

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are many reasons for joining the League of Women Voters. Membership in the League can lead to self-education, an understanding of community problems, and the ability to act effectively on issues of public interest. The League's purpose, its open membership, its independence from partisan politics, and its democratic procedures attract women and men of ages and backgrounds.

## **PURPOSES**

The purposes of the League of Women Voters are to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government and to act on selected governmental issues.

## **HISTORY**

In 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt, a native Iowan, organized the League of Women Voters of the United States. The League's first goal was to teach women how to exercise their new right to vote. The scope was soon enlarged to include service to all citizens. Political action based on knowledge gained from study became the cornerstone of the League's diverse agenda.

## **NONPARTISANSHIP**

The League may take political action on issues on which members reach agreement. The League never supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office. However, the League encourages its members, as individuals, to take part fully in the political process. Because of scrupulous adherence to this nonpartisan political policy, the League takes action in the public interest.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to everyone.

- Voting members are citizens at least 18 years old who are enrolled in a Local League.
- Associate members are persons enrolled in a Local League who are under 18 years old or who are noncitizens.
- Life members are voting members who have belonged to the League for 50 years. Life members pay no dues.

Two or more members living at the same address qualify for a household membership. One person pays full dues, and the second person makes a half-payment of dues.

A person may join the League at the local, state, or national level. Membership in the League usually encompasses all three levels.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The League of Women Voters works on the local, state, and national levels. Members of the Local League elect their officers and board of directors at an annual meeting. Each Local League is entitled to send delegates to state and national conventions. For all three levels of League, local members decide what will be studied, what action will be taken, how League money will be spent, and who League leaders will be. The League is a grass-roots organization, and members are very protective of this approach.

## **MEETINGS**

Each Local League determines its own schedule, but most meet at least once a month. A meeting of all members is usually called a general meeting. Sometimes the membership may divide into several small discussion groups, or units, and hold unit meetings. Members meet regularly to study and to discuss issues such as voting rights, land use, taxes, water resources, human needs, international trade, and national security, as well as issues of

local concern.

Once a year, each Local League holds an annual meeting to elect officers, to set local dues, and to adopt local programs, bylaws, and budget. All members can and should attend the annual meeting.

### **CONVENTIONS AND COUNCILS**

The national convention is held biannually in even-numbered years. It is composed of delegates elected by Local Leagues in numbers proportionate to their membership. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention delegate. Observers and guests may attend but may not vote.

Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support, and bylaws, and they elect officers for the next biennium.

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

Similarly, each state League holds convention. Some states have annual conventions, while others use the convention-council system.

### **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 believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens 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 which 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 which affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy, and adopt domestic policies which 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 organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

### **PROGRAM**

League program at every level consists of those governmental issues that members choose for concentrated study and action. At each year's program planning meeting, members discuss their ideas for local, state, and national program. Their proposals are submitted to the respective boards of

directors. The board at each level then considers the proposals forwarded to it, formulates a recommended program, and presents it to the membership at the annual meeting or to the delegates at the state or national convention. There is also a procedure for placing non-recommended items before the meeting.

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, this is done by the voting members in attendance at the annual meeting.

Once a study has been adopted, the board appoints a chairperson of the “resource,” or study, committee. This person in turn finds other members to serve on the committee. Taking part in a study is an excellent way to become familiar with and involved in the League.

The resource committee gathers information on the study item, analyzes the information, clarifies the issues, and identifies the problems. It is the committee’s responsibility to present all sides of the issue to members for their consideration. The study may also include tours, 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 that 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 group, or any League board—another local board, any state board, or the national board.

## **ACTION**

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

- lobbying
- working with other organizations
- speaking out through letter-writing and telegram campaigns to legislators and through personal visits to legislators and administrative agencies
- publishing and distributing pertinent materials
- testifying at legislative and administrative hearings to assure citizen input in policymaking decisions
- monitoring elections and other government activities
- litigating to help clarify laws in the public interest.

The League observes meetings of local, regional, state, and national governmental bodies. Observers do not speak for the League but attend meetings to listen, to learn, and to make factual reports of the proceedings.

