



A Guide to League Study, Consensus, and Concurrence

League Program

League of Women Voters of Texas 2021©

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Introduction: What is League Program?

League program is the education and advocacy platform that members of the League of Women Voters adopt to support the mission of their organization.

League Principles are concepts of government supported by the League as a whole. They are the authorization for adoption of national, state, and local program. (See Appendix)

The LWVUS Bylaws (Art. XII, Sec. 2) define program as follows:

The program shall consist of action to implement the Principles and those governmental issues chosen by the convention for concerted study, or concurrence, and action.

Program includes both:

- Action to support League principles.
- Study of public policy issues, followed by action to support adopted positions.

Origin and Purpose of the League

The League grew out of the women's suffrage movement. In 1920, after women won the right to vote through passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, members of the movement founded the League of Women Voters of the United States in order to make further constructive use of the energy and drive of the suffragists. Their purpose was to encourage active and informed public participation in government through voter education and through a process of study and advocacy aimed at understanding and influencing public policy. These two separate but equal missions of the League, nonpartisan Voter Service, which neither supports or opposes candidates or parties, and Program and Advocacy, continue to the present day.

League Study

The goal of League study is to reach member agreement on what will become an advocacy position. Studies take place at all three levels of the League; national, state, and local. Once studies are complete and the resulting positions on issues are adopted, the positions may be used by the League for advocacy and education.

- National and state League program positions are readopted every two years at the respective conventions, which are held in the spring of even-numbered years.
- Local League program positions are readopted annually at annual meetings.
- All program positions should be reviewed and updated periodically.

Two League Processes: Adoption of Study and Concurrence

Study involves four steps that may lead to a new policy position:

1. Program planning
2. Adoption of the new study at a convention or annual meeting
3. The study process
4. Adoption of the new position at the following convention or annual meeting

Concurrence is a second way of adopting a new position. At its convention or annual meeting a League may vote to adopt a position statement created by another local or state League. Leagues should refer to their bylaws for rules on concurrence.

Program Planning: Choosing a Study Topic

State and national program planning is done in the fall of odd-numbered years in preparation for state and national conventions in the spring of even-numbered years. Program planning materials are sent to all local Leagues from LWV Texas and LWVUS to facilitate the consideration of current program and to gather suggestions for new studies.

Local League program planning is done annually before an annual meeting to gather suggestions for local study and action. It is often the Program Vice President's responsibility to organize the local program planning meeting and to prepare material to help with the process.

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is an important factor to be considered when selecting topics and carrying out studies. (See Resources)

Study Topic Ideas

Good sources for ideas might include:

- Studies by other Leagues or similar organizations.
- League Observers Corps.
- Local community organizations, especially those that represent views of diverse populations.
- Local media articles on issues that need solutions.
- Public officials, civic leaders, members of local boards and commissions.
- Local League bylaws and policies.
- Current League positions.

The Program Planning Meeting

League members come together to consider possible topics for new studies and/or updates. All ideas presented during program planning are eligible to be brought before the next convention or annual meeting. The board reviews the suggested topics and may choose one or more to recommend to the convention or annual meeting.

The board approves a Focus and Scope for any recommended studies.

- **Focus:** The title of the study or one sentence to describe the proposed study
- **Scope:** A broader description of the parameters of the study

Those items suggested during program planning, but which are not recommended by the board, are listed along with the Proposed Program. Before they are eligible to be debated and voted on, they must receive a vote for consideration by delegates at the convention or annual meeting.

Local Use of a State or National Position

Leagues may take action locally under existing state and national positions.

Members may only want to be better informed, to understand the local aspects of an issue, or to consider its possible impact on diverse communities. In this case, a study is not required. Local Leagues may choose to sponsor a meeting or public forum on the issue.

Adoption of a Study: The Convention or Annual Meeting

At the Convention or Annual Meeting:

- Program studies are adopted by League members in accordance with bylaws.
- Only the items recommended by the board as part of the Proposed Program and those non-recommended items suggested in program planning and voted for consideration may be debated, amended, and voted on.
- Amendments may not change the intent or enlarge the scope of the study.

Once debated and voted for adoption, the study moves to the next phase.

The Study Process

League studies must produce balanced, unbiased information representing a diversity of views on the study topic. The board is responsible for ensuring that the study process is open and fair in order to avoid biased research and results.

The Study Chair or Co-chairs

- The Program Vice President or Chair selects a chair or co-chairs for the study. Study chairs must be willing to look at all sides of the issue.
- The Program Vice President or Chair serves as ex-officio committee member.
- The board approves the chair or co-chairs and determines whether a chair is to have a board position.

