

How to Create a Civic League with a Monthly Newsletter on Town Government\

By the Board of the Rye NH Civic League (RCL) www.ryecivicleague.org

4 pages

“Civic League,” as defined by the RCL, means a non-profit membership organization that monitors and reports on all aspects of town government and publishes them in a free monthly E-newsletter. The league also sponsors other events through the year as outlined below.

1. Identify a core of civically-active people in your town who:

- attend and speak at town board meetings
- speak at Deliberative sessions
- write letters to boards to get on the agenda to discuss issues, etc.
- are knowledgeable about town political history and reference past town reports

Ideally one or two of these people are native or long-time residents to give perspective on the political history of the town.

2. Invite them to an initial meeting to explore feasibility of starting a league.

The invitation must include two documents: a. this one and b. the article Alex Herlihy wrote for the National Civic League (Spring 2022 – National Civic Review) and reprinted in the NH Municipal Assn. July 2022 magazine that gives the larger perspective and context of the Rye Civic League history and current work.

3. First meeting goals

a. The most important item to discuss in the beginning is: Does the town exploring the idea of starting a league think they can find enough people to sustain a very modest beginning? Someone needs to volunteer to be the note taker for this meeting.

For example, when Alex Herlihy revived the RCL in 2009, he started a list of about 40 people he knew who were willing to be on his distribution list sent from his e-mail account. Alex used town govt info. On line and attendance at meetings to write the newsletter himself. Within six months enough people with needed skills were receiving the newsletter and attending monthly meetings. Within a year, those people transformed a “quaint” newsletter into a highly detailed and comprehensive monthly look at Rye town government, distributed by Constant Contact. In 2012 RCL 501 c 3 non-profit status.

b. The new group will do best by just focusing on a modest first monthly newsletter. Do they think they have enough capacity to create a first edition that has a few goals, such as highlighting actions of town boards in previous month and listing meeting dates and agendas coming up the next month? (Do NOT try to replicate the very detailed RCL "Civic News." That can be an aspiration as the league grows.)

c. If the conversation at this point is still hopeful, discuss goals and tasks of organizing an ad hoc group (precursor to a league and non-profit status). Who will volunteer to cover which town board by:

- attending meeting
 - viewing video of meeting and/or
 - viewing official minutes of meeting
- and then submit monthly highlights which include, questions raised by the public at the meeting, board actions and meeting times and agendas of the next month.

d. What two people will volunteer to be the co-editors/publishers of the first edition of the newsletter? The co-editors/publishers create the draft to be vetted by all in the ad hoc group before distribution. A person with some graphic skills will be needed to give the newsletter an appealing format.

e. In order to be non-partisan, it is essential that all members of the ad hoc group become diligent reviewers before the newsletter is distributed

f. Early on, the ad hoc group needs to inform the chairs of the main town boards of the group's intent so the first newsletter is not a surprise to anyone

4. Second meeting –

In attendance will be people who want to start a civic league with their first task of publishing a monthly newsletter on town government.

An RCL board member can be available via phone or zoom to help with that task.

This meeting will need to be in the evening or on the weekend.

a. Status of dist. list for first newsletter. Each member of ad hoc group needs to pitch the newsletter idea to friends through e-mail. First agree on wording so it is the same pitch. How to grow the dist. List beyond who you know so the first edition goes to more than just a few people.

Use all forms of social media to reach out and grow the newsletter distribution list.

b. Are there enough people to cover the main town boards? (Sel Bd., Pl Bd, ZBA, Conserv. Com., Sch Bd. Any boards you can cover beyond these top five is important such as Rec. Heritage, etc.

c. Needed before distribution: title of newsletter, mission statement at top of each newsletter, each newsletter should indicate at the top a link to town web site where minutes and agendas may be found because many do not access this important info.

d. Educating readers about how to navigate the town web site is an important service you can provide in first edition – an explanation of how this first newsletter came to be.

e. request for more volunteers to help the group grow into a civic league

f. publicity – inform all town boards of intent before first distribution, publicity in local media, social media to grow dist. list.

g. memb.org. aspiration – tell readers in first edition that is your goal when you become a formal league, there will be modest overhead which can be supported by annual memb. dues (RCL memb. Is \$12 a year, but many give more).

5. Additional information

a. Annual overhead costs in context of a memb. org. – the RCL info:

PO box - \$134

Constant contact dist. service- upwards of \$500 or piggy back with another org that is using and share costs?

Website, domain, security costs depend on how much capacity you need

NH Atty Gen annual fee for non- profit - \$75

NH Sec of State every five yrs. fee - \$25

Printing costs -?

Other?

Who will donate to support this overhead? The first group of civic league members?

b. Formal league skills – Board members

President – set agenda for monthly meeting and run it; run annual meeting, leadership

Vice President – support president with agenda for league board meetings and retreats

Secretary – take and distrib. accurate notes of each meeting and keep and store them

Treasurer – pay bills, keep membership info., report balance etc. to bd revery month

Membership—promote memb. growth, send renewal reminders, keep accurate records

Two editor/publishers - who organize other news gatherers

Publicity – conventional media, social media – promote the work of the league

c. Volunteers – important to have people beyond the board who help with specific tasks; need to promote this need in the newsletter. i.e. news gatherers, help with special events, etc.

d. 501 c 3 status - When there is a healthy distribution list and good response to the newsletter and some members, the ad hoc group needs to apply for IRS non-profit status, thus taking it from an informal group to a formal non-profit organization which will raise its standing among all concerned.

e. Potential additional events for the league to sponsor through the year:

- In a public program, provide Power point budget and warrant articles analysis.
- Deliberative Session- promote attendance through a variety of incentives
- Annual Candidate's Night for all those running for town offices
- Even numbered years, in fall sponsor state wide Candidate's Night
- Create a free "Citizens Handbook," updated annually; get local business sponsors
- sponsor public forums with speakers on relevant, pressing issues; i.e., water pollution, over development, etc.

f. For the latest Rye Civic League "Civic News" monthly newsletter and the annual RCL Citizens Handbook, go to: ryecivicleague.org
