

# Fill the Local News Gap with a Civic League Newsletter on Town Government

NEWSLETTER

*By the Board of the Rye NH Civic League*

[www.ryecivicleague.org](http://www.ryecivicleague.org)

During the late 1900s, interest in local civic affairs began to decline as interest in national partisan ideologies rose. This shift adversely affected local civic engagement, as individuals had previously been actively engaged in their community's political processes through avenues like newspapers, public meetings, and elections. This heightened participation allowed people to play a more significant role in shaping decisions that directly impacted local residents. However, a marked decline in newspapers, including the demise of approximately 2,000 weeklies in recent years, has resulted in [a severe loss of local news](#) and the close-knit community connections it fostered.

In 1968 the non-profit Rye NH Civic League (RCL) was established by three politically active women who realized residents were not aware of the workings of town government and how they could influence it. The RCL wrote and published a free, monthly "Town News" on town board meetings which had a positive impact on civic engagement by more people serving on town boards and attending meetings.

Today the RCL publishes a monthly E-Newsletter that delivers key points in a digestible format. Over 1000 readers open the "Civic News," leading to greater awareness and participation in civic life. The RCL provides other civic minded services including forums on key issues, budget analysis and the annual citizens handbook. Between 2009 and 2012 the Civic News has helped increase the voting rate in town elections from 20% to 33%, but this rate is still far behind that for national elections, which often reaches 80%.

To create a civic league in your town, call a meeting of other civically active individuals; consider hosting the meeting in an accessible location, such as the library. The RCL has created a [detailed document](#) of how to set up a civic league and publish a monthly newsletter that reports on town government. Send this document in advance to attendees of your first organizational meeting where you can discuss the RCL model, how it can be applied to your community, and what unique tasks and obstacles you face in getting started. RCL board members will be happy to engage with any questions.

The Rye Civic League and our newsletter maintain a non-partisan stance. For an in-depth look at our content and format, we encourage you to visit the [RCL website](#). Our focus in reporting does not encompass news, feature articles, or blogs, but the potential for their inclusion exists. RCL meticulously reviews all distributed newsletters, but even with the current RCL format, which prioritizes concise reporting of public meetings, room for error always remains. In the event that someone voices dissatisfaction with accuracy, it's worth noting that perfection eludes even established media outlets, elected or appointed officials, and town employees. What's imperative to emphasize is that the Rye Civic League and our newsletter represent a transparent, volunteer-driven, good-faith endeavor aimed at addressing the local news gap.