



MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Membership in the League of Women Voters has many benefits. Active involvement develops leadership, offers information and education on energizing community issues, promotes voter education and civic involvement, and models effective ways to impact issues of public interest. The League's purpose, open membership, independence from partisan politics, and democratic process attract women and men of all ages and backgrounds to become involved.

MISSION

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

PRINCIPLES

The League of Women Voters believes:

- in representative government and the individual liberties established in the U.S. Constitution.
- that democratic government depends on the active informed participation of citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.
- that the right to vote of every citizen should be protected; that every person should have access to free public education; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.
- the efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.
- responsible government should: be responsive to the will of the people; maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation; promote conservation and development of natural resources in the public

interest; participate in the solution of economic and social problems affecting the general welfare; promote a sound economy; and adopt economic policies which facilitate the solution of international problems.

- 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.

NON-PARTISANSHIP

The League is non-partisan. The League:

- Provides non-partisan, factual information on the structure and function of government, voting procedures and election issues and promotes active citizen involvement in government;
- May take action on issues and legislation on which members have consensus;
- **Never** supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office.
- Encourages members, as individuals, to take part in the political process.

HISTORY

League of Women Voters of the US (LWVUS): The LWVUS was founded in 1920 by Carrie Chapman Catt. In 1919, at the 50th convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, President Catt proposed a League of Women Voters "to finish the fight" – winning national woman suffrage and eliminating other forms of political and legal discrimination against women. On February 14, 1920, six months before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution (which gave women the right to vote) was finally ratified, the LWV was launched as an independent organization. The League began as a "mighty political experiment" designed to help women carry out their new responsibilities as voters. It encouraged them to use their new power to participate in shaping public policy. From the beginning, it was then, as well as now, a non-

partisan organization. Political action based on knowledge gained from study is the cornerstone of the League's diverse agenda. **The League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWV ED Fund)** was established in 1957 and received its IRS approval as a 501©(3) organization in 1959.

League of Women Voters of Anchorage (LWV Anc): The LWV of Anchorage was begun by Evangeline Atwood in March, 1950 as a provisional League; it became a full-fledged League in March 1951 – the first in Alaska.

League of Women Voters of Alaska (LWVAK): The LWVAK was established in 1967; the LWVAK Education Fund was established in June 1986.

MEMBERSHIP

A person may join the LWV at the local, state, or national level. Joining at any level automatically confers membership at every level. Membership in the League is open to everyone. There are two types of membership: (1) voting members are citizens at least 16 years old who are enrolled in a local League and (2) associate members – all others who join the League.

Yearly dues are established at the Annual Meeting.

- **Individual members** pay full membership dues.
- **Household members** are two or more members residing at the same address in a common household. The first member pays full dues and other members of the household pay one half of membership dues.
- **Student members** are persons enrolled either full- or part-time in an accredited institution; they pay one-half the individual member dues.
- **Life members** are voting members who have belonged to the League for 50 years; they pay no dues.
- **Members-at-Large (MALs)** are individuals residing outside the area of any local League; they pay dues to either the LWVAK or LWVUS

CONVENTIONS, COUNCILS, and ANNUAL MEETINGS

The **LWVUS national convention** is held biannually in even-numbered years. It is composed of delegates selected by local Leagues in numbers proportionate to membership. Each state League is entitled to send three delegates; each local League is entitled to send at least one delegate. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention delegate. Delegates debate and adopt a program, budget, financial support, bylaw changes, and elect officers for the next biennium.

LWVUS National Council is held in odd-numbered years. It is composed of two delegates from each state League plus the national board of directors. Duties of the council include approving the budget for the coming year and giving direction for the Leagues study and action program.

The **LWVAK** holds its yearly convention in late March or early April. Delegates include the LWVAK Board and at least two delegates from each local League. They debate and adopt a program, budget, financial support, bylaw changes, and elect officers. Each local League (Anchorage, Central Kenai Peninsula, Juneau and Tanana Valley) hosts the state convention on a rotating basis.

The **LWVAnc** holds an annual business meeting to elect officers, set local dues, and adopt local program. The Anchorage League's annual meeting is held in late March or April. All members are encouraged to attend the annual meeting.

MEETINGS

Each local League determines its own schedule; the Anchorage League generally meets four times a year in what are called general meetings, often in collaboration with other organizations. Members meet regularly to study and to discuss issues. Discussion might include topics such as voting rights, land use, taxes, water resources, education, human needs, international trade, and national security, as well as issues of local concern.

The LWV Anc Board meets monthly. Members are welcome to attend. Please call (907) 274-8477 for time and place.

PROGRAM

At every level – local, state, or national – the League program each year consists of governmental issues that members choose for concentrated study and action. Proposals are submitted to the League Boards, which then considers the proposal, formulates a recommended program, and presents it to the membership at the annual meeting or to the delegates at the state or national convention. A procedure for placing non-recommended items before the meeting or convention also exists.

