



# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JUNEAU

## Member Handbook

The League of Women Voters only takes action on policy positions established after study and agreement by members. Positions are here: <http://juneaulwv.org/advocacy/positions/>.

### 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

## KEY TO LWV LINGO

**ACTION** - support or opposition to legislation at government levels and education of the public after position has been reached by LWV 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. 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 another LWV 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 501(c)(3) branch of a League which has not gained its own 501(c)(3) status. Eligible to receive 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 legislative bodies

**PMP** - Per Member Payment – a share of member dues paid by local LWVs to the state and national LWVs. The amounts are 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 formed to conduct research on a policy issue. Each committee ferrets out facts from available source and then presents information on all sides of the issue to the members prior to seeking consensus on a policy position.

**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 issue

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are many reasons for joining the League of Women Voters (LWV). Membership in the LWV 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 purpose of the LWV is 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. The Juneau LWV was established in 1964.

## **NONPARTISANSHIP**

The LWVJ 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. Note that, only the LWVJ President, or a member designated by the Board acts on behalf of the LWVJ.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

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

- Voting members are citizens at least 16 years old who are members of a Local League.
- Associate members are persons enrolled in a Local League who are under 16 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. Senior and student discounts are also offered.

Membership in the LWVJ includes membership in the LWV of Alaska and the LWV of the United States.

## **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 to study and to discuss issues of local concern.

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

### **CONVENTIONS AND COUNCILS**

The LWVUS convention is held biannually in even-numbered years. It is composed of delegates elected by Local Leagues in numbers proportionate to their membership. Any LWV 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 LWVUS 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 (such as Alaska) 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 chair for the 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 study (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 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" 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 developed, 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.

Some LWVs observe meetings of local, 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 LWV is perhaps best known for its services to voters. The League directs its efforts toward encouraging citizens to register, to vote, and to take part in government and politics. Voter Services include sponsoring candidate meetings, debates, or interviews; conducting voter registration drives; providing information about voting, training workshops, 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 and WEBSITE**

One important tool for finding out about state, local and national LWV is through their websites. Copies of publications are usually available for download. A newsletter (the Voter) is sent periodically to LWV members. Back issues are available on the website.

### **FINANCE**

League is a non-profit organization. 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—a large portion of the dues, called per member payment, goes for the support of the state and national LWVs.

To augment income from members, the League periodically conducts fund-raising campaigns at each level. Many LWVs have qualified as 501(c)(3) organizations under the Internal Revenue Code and donations are tax-deductible.