



League Mission, Basics and Lingo

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Mission

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy. This is the organization’s mission statement.

Women—and men (since 1974)—who are at least 16 years old may join the League as voting members. Joining at any level of the organization automatically confers membership at every level, and with that membership comes the opportunity to make an impact on local, state, regional and national public policy issues.

League program

League program consists of the governmental issues selected by the League members for study and – after consensus is reached – action. It is not a series of meetings or speakers. League study and action is basic to League work.

- The president is the official spokesperson for the League, unless she or he designates another to speak.
- We operate on three levels corresponding to the three levels of government.
- We speak with one voice, coordinating action with other affected Leagues or levels of League.
- The League must have a position before it takes action.
- League members must study and come to agreement on an issue before a position is reached. Studies echo League nonpartisan philosophy by examining all sides of an issue

without prejudice; *Facts & Issues* are just that. Consensus questions that are written do not lead members to preconceived conclusions. The board approves the consensus questions before they are used and approves the position statement if agreement is reached.

- We are a grassroots organization. LWV boards at all 3 levels develop position statements and program planning reports to reflect member agreement. Good position statements are deliberately broad to allow boards to respond to current situations.
- Local studies focus on issues that can be addressed by local government.
- Local Positions are used to lobby at the local level; only in unusual circumstances and with pre-clearance by the appropriate LWV-Texas or LWVUS is a local position used to lobby at the state or national level.
- Applicable state and national positions may be used to lobby at the local level without clearance from the state or national level.
- We never lobby in opposition to a League position.

Speaking with One Voice

“Speaking with one voice” is one of the most important tenets of the League. The national League is responsible for determining strategies and action policies that ensure that the League’s message on national issues is consistent throughout the country. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for a consistent state message, and local Leagues must cooperate to ensure that regional issues are addressed in a consistent matter by neighboring Leagues.

Only the president (or designee) is permitted to speak for the League in an official capacity. However, members are encouraged to take action on League topics as individuals.

For example, when responding to an LWVUS Action Alert, a local League president would send a message on behalf of the organization (i.e. on League letterhead); members might contact the same official as individuals (i.e., not mentioning their affiliation with League).

Working Together to Influence Public Policy

The process used in formulating positions and in taking action at the grassroots level makes the League unique and sets the League apart from other organizations. The fact that we are members not only of a local League, but of a state League and of the League of Women Voters of the United States as well makes us a powerful force.

League Principals

The Principles are concepts of government to which all Leagues subscribe. They are the beliefs shared by League members everywhere. Principles are the basis upon which national, state, and local program is adopted. The Principles themselves may be used to take action at any level of government. However, because they are broad statements, such action is usually taken in conjunction with current League positions.

- The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.
- The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen’s right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.
- The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

- The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.
- The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy, and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.
- The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of international organizations and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

Taking Action: Guidelines for Local Leagues

A definition of League action

Action is our League effort to bring about governmental change based on the positions we derive through member study and consensus. Because we are a multi-level organization with positions at each level, we must:

- Coordinate our action efforts in order to speak with one voice
- Choose issues for priority attention at all levels in order to allocate resources effectively and maximize political impact.

These action guidelines apply to all Leagues

- Leagues only act when we have a local, state, or national position or are acting under League principles.
- Leagues never lobby in opposition to a League position.
- Elected officials respond best to their own constituents. Therefore, lobby only your own representatives unless otherwise directed.
- Local Leagues may use any local, state, or national position to lobby at the local governmental level only without asking for authorization from state or national.

For guidance and background information read *Fundamentals for Local League Boards (LWV-TX)*, *Impact on Issues (LWVUS)*, and *Program Perspectives (LWVTX)*.

Before taking action on an issue, ask yourself

- Under what position do you wish to act--local, state, national, or principles?
- What do you wish to accomplish?
- Who is authorized to act for your League? (Check your local Policy Guide.)
- Will state or national or other local Leagues be affected by this action?
- Is authorization needed from LWV-TX, LWVUS, or other local Leagues before you act? (See chart on next page.)
- Who must receive copies of your letter, testimony, etc.? (See the *What to do* chart on next page.)

