

APPLICATION WORKSHOPS

Introduction

Each year, the Soroptimist Live Your Dream Awards helps over 1,700 women live their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. However, there are countless more women who miss the opportunity to receive an award because they feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the application process. They don't believe they are capable of completing the application, let alone receiving an award.

Conducting a Soroptimist Live Your Dream Awards application workshop is an excellent way for your club to identify eligible women in your community and provide them with the support they need to complete the application. As a result, not only will your club help increase the confidence and self-esteem of the women applying, you will end up with more award applications from eligible applicants. Conducting an award application workshop will serve as an especially helpful tool for clubs struggling to find eligible women to apply for the award.

If your club is in the vicinity of other Soroptimist clubs, consider creating a multi-club collective to co-host a workshop. This provides more members to help plan and implement the workshop, and allows for pooling and sharing of applications to ensure that all clubs in your area receive eligible applications. If you co-host a workshop, divide the applications among all clubs so that each club has different applications to judge.

Also, when distributing applications to women who will not be attending the workshop, make sure to let them know you are available to assist with the application process should they have any questions. This will help ensure that all applicants have equal access to assistance.

Guidelines for Conducting an Application Workshop

Identify and Meet with Partner Organization(s)

The first step in conducting an application workshop is to identify your partner organization(s). Partnering with a local college, university, vocational/skills training program and/or women's organization—such as a domestic violence shelter or women's homeless shelter—is a great way to identify eligible women and potential applicants.

Once you have identified your partner organization(s), set up an informational meeting with the point person for the organization. Use the meeting to introduce Soroptimist and the Live Your Dream Awards program. The goal of the meeting is to secure an agreement between your club and the partner organization(s) to conduct a Live Your Dream Awards application workshop on-site—either on the campus of your partner school or at the site of a women's organization—and to enlist your point person(s) in helping you to advertise the workshop and identify eligible applicants.

Try to secure a room with computers. This will allow participants to use the [writeable/emailable application form](#). If this is not possible, conduct the workshop using paper applications. Also, try to include space for child-care. For some women, this will be necessary in order for them to attend the workshop.

Advertise the Workshop

When advertising the workshop, it is important to consider an ideal number of participants. You don't want to advertise it so widely that you get more applicants than you can assist. Likewise, it is important to state the award eligibility requirements clearly. Be strategic and work with your partner organization to advertise to and recruit only women known to be eligible for the award.

To help advertise the award, distribute the [Soroptimist Live Your Dream Awards Poster](#) at strategic places at your partner organization(s) and/or email it directly to potential workshop participants. When women contact the club for more information, you can pre-screen for eligibility.

Recruit Workshop Volunteers

Once you have an idea of how many women will attend the workshop, begin recruiting club members to serve as workshop volunteers. Ideally, there should be no more than three applicants per Soroptimist volunteer – the more one-on-one and personalized attention that can be given to workshop participants the more successful and rewarding the workshop will be. Also recruit members who are interested in providing child-care services during the workshop.

To ensure workshop volunteers are sufficiently knowledgeable, consider holding a training session to walk club members through the application process – explaining each section of the application and providing sufficient time for questions. Give volunteers a heads-up that when applicants work on their personal essay some women may become emotional and/or tearful.

Conduct the Workshop

Allow two hours for the workshop. This will give participants plenty of time to receive one-on-one attention and to complete their portion of the application. Make sure to bring extra applications in case a participant needs to start over. To keep energy levels up, schedule in a short break if needed. Also, provide a sign-in sheet for participants for post-workshop follow-up.

Introductions and Ice Breaker

Begin the workshop with a brief introduction to Soroptimist. The [Who We Are](#) page of the SIA website provides a concise summary of Soroptimist including the mission, vision and core values of the organization. Then allow time for both workshop volunteers and participants to introduce themselves. Use an ice breaker to help participants relax, such as asking everyone to share what they are studying and why. Next, provide a summary of the program, including a brief explanation of the various award levels. Disclose how many club awards will be given, the cash amount and when award recipients should expect to be notified.

Overview of Application

After the introductions, provide an overview of the application section-by-section and line-by-line— allowing participants to ask questions during each section. Let participants know there will be time to work on the application following the overview. Some things to note in each section:

Part I: Personal Data

- Confirm all workshop participants have dependents that rely on their financial support.

Part II: Career Goals

- Instruct applicants to clearly describe the connections between their educational pursuits and their career goals.

Part III: Personal Statement

- Encourage applicants to be as honest as possible and provide as much detail as they are comfortable sharing.
- Assure applicants that their personal statement will remain confidential—only local Soroptimist club members and award judges will have access to their application. Should they receive an award, their information will be shared only if consent is granted.

Part IV: Financial Need

- Emphasize the need to be as accurate as possible—eligible applicants must demonstrate financial need.
- Note that the figures need to reflect *annual* income and expenses—not monthly.
- Provide calculators for participants to use.

Part V: References

- Be prepared to help applicants brainstorm potential references.
- Role-play a scenario of an applicant asking someone to provide a reference.
- Provide a sample email for applicants to send to their references.

Fill Out and Collect Applications

Following the application overview, allow ample time for participants to fill out an application. The majority of the workshop should be allocated for actually working on the application. Make sure each participant receives one-on-one attention and instruction. This is arguably the most important part of the workshop and key to assuring your club receives completed applications.

At the end of the workshop, collect the completed applications. Make sure to give participants the application deadline and club contact information so they know where to submit their references or application if they were unable to complete it during the workshop. Also, be sure to let them know when the award judging will take place and when they should expect to be notified. If participants used computers to fill out the writeable form but did not finish, make sure to help them save the document so that they may work on it later.

Remember to thank participants for their attendance. As a symbol of support, consider ordering Soroptimist merchandise from the [Soroptimist Store](#) such as a LYD.org notebook for distribution to workshop participants. *Make sure participants understand that attending the workshop does not ensure they will become award recipients: not all workshop participants will become award recipients.* However, you can encourage participants to reapply the following year if they are not selected.

Post-Workshop Follow-Up

Check-in with participants as the application deadline approaches to remind them to submit their application and/or references. Once your club has selected the club-level award recipient(s), send a letter to all participants who were not selected (see these [sample letter templates](#)). Thank them again for their participation in the workshop and encourage them to reapply next year.

Conclusion

Conducting an application workshop is a proven way to identify eligible applicants and provide them with the support and encouragement they need to apply. As a result, not only will this increase the number of applications your club receives, but you will have helped to increase the self-confidence and self-esteem of workshop participants. Participants will leave the workshop having made new friends and will know that they are not alone. They will leave knowing that Soroptimists believe in them—and that, regardless of whether they receive an award, they are capable of achieving their dreams of a better life for themselves and their family.