

WINTER CONFERENCE 2026 NOTES

Mental Health

[Lock & Talk](#) is a suicide prevention initiative in the state of Virginia that strives to encourage community conversation around mental wellness and promote safe care of lethal means, including firearms and medications.

[Mental Health First Aid](#) teaches people how to help others who may be struggling by learning how to recognize, understand, and respond to signs of mental health or substance use challenges — and offer the first level of support.



988 is a suicide crisis hotline. It is paid for through cell phone taxes.

[Young Adults RISE](#) is a free Shenandoah Valley program supporting individuals in their 20s and 30s with career, financial, social, and wellness challenges. It offers weekly peer discussions, speakers, and social events designed to build life skills, purpose, and community. The program operates in Mount Jackson, Strasburg, and Harrisonburg. There is a curriculum that can be used by trained facilitators in other geographic areas.

Disaster Relief

Key Takeaways:

- Never self-deploy! Work with a trusted partner.
 - Lions International is not a first responder organization.
 - In communities, emergency management can be organized by different entities. Some communities have Offices of Emergency Management. In others, it is organized under the fire or police departments.
 - Clubs that are interested in response should partner with local response organizations.
- The most valuable thing Lions can do is assist their communities in preparedness.
 - Lead workshops and show people how to build Disaster Preparedness Kits.
 - Church World Services has a great kit that can be purchased for \$60. Contact Madison Reese at mreese@cwsglobal.org or 540-830-6908.
- There are several ways individuals can be trained as responders:
 - [CERT](#) (Community Emergency Response Team) is a FEMA program that trains volunteers in basic disaster preparedness and response skills. In some communities, CERT Teams are also authorized to deploy.
 - Read about the [FEMA National Incident Management System](#).
 - [American Red Cross](#) offers training in a multitude of response areas.
 - [God's Pit Crew](#) is a faith-based disaster response team.

- [VOAD](#) (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) is a national organization comprised of a diverse group of organizations dedicated to serving communities throughout the disaster cycle.
- Disaster preparedness and response grants are available from LCIF and LOVF.
- Financial support is always encouraged.

Membership Ideas in Response to Table Discussion Questions

Did you know that 50% of new Lions drop out within their first three years of membership?

Recruitment

- Community Visibility & Branding
 - What prevents our clubs from being more visible in the community?
 - Lack of communication.
 - Lack of publicity.
 - Lack of service.
 - What outreach methods attract younger families, working professionals, and diverse communities?
 - Flexibility.
 - Diverse fundraising and service projects at different times.
 - Maximizing use of social media.
 - Word of mouth.
 - Encouragement.
 - Personal invitations.
 - Participation in service projects prior to membership.
 - How can we modernize club presence (events, social media, branding)?
 - Group activities (in addition to meetings).
 - Better use of technology.
 - Less formality at meetings.
- Targeted Outreach & Partnerships
 - Which community partners are underutilized?
 - Those whose missions match our focus areas.
 - How can clubs build year-round partnerships that generate members?
 - Select Lions to be representatives to other organizations.
 - What specialty or brand clubs could meet unmet needs?
 - Those that focus on service.
- Modernizing the Membership Experience
 - How do meetings and culture affect new-member appeal?
 - Procedures should be simplified and explained.
 - Meetings should have fun elements.
 - Have an agenda and stick to it.
 - Ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak, in an orderly manner.
 - What alternative models could help?
 - Lions more involved in other community initiatives.
 - Stress importance of service participation.
 - How can technology reduce barriers?
 - Introduce participants on Zoom calls.
 - Use for announcements of meetings and events and for follow up after meetings.

- Storytelling & Public Relations
 - How can Lions better communicate local impact?
 - Tell how we impact our community and how our service has impacted us.
 - Better use of social media.
 - Local technology bulletin boards. (Nextdoor, etc.)
 - Practice elevator speeches.
 - Invite local community leaders to meetings and events.
 - Volunteer at schools.
 - Local radio interviews.
 - Printed flyers.
 - Bumper and other stickers. ("I have been screened by Lions!")
 - Lion placemats.
 - What stories should we tell and to whom?
 - All of them ... to everybody!
 - Testimonials from those we serve.
 - Accomplishments.
 - How can members use personal networks?
 - Add information about Lions to your email signature.
 - Share on social media and "Like" Lions posts.

Retention

- Club Culture & Member Experience
 - Why do members stop attending?
 - Some members only want to participate in service projects.
 - Money.
 - Younger people are too busy.
 - Some people do not have transportation.
 - Some service projects are too physically demanding.
 - Sponsors do not follow up.
 - Lack of communications about activities.
 - What makes a club welcoming?
 - Greeters at meetings.
 - Initiate a program (Proud Lion Program) for first-year members where they are awarded for completing specific actions (i.e. attend a Board Meeting, participate in a service project, etc.)
 - Make sure guests and visitors have someone to welcome them.
 - Consider subsidizing members who cannot afford dues and meal costs.
 - Organize special events that focus on specific interests.
 - Use sign language.
 - Start a new-member mentoring program.
 - How do we prevent cliques?
 - Mix up who sits at each table.
- Engagement & Service
 - What projects keep members enthusiastic?
 - Diversity of service activities.
 - Activities in focus areas.

- How can we match skills to service?
 - When people become Lions ask about their interests.
 - Annual member survey.
- How do we retain both new and longtime members?
 - Expand sponsor role.
 - Ask why joined club, desired benefit from membership, and what are interests.
- Leadership & Operations
 - What training is missing?
 - Ongoing training.
 - Communication to new leaders about procedures, what worked and did not work about how jobs have been done in the past, and community contacts.
 - Beware of burn-out. Divide large roles among several members.
 - How do we identify future leaders?
 - Look for enthusiastic Lions who are dependable, take charge, and offer solutions.
 - Give some members more responsibilities.
 - Encourage non-Board member attendance at Board Meetings.
 - What governance practices frustrate members?
 - Too many meetings.
 - Doing things as they have always been done as opposed to being open to new ideas.
- Caring & Support
 - How should clubs check in when engagement drops?
 - Phone contact is best. Determine who should call.
 - Provide transportation for those who need it.
 - Sponsors should follow up with those they recruit.
 - Create sponsor guidelines.
 - Allocate funds to support members during hardships.
 - What shows appreciation?
 - Certificates for achievements.
 - Thank you notes.
 - Recognition at meetings.
 - How do we make members feel valued?
 - Include them in photos.
 - Ask them to do specific jobs (recognizes their skills).
 - Have speakers tell members how the club has impacted their organizations.
 - Publicize club activities.
 - Melvin Jones recognition.
- Dues & Cost
 - Why do members drop at dues time?
 - A bill is a reminder.
 - What flexible options exist?
 - Bill more often so balances are less.
 - Optional meals.
 - Club can subsidize part of dues.
 - Change timing of dues payments.
 - Flexible membership options.
 - Reduced dues for longstanding members.
 - How can technology streamline collections?
 - Ability to pay online.