When you receive action requests

There are three kinds of action requests: Action Alerts from LWVUS, LWV-TX or your local League. Action in response to these requests is expected and does not require authorization.

- An Action Alert means your League's help is critically needed. Local Leagues are expected to respond to LWVUS and LWV-TX Action Alerts or explain to the appropriate board (national or state) why they are not responding. Action Alerts provide specific

instructions.

- LWV-TX Action Alerts are sent from the state office to all local League members by email. Action Alerts contain information on legislation or governmental action/s and suggestions for action/s to be taken. The President of the local League will answer the Alert in the name of the local League and return the Action Alert Response form to the state office. Indicate on the response form the action taken or why action was not taken.
 - All other local League members are strongly requested to take action as private citizens on LWVUS and LWV-TX Action Alerts.

When you initiate action

Action you initiate often requires contacting officials shared with other Leagues. Occasionally, you may wish to contact officials other than your own. For these reasons, authorization from other local Leagues is often necessary when you initiate action.

Examples:

- LWV- Houston wants to testify before a state legislative committee holding a hearing in Houston on land use and critical areas protection. Houston members believe this is a good opportunity to advocate the League's state land use positions. After authorization by LWV-TX, they are ready to act.
- LWV-Tarrant County wants to appear before the North Central Texas Council of Governments on a regional issue. After consulting other Leagues in the region they speak at the COG meeting. When your League wants to initiate action on its own behalf, use the following chart. If you do not find your needs addressed, call the appropriate program chair or the state office.

What to do when your League initiates action before a:	
local government or official in your League area only (Examples: city council, mayor, planning commission, school board, etc.)	A
regional agency or official which is shared with other local Leagues (Examples: common city government or special purpose district, council of governments, regional task force, etc.)	A, B, C
state government or official (Examples: state representatives, senator, governor, state agency, etc.)	A, B
federal government or official (Examples: Member of Congress, federal agency, the president, etc.)	A, B, D
Key	
A	local board decision; copy to local League files
B	authorization from LWV-TX; copy to the state office
C	authorization by local Leagues affected by this action; copy to these local Leagues
D	authorization by LWVUS (sometimes LWV-TX can authorize); copy to national office

League Lingo

action – Promotion of a League position on local, state, and national public policy issues to government officials, the media, and the public by the president of the League or an authorized representative

action alert – Request from the state or national League to take action at a specific time in support of a League position

Action News! – A monthly electronic newsletter sent by LWV-Texas to League members in Texas

advocacy – Arguing in favor of a cause, an idea, or a policy (does not necessarily involve lobbying)

annual meeting – A local League year-end business meeting to elect officers and directors, vote on bylaws changes, and adopt a budget and program of work for the next year

calendar – Plans by the board of directors for the League year for League program and other activities

Capital Corps – League members from the Austin area who assist issue chairs with legislative visits, testimony, and other state League advocacy efforts

concurrence – A method of adopting a position reached through consensus by another League; Leagues can also concur with the recommendations of a resource committee or decision statements formulated by a League board of directors

consensus – Collective opinion of a substantial number of League members, representative of the membership as a whole; reached through objective study and discussion of an issue, not a vote

convention – A state or national League meeting held biennially in which League delegates adopt program, elect officers and directors for the biennium, adopt a budget, act on proposed bylaws changes, and conduct other business

council – (national) A biennial meeting of League delegates to adopt a budget and review program, held in years between conventions and with a more limited representation

education fund – A publicly supported, non-membership organization to which tax-deductible donations can be made; LWV-Texas Education Fund was established in 1966 to operate exclusively for educational purposes in the area of government and public policy. It also holds tax-deductible donations made to local Leagues and makes grants to the state and local Leagues to carry out the educational purpose of the League