## **VOTERS SERVICE**

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

## **CITIZEN INFORMATION**

Educating citizens about government is a major League activity. Through community forums, political directories, 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**

One important tool 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 called the Voter is sent by each League level to its members. Local Voters are published quarterly, state Voters quarterly, and the National Voter bi-monthly.

## **FINANCE**

League is a non-profit organization that must have adequate financing to operate and to achieve its goals. Local Leagues adopt budgets that include funds to support local, state, and national activities. Financial support comes from members, nonmembers, and the community at large.

Dues are a major income factor in Local League budgets. Each Local League decides the amount of its dues and the method for collecting them—either by the anniversary system in which a member's dues are paid on the anniversary of the month she/he joined, or by the annual system in which all members pay dues at the same year. A large portion of the dues, called per member payment, goes for the support of the state and national levels.

To augment income from members, the League conducts fund-raising campaigns at each level. The Education Funds at the state and national levels qualify as 501(c)(3) organizations under the Internal Revenue Code and may accept tax-deductible contributions. These funds are used exclusively for services to voters, impartial information on government issues, study guides, surveys, research projects, and litigation in the public interest.

## **KEY TO LEAGUE LINGO**

**ACTION** - support or opposition to legislation at government levels and education of the public after position has been reached by League members on a program item.

**ANNUAL MEETING** - the meeting of local League members at which officers and directors are elected, an annual budget is adopted, and programs are chosen. The past year is reviewed and suggestions are offered to the board for the coming year.

**BOARD** - Administrative body consisting of officers plus elected and appointed directors.

**CONCURRENCE** - a process of obtaining League agreement on a program item which basically accepts the research, analysis, and conclusions reached by our peers in arriving at a position in order to speed up the decision-making meetings of government councils, boards, and commissions. process. See consensus.

**CONSENSUS** - agreement among a substantial number of members, representative of the membership as a whole, reached after study and group discussion.

**CRITERIA** - the criteria for adoption of a program item for League study are that the item must come within the principles of the League, be a timely problem that can be met through government action, and one on which the League can be effective.

**ED FUND** - Education Fund - a branch of the League whose activities are limited to education and are therefore eligible to be funded by tax-deductible contributions.

**GENERAL MEETING** - meetings to which all members and

their guests are invited. Often expanded to include the public.

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

**NONPARTISAN** - Describes the League's policy of neither supporting nor opposing political parties or candidates.

**OBSERVERS** - League members who attend and monitor

**PMP** - Per Member Payment - monetary support for the state and national levels decided by convention delegates.

**PORTFOLIO** - a particular job on the League board.

**POSITION** - a statement of member agreement (consensus or concurrence) on a program item, which is then 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** - to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.

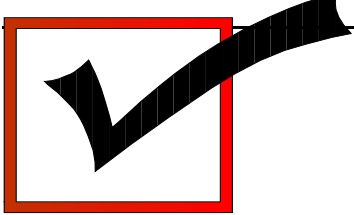
**RESOURCE COMMITTEE** - a study committee is formed for each current item. Each committee is responsible for ferreting out facts from every available source and presenting information on all sides of the issue to the members.

**UNIT** - a small discussion group of League members who meet regularly to participate in study and discussion of League program topics on local, state, and national levels.

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

# League of Women Voters of Juneau

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## THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JUNEAU

### **Member Handbook**

#### **We have Position Statements on:**

- ★ **Water & Wastewater**
- ★ **Planning & Zoning**
- ★ **Parks & Recreation**
- ★ **Mendenhall Wetlands Boundary**
- ★ **Estuarine Resources**
- ★ **Education**
- ★ **Local Government**
- ★ **Charter Commission**
- ★ **Library**
- ★ **Local Election Procedures**
- ★ **Advisory Committees**
- ★ **Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**
- ★ **Solid Waste Management**
- ★ **Avalanche & Mass Wasting**

The League of Women Voters only takes action on positions we have established through study and agreement. If you would like a copy of one or more of these positions, call Marianne at 364-2614.

We also have copies of the National and Alaska League positions.