitney is a joy to know. She encourages and affirms her friends and colleagues, has a sharp sense of humor, is an attentive listener, and is always ready with an invitation to connect in person and dream. It's been my pleasure to write this letter to celebrate her; I wholeheartedly recommend Whitney Oxendahl for this recognition.

Cady Rutter  
Secretary, Board of Directors, LWV Red River Valley