Responsibilities of the Study Chair or Co-chairs

- Recruit, with the help of the Program Vice President or Chair, a diverse committee large enough to handle all aspects of the study
- Ensure that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies are incorporated into the study and a “DEI Lens” is used throughout. (See Resources)
- Create and coordinate a timeline and a calendar for the study
- Schedule and chair regular committee meetings at times and locations that ensure all members are able to participate
- Delegate tasks and research assignments to keep the study moving and on track
- Inform the members about the study with periodic newsletter articles
- Organize general meetings or public forums on the study issue
- Reach out to people impacted by the issue and organizations involved with it
- Develop, together with the committee, a set of consensus questions for the membership to discuss and answer at the conclusion of the study
- Submit regular reports to the board
- Submit public announcements, press releases, etc. to the board for approval
- Remain in close communication with the Program Vice President or Chair
- Create a budget for the study, obtain board approval for expenses in advance, and keep track of disbursements for the Treasurer’s records
- Recruit and brief resource people prior to consensus meetings

The Study Committee

Oversight of the Committee

- The board is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the study, including an unbiased process and unbiased results.
- The board should promote the study committee and open it to all members.
- The board should ensure that committee membership represents a balance of views.
- The Program Vice President or Chair helps to organize the study committee.
- The board has responsibility for ensuring that events, such as meetings, issue forums, and workshops, represent the differing viewpoints on issues.
- The President has final authority over all published materials.
- The board approves questions for discussion and consensus by the membership.
- The board determines and promotes a process for member agreement.

Committee Membership

- A DEI lens should be applied to form an inclusive committee. Participants from those groups or communities impacted should be sought, so that their voices are represented. Committee work is best served by a diverse set of decision-makers.
- When they join a study committee, individuals agree to formulate and abide by ground rules for working together.
- Committee members will be expected to gather information, write articles and a final report, and develop consensus questions. They may be expected to plan and organize meetings.
- Non-members may be asked to serve on a League study committee to provide a variety of perspectives and a diversity of views. If non-members are included, their work ends with the completion of the study. Only League members are allowed to participate in consensus meetings; however, non-members should be invited to join the League and take part.

Committee Tasks

- Research: Committee members should research pros and cons of all aspects of the issue, using online and print resources. They may also use current laws, ordinances, and codes; records from appropriate government departments or agencies; and materials from conferences and forums on the issue
- Interviews: People are frequently the best sources for information. Some who might be consulted are local officials, heads of agencies, and community activists.
- Questionnaires or surveys: Feedback from appropriate groups, as well as other Leagues, may be helpful.
- Community monitoring: Observers should attend the meetings of local government bodies, agencies, boards, or commissions likely to take action on the subject.
- Media monitoring: Committee members should watch for current articles, as well as radio and television, for comments relevant to the study topic.
- Tours: Visiting an appropriate site or facility may provide a better understanding of the issue. Tours could include the membership at large.
- Organizing meetings: It is often worthwhile to hold a general meeting or public forum with invited experts as speakers or panelists.
- Writing: Periodic VOTER articles keep members informed and interested. Creating a final report or *Facts & Issues* is a primary task.

Preparing for Member Participation

Upon completion of their research, the committee writes consensus questions for discussion by the members of the League. They also publish a final report or *Facts & Issues* to educate the members.

Consensus Questions

Careful preparation of the consensus questions is important. Unbiased study materials and consensus questions contribute to a valid consensus. Responses to the questions are the basis for a potential position on which the organization will act for many years.

When writing consensus questions:

- Create questions based on subjects that research reveals to be important.
- Carefully draft the consensus questions or concurrence statements for board approval.
- Expect changes by the board. The board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the questions are appropriate.

Concurrence Statements

Unlike consensus questions, a concurrence statement is a proposal to adopt a position that already has been adopted by another League. Usually, that statement may not be changed or amended; therefore, it does not require an unbiased format.

The Final Report: *Facts & Issues*:

Once information has been gathered, it is compiled into a clear, succinct, and objective report. Charts and graphs should be included when appropriate.

The information presented should be:

- Factual.
- Well-balanced between pro and con opinions.
- Clearly attributed when appropriate.
- Sufficient to cover all areas in which consensus is being sought.
- Impartial rather than seeming to advocate for any conclusions.
- Nonpartisan.

The committee chair completes a draft of the *Facts & Issues*, which is edited by the Program Vice President.

Member Education

Member education on issues facilitates agreement. Members should understand why it is important to take part in the consensus or concurrence. Member understanding and agreement provide the foundation for the League's advocacy.