Certain criteria must be used when considering a program. The issue must fall within the Principles of the League and be one on which governmental action can be taken. Final decisions on state and national program are made by a vote of the delegates to the respective conventions. At the local level, approval is by the voting members present at the annual meeting. **State or local leagues may not take positions that are in opposition to or conflict with the LWVUS established principles and positions.**

Once a study has been adopted, the board appoints a chair of the “resource” or “study” committee, who enlists other members to be involved on the committee. Taking part in a study is an excellent way to be involved in the League. The resource committee gathers information on the study item, analyzes the information, clarifies the issues, and identifies the problems and potential solutions. It is the committee’s responsibility to present all sides of the issue to members for their consideration. The study may also include guest speakers, interviews, and other activities.

Before the League can act on the issue, members must agree in broad terms on various aspects of the issue. To formulate a position, the League takes consensus. Consensus, or agreement, is reached through group discussion. Members come to an overall “sense of the

group” as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions. It is from this agreement League formulates a position statement for action.

Another process for obtaining a League position is through the process of concurrence, or agreeing with a proposed statement. League members or boards can concur with recommendations or a statement from a task force, a resource committee, a unit groups, any League board – local state or national.

ACTION

Once members reach agreement and a position is stated, local, state or national Leagues take action by:

- lobbying through letter-writing, telephoning, e-mailing, faxing or personal visits to legislators and administrative agencies;
- testifying at legislative and administrative hearings to assure citizen input in policymaking decisions;
- monitoring elections and other government activities
- publishing and distributing pertinent educational materials;
- working with other organizations toward a common goal;
- litigating in the public interest to help clarify laws or policy; and
- hosting public forums and educational events.

Leagues may act on national program only in conformity with positions taken by the LWVUS. A Board may not take action in opposition to a position articulated by the LWVUS on federal or national issues. Individual members are always free to take action **as long as they do so in their own name**, and leave no impression that they speak for the League.

An important tradition of the League is to observe meetings of local, regional, state, and national governments. Observers do not speak for the League but attend meetings to listen, to learn, and to make factual reports of the proceedings. Observer training is available.

VOTER SERVICE

The League is perhaps best known for its varied services to voters. The League directs its efforts toward encouraging citizens to register, vote, and take part in government and politics. Voter Service activities include sponsoring candidates meetings, debates, or interviews; conducting voter registration drives; providing information about voting to the public through print and electronic media; getting out the vote on election day and educating young people in civic responsibility.

CITIZEN INFORMATION

Educating citizens about government is a major League activity. Through community forums, publications such as the *Municipal Ballot Review*, and factual studies of governmental issues, the League provides information necessary for an informed electorate. Community organizations often turn to the League for speakers or moderators of panels.

PUBLICATIONS

Important tools for carrying out League's goals are publications that are researched, written, and distributed by members at every level. National catalogs are available, Publications may be purchased by members and the public.

A newsletter, the **Voter**, is sent by each League to its members. The LWV Anc **Votes** is published bimonthly, the LWVAK *Voter* quarterly, and the LWVUS *Voter* bimonthly.

FINANCE

The League of Women Voters is a 501(c)(4) organization that must have adequate funding to operate and to achieve its goals. Local Leagues adopt budgets to support local, state, and national activities. Financial support comes from members, nonmembers, and the community at large.

Dues are a major source of funds in local Leagues. Each local League sets its dues. A very large portion of the dues, called per-member payment, supports the state and national Leagues. To augment income from

members, the League conducts fund-raising campaigns at each level and may apply for and receive grants and contracts as well as by providing fee-for-services, such as election monitoring.

The **LWV Education Fund** is a 501(c)(3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code and may accept charitable tax-deductible contributions. These funds (LWVUS Ed Fund and LWVAK Ed Fund) are used exclusively for services to voters,

LEAGUE TERMINOLOGY

ACTION – support of or opposition to legislation or policy and education of the public after a position has been reached by Leagues members.

ANNUAL MEETING – the yearly business meeting of local League members.

CONCURRENCE – a process of obtaining local League agreement on a program item which accepts the research, analysis, and conclusions reached by another League in arriving at a position, which is used as a basis for League action

CRITERIA – the criteria for adoption of a program item for League study are that the item must be consistent with the principles of the League, timely, can be met through government action, and one on which the League can be effective.

ED FUND – Education Fund – a 501(c)(3) branch of the League whose activities are restricted to education and eligible to be funded by tax-deductible contributions.

GENERAL MEETING – meetings to which all members and their guests are invited and are open to the public.

ITEM – a given subject adopted for study and action by League members. There are local, state and national items.

NON-PARTISAN – describes the League’s policy of neither supporting nor opposing political parties or candidates.

OBSERVERS – League members who attend and monitor

- elected or appointed government bodies, e.g. Assembly, School Board, Planning and Zoning Commission, etc. or
- elections, including ballot counting, for other organizations or political entities, generally for a set fee.

PMP – Per-Member Payment – a percentage of dues paid by members to support state and national League decided by convention delegates.

PORTFOLIO – A particular responsibility of a League board member.

POSITION – a statement of member agreement, consensus or concurrence on a program item used as a basis for League action.

PROGRAM – governmental issues adopted for study and action by the members at annual meetings and by delegates to state and national conventions.

PURPOSE (MISSION) – to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.

RESOURCE COMMITTEE – formed for each current study. Each committee is responsible for researching facts from every available source and presenting information on all sides of the issue to the members for consideration.

VOTER SERVICE – year-round activity of registering voters and encouraging citizens to be politically active. Provides non-partisan factual information on candidates and issues.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LEAGUE:

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