Facts & Issues – (F&I) A balanced, unbiased, nonpartisan report authored by a study committee that reflects a diversity of views on the study topic and summarizes the facts as well as alternatives for change in public policy

household member – If more than one member of a household is a member of the League, each additional household member is assessed half the per member payment for dues by the state and national Leagues; local dues may or may not follow this pattern

issue chair – A League member who monitors a specific LWV-TX position and educates others about it, promotes its visibility, and advocates on its behalf

life member – A person who has been a League member for 50 years or more; life members are excused from dues payment, and their Leagues pay no per member payment for them

lobbying – communicating with elected officials (or their staff) to urge a position on a pending piece of legislation; always involves advocacy

member-at-large – (MAL) A member who resides outside of, and is not enrolled in, a local League

member-at-large unit – A state-recognized group of members-at-large in an area where there is no local League who become a formal group and provide League service in their communities

nonpartisan – The League does not support or oppose political parties or candidates for public office at any level, including candidates who may be a League member

Observer Corps – League members who attend governmental meetings, note what happens at the meetings, and report back to the League and community to promote government transparency and accountability and ensure that citizens are aware of decisions that impact their lives
Fundamentals for Local League Boards 52 LWV-Texas, July 2016

orientation – Basic background material provided in writing or at meetings to help members understand League purposes, policies, and procedures

per member payment – (PMP) The amount of dues paid to the state and national Leagues on behalf of each member; determined by delegates to the state and national conventions; assessed based on the membership count on January 31 of each year

political – The League studies public policy issues and advocates for change in government policy and legislation without regard to political party

position – A statement of the League point of view on a public issue, arrived at through member study and agreement (consensus, concurrence) and approved by the appropriate board of directors; used as the basis for League action

program – Selected governmental issues chosen by the membership at local, state, and national levels for League study and action

program planning – The process through which members suggest (a) a new topic for study, (b) review of a current position for a possible update, or (c) an amendment to a current position, or (d) a new position to be adopted by concurrence

programs – Planned, coordinated activities (speakers, discussion, et al.) at League meetings, often for a specific purpose

unit – A subdivision of a League with a large membership; provides maximum participation by members in discussion of League program and activities

VOTER – A League newsletter for members and others; published by local and state Leagues

voters guide – (VG) A nonpartisan publication that includes candidates' qualifications and positions on selected issues or pro/con information on propositions or amendments

voters service – (VS) Year-round activity to help citizens be politically effective and encourage their participation in the political process; registering voters and presenting factual, nonpartisan information on candidates and election issues are the two most basic voters service activities

League Acronyms

ADV – Advocacy, a State Board committee
AJ – Administration of Justice
BOSS – Book of State Stuff
CE – Citizen Education, a State Board committee
CP – Citizen Participation
CHIP – Children’s Health Insurance Program
COMM – Communications Committee, a State Board committee
C/SEP – Convention/Statewide Events Planning Committee, a State Board committee
DEV – Development and Marketing, a State Board committee
DV – Domestic Violence
EAA – Environmental Awareness Award
EDU – Citizen Education Committee, a State Board committee
F&I – Facts and Issues
FM&A – Fiscal Management and Administration, a State Board committee
FSG – Financing State Government
GEO – Guide to Elected Officials
GOTV – Get Out the Vote
GOV – Governance Committee, a State Board committee
HAVA – Help America Vote Act
HCFI – Health Care for the Medically Indigent
JJ – Juvenile Justice
LL – Local Leagues
LNL – Legislative Newsletter
LRP – Long Range Plan
MAL – Member at Large
NR – Natural Resources
PCP – Political Campaign Process
PMP – Per Member Payments
PPR – Periodic Program Review
PSF – Public School Finance
PUB – LWV-TX Publications
SB – State Board
SLL – Services to Local Leagues, a State Board committee
SO – State Office
SOS – State of the State OR Secretary of State
SP – Strategic Planning Committee, a State Board committee
SSMI – Services for the Seriously Mentally ill
TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TCEQ – Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
T or TX – LWV-Texas
TCR – Texas Constitution Revision
TEF – Texas Education Fund
VG – Voters Guide
VS – Voters Service
WUTL – Women under Texas Law
WYGTA – When You Go to Austin
YEO – Your Elected Officials

(Board and staff names are often abbreviated as initials, i.e. Darlene Hicks is referred to as “DH”)