- As the committee's work progresses, Voter articles and posts on a website or in social media can provide information, promote interest, and increase participation in the consensus process.
- Meetings and forums increase awareness and understanding of issues by members, as well as by the community. They also may point toward possibilities for change.
- Sufficient time should be allowed for editing and production of any written materials.
- Consensus questions or concurrence statements should be sent to members well in advance, using the VOTER or an email to all members.
- The *Facts & Issues* should go to members in time for adequate preparation.

Reaching Consensus

What is Consensus?

- Consensus has been the League's primary process for reaching member agreement.
- Consensus in the League is defined as agreement among a substantial number of members, reached after sustained study and group discussion.
- Consensus is a sense of what the group supports, not a vote.
- Consensus is an interactive discussion process designed to reach a group opinion.
- Consensus is not a simple majority, nor is it necessarily unanimity.
- Consensus is a decision with which participants are comfortable overall. Participants, even when they do not like all the points of agreement, may support the results, because they have seen a combination of gains and losses in things that are important to them.
- Consensus is a unifying process, while voting has the potential to polarize.
- Consensus is appropriate for complex, complicated, or controversial issues.
- Consensus is a way to produce stronger support for the positions reached.
- Consensus is a way to enhance League members' skills for presenting public policy positions outside the League.

The Consensus Meeting

Choosing the Format for Member Participation

- Discussion is the preferred way to reach consensus.
- Discussion meetings may be either in-person or virtual.
- Consensus works particularly well in small group discussions.
- While direct interaction is the most desirable way to attain the opinion of the group, consensus may be conducted using member surveys.
- Additional meetings may be held if the board feels participation is too small.

Selecting Leaders

Those who take the leadership positions in the consensus process must be as neutral as possible. They will be expected to be careful not to dominate discussion, not to force their views on others, and not to ignore opposing views. They may, however, participate fully in the consensus discussion.

Leaders needed to facilitate the meeting:

- **The Discussion Leader** keeps the group on track to move the agenda along, welcomes all viewpoints, encourages all to participate, looks for common threads among the ideas discussed, and tests wording to see if the group thinks it represents agreement. The discussion leader may be a study committee member or another knowledgeable individual.
- **The Recorder** records areas of agreement as summarized by the leader and notes those main points made on each consensus question that might be useful in writing a position statement. The recorder's notes should go promptly to the committee.
- **The Resource Persons** provide background on the issues through brief presentations or by answering questions. Members of the study committee typically serve in this function for a local study.

For a state or national study, the facilitators should be familiar with the Leaders Guide that has been provided.

Promoting a Good Discussion

The agenda, format, and setting of the meeting can promote good discussion or stifle it.

- Creating an atmosphere of trust is essential. People reach agreement on contentious issues only after they have begun to trust each other.
- Nonpartisanship, unbiased study materials and consensus questions, and respect for the League's grassroots consensus process all contribute to a valid consensus.
- Some social time at the beginning helps members become better acquainted, making it more likely that people will speak up.
- Using an agenda facilitates discussion and allows time to consider all the questions, preventing the neglect of some issues.
- A circle of chairs invites sharing of thoughts among equals.
- Posting emerging areas of agreement where they are easily visible, such as on a flip chart, prevents repetition and serves as a group memory.

Evaluating the Conversation

The discussion leader should listen carefully to each participant's input in the conversation and to the overall will of the group.

- After each question is considered, the group may come to consensus.
- The group also may acknowledge lack of agreement or "no consensus."
- The recorder should note either result, as well as strong minority views.
- When there are several consensus meetings, minority views may show up as majority views in other groups. Awareness of these views helps the board determine sufficient support for a specific idea.

At the end of the meeting, the discussion leader should present a review of the areas where members have come to consensus and where there was no consensus. The leader should also review the next steps for the input from the meeting.

Determining Consensus

Following the consensus meeting or meetings, the study committee evaluates whether agreement has been reached and drafts a position statement for board approval.

- When evaluating the reports, the committee should list areas of clear agreement, areas of tentative agreement, and areas of no consensus.
- When there is input from several meetings or methods, the areas of tentative agreement may generate a position when pulled together.
- Results from surveys, such as online questionnaires, email responses, or telephone polls, should be tallied along with results from group discussions.
- The committee should record the number of members who participated.
- The committee should ascertain that there are no patterns that would make responses unrepresentative of the League as a whole.

Stating the Proposed Position

Since many League positions are retained for decades, they should be worded generally and flexibly so they can be used in a variety of advocacy situations. The first paragraph is very important. Often it is an overarching statement of the position. Specific details, such as references to legislation or technology, must be avoided in a position statement, since they could limit League advocacy in unknown future situations.

