

League of Women Voters® of Oregon
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New Member Handbook

League of Women Voters®

Welcome

We are pleased you have chosen to join the League of Women Voters and hope that your experiences as a member will be rewarding. This handbook will acquaint you with League principles and processes so you can take full advantage of the opportunities of membership.

MISSION STATEMENT

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.

<i>Observers</i>	League members who attend and monitor meetings of government councils, boards and commissions.
<i>PMP</i>	Per Member Payment—monetary support for the state and national Leagues as decided by Convention delegates.
<i>Portfolio</i>	The specific program or administrative responsibility of a Board member, such as international relations, land use or public relations. Many League Boards are moving away from the portfolio system, with Board members assuming responsibilities as necessary.
<i>Position</i>	A statement of beliefs of League members on a particular issue, reached by consensus or concurrence of members after thorough study and discussion. The position is adopted by the appropriate board, according to the level at which the study was done (local, state, or national). Action, pro or con, is done on the basis of positions.
<i>Social Policy</i>	The fourth area of concern to League members. Social policy covers education, health, housing, corrections, issues affecting women and children, human rights and civil liberties.
<i>Study</i>	The process of researching and analyzing an issue from all sides.
<i>Units</i>	Small discussion groups. Not all Leagues use units. They work well in larger Leagues or those spread out over a geographic area.
<i>Voter Service</i>	Projects helpful to voters: registration, candidate and issue forums, printed material giving objective, balanced election information about issues and/or candidates.

HISTORY

Carrie Chapman Catt and others organized the League of Women Voters of The United States in 1920. 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 takes political action on issues on which members have reached agreement. The League never supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office. However, as individuals, League members are encouraged to join fully in the political process. Because of scrupulous adherence to this nonpartisan political policy, the League takes action only in the public interest.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to men and women. **Voting Members** are citizens at least 18 years old who have paid dues or who are Life Members (see below). **Associate Members** are under 18 or non-citizens and have paid dues. **Members At Large** have paid national and state League dues. **Life Members** have belonged to League for 50 or more years and no longer pay dues. Two or more members at the same address can have a **household membership**. One person pays full dues and the second person pays half the amount.

ORGANIZATION

The League of Women Voters works on local, state and national levels. At all levels, members have a voice in 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 grassroots organization, and members are very protective of this approach.

MEETINGS

Each local League determines its own schedule and meets at least nine times a year. A meeting for all members is usually called a General Meeting. The membership may divide into smaller groups, called units, which meet for discussion. Units are effective for different interest groups or when members are scattered over a large geographic area.

Members meet to study and to discuss issues such as voting rights, land use, taxes, water resources, human needs, international trade and issues of local concern. All League meetings are open to the public.

Each local League holds an Annual Meeting to elect officers, set local dues, and adopt local programs, bylaws and budget. All members can and should attend the Annual Meeting.

CONVENTIONS AND COUNCILS

The national Convention—for the League of Women Voters of the United States—is held biennially in even-numbered years. Delegates are elected by local Leagues in numbers proportionate to their membership. Any voting member of the League is eligible to serve as a Convention delegate. Observers and guests may attend but not vote. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support, and bylaws. They elect officers for the next biennium.

The national Council is held in odd-numbered years. Voting members include two delegates from each state plus the national Board of Directors. The League of Women Voters of Oregon holds its Convention in odd-numbered years and Council in even-numbered years, using similar rules.

LEAGUE LANGUAGE

<i>Board</i>	Administrative body consisting of officers plus elected and appointed Directors.
<i>Concurrence</i>	General agreement of League members to a statement of position written by the Board or other group at any level of League. Concurrence is often used to update an existing position.
<i>Consensus</i>	General agreement of League members following thorough study and discussion. League positions are based on member consensus.
<i>Education Fund</i>	A separate organization established by the League to accept tax-deductible contributions, the funds of which can be used only for educational or Voter Service activities, such as a League study or <i>Voters' Guide</i> .
<i>Governance</i>	One of the four areas in which League studies and acts. Governance refers to the workings of the three branches of government, especially state legislatures and Congress, where laws are made. It includes taxation and other financial matters of the state or nation.
<i>International Relations</i>	The relationship of our country to other nations in trade, peacekeeping, the United Nations, etc. This is the second major area of League concern.
<i>Local Item</i>	A topic of concern and possible action in the city or county of a local League.
<i>Natural Resources</i>	A third major area of League interest. It includes air and water quality, land use, energy, transportation, and waste disposal.
<i>Nonpartisan</i>	Describes the League's policy of not supporting or opposing political parties or candidates.

balanced election information and does *not* state League positions

PUBLICATIONS

League publications are important tools for carrying out our purpose. They are researched, written and distributed by members at every level. State and national catalogs are available. Publications may be purchased by members and by the public.

The *Voter* is the official name of the newsletter at every level of League, though some local Leagues have their own titles. Local newsletters are usually printed monthly and the state *Voter* quarterly. The national *Voter* is currently printed three times a year. LWVUS now has a newsletter on line.

FINANCE

League is a nonprofit organization that must have adequate financing 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 income factor in local League budgets. Each local League decides the amount of dues and the method for collecting them. Dues can be paid on the membership anniversary or at the beginning of the fiscal year. A large portion of the dues, called Per Member Payment or PMP, goes for the support of the state and national levels. The League conducts fundraising campaigns at every level to augment income from dues. Dues are not tax-deductible.

Both the League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters of Oregon have separate Education Funds. These funds qualify as 501c (3) organizations under the Internal Revenue Code and may accept tax-deductible contributions. These funds must be used for Voter Service

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 the 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 government should be responsive to the will of the people; that it 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 issues members choose for concentrated study and action. At each year's program planning meeting, members discuss ideas for local and state or national program topics or studies. Proposals are submitted to the appropriate Board of Directors. The Board then considers the proposals, formulates a recommended program and presents it to the membership at the Annual Meeting of the local League or to the delegates at the state or national Convention. Not-recommended items can also be considered at each level.

Such issues must fall within League principles and must be ones on which government action can be taken. Final decisions on state and national program are made by a vote of the delegates to the respective Convention. Members decide local League program at their Annual Meeting. Once a study has been adopted, the Board appoints a chairperson of the "resource" or study committee and other members are solicited to serve on the committee.

The resource committee gathers information on the study item, analyzes information, clarifies issues, and identifies problems. The committee presents all sides of the issue to members. The study may include tours, guest speakers, interviews and other activities. When the study has been completed, a document is published.

Before the League can act, 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.

League positions can also be reached through 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.

ACTION

After reaching agreement and announcing a position, local, state or national Leagues take action by:

- Lobbying
- Working with other organizations (coalitions)
- Speaking out through letter-writing and e-mail campaigns and through visits to Legislators and public officials. Based on our positions, we support or oppose legislation, ballot measures, etc.
- Publishing and distributing pertinent materials
- Testifying at legislative and administrative hearings
- Monitoring elections and other government activities
- Litigating to help clarify laws in the public interest

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

CITIZEN INFORMATION

(supported by Education Fund)

Educating citizens about government is a major League activity. Through community handbooks, political directories, and factual studies of issues, the League provides unbiased information necessary for an informed electorate. Community organizations often call upon the League for speakers on selected topics about government.

VOTER SERVICE (supported by Education Fund)

The League encourages citizens to register, vote and take part in government and politics. League members register voters, sponsor candidate and issue forums/debates, and provide information about voting. The *LWVOR Voters' Guide* is an important resource for state elections. It provides objective,