Adopting a New Position

By Consensus

Local League Positions

- Upon receiving the statement drafted by the study committee, the board considers the proposed position and edits it as necessary.
- The board judges whether there is substantial agreement among the participants and whether results are representative of the membership as a whole.
- The position is adopted by a vote of the board.
- Once adopted by the board, the position on a local study can be used for action.
- The board publishes new local positions to make members aware of them.
- The board maintains records of the entire process that lead to the adoption of the position. Good files make it easier to restudy or review the topic if the need arises.

State and National Positions

- Upon receiving the statement drafted by the study committee, the board considers the consensus results.
- The board judges whether there is substantial agreement among the participants and whether results are representative of the membership as a whole.
- The consensus is adopted by a vote of the board.
- Local consensus on state or national studies is forwarded as is appropriate.
- Local Leagues should not publish their consensus results until the state or national position is formulated.

By Concurrence

Concurrence is an alternative process that may be used for adoption of a program position. In the League it is a vote to accept or reject a proposed position statement.

- Concurrence is the process used to adopt a position of another League by vote at a convention or annual meeting.
- Concurrence may also be used to update an existing position following a review.

In order for a position statement of another League to be adopted by concurrence it is:

- Proposed during program planning.
- Recommended by a vote of the board.
- Publicized to members in accordance with bylaws.
- Adopted by vote of the members.

When concurrence is the method to be used for adoption:

- Boards may develop the wording or use the statement of another League.
- A statement developed by another League usually cannot be modified or amended unless there is unanimous agreement on the change.
- It is often easier than consensus and more suitable for simpler issues and questions.
- A meeting for determining concurrence may be helpful, especially if the statement is long or if the subject is one not generally understood.
- It can be designed to be interactive when meetings include discussion, even though the process is based on individual opinion.

Advocacy and Action

Action, as practiced in the League, is any effort to bring about governmental change based on the positions derived through member study and agreement.

At the State Level

Advocacy and action are intended to influence any branch of state government and must be based on state or national League positions or policy.

The state board directs advocacy efforts by:

- Adopting goals and choosing legislative priorities.
- Assigning issues.
- Determining how, when, and by whom strategies shall be developed and implemented.
- Entering into litigation.
- Resolving conflicts that cannot be settled otherwise between local Leagues regarding jurisdiction or action on issues.
- Directing local League advocacy that is directed toward state government.

At the Local Level

Local Leagues can utilize their local positions, as well as state and national positions, to act at the local level by:

- Contacting local officials, both elected and appointed.
- Monitoring actions of local councils, boards, commissions, etc.
- Testifying before meetings of local councils, boards, commissions, etc.
- Writing letters to the editor of a local newspaper.
- Sponsoring issue forums to point out problems and offer solutions.
- Entering into litigation.

Taking action generally produces positive community support for the League; however, it can create negative ramifications in some instances. Before making the final decision to act on an issue, the board should consider:

- What position will support the action? Leagues may only act on a League position or League Principle.
- What is the desired outcome?
- Who will be authorized to act and/or speak for the League?
- Will other local Leagues be affected? If so, they should be notified before action is taken.

When a local League wishes to contact a state or U.S. senator or representative, it must get the appropriate authorization from LWVTX or LWVUS.

For permission from LWVUS to lobby a U.S. senator or representative, other than in response to an Action Alert, local Leagues should fill out and submit a form:

<https://www.lwv.org/federal-action-request-form>

For permission to lobby a state senator or representative local Leagues should contact:

lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org

Advocacy and Issues: A Guide to Public Policy Positions, contains information on, "Taking Action: Guidelines for Local Leagues." (See Resources)

Resources

FROM LWV TEXAS:

[Advocacy & Issues: A Guide to League Issues](#) (2020-2022) contains complete wording, explanations, and history of action taken for all LWVTX positions. It includes brief descriptions of national positions and related LWVTX action. It is revised biennially in the summer following the LWVTX Convention.

FROM LWVUS:

[Impact On Issues :A Guide to Public Policy Position](#) (2020-2022) contains a complete listing of national positions, history, and action taken. It is revised biennially following the LWVUS Convention.

[Guidelines for LWVUS Studies](#)

[LWV Clearinghouse for Studies](#) contains studies and research conducted by League members.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) Resources to support your League's effort to educate yourself on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

- [Using a DEI Lens](#)
- [DEI Policy](#)
- [Understanding and Partnering With Your Community - Part 1](#)
- [Understanding and Partnering With Your Community - Part 2](#)

Appendix

League Principles

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 of the United States believes that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.

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 every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes 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 responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; 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 cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.