



OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

The Basics

The League's program consists of those governmental issues that the League has chosen for concerted study and action at the national, state or local level. The program process is specified in the bylaws and includes the following steps:

- Formal adoption (by members at an annual meeting or by state/national convention delegates) of an issue for study.
- Member study and agreement on broad concepts.
- Formulation of a position by the appropriate board of directors.
- Action as directed by the board of directors.
- Annual or biennial re-adoption of the position.

Local Leagues may work simultaneously on local, state, national and (if applicable) regional program issues, but action may be taken only in those areas where there is member understanding and agreement. Issues reflect community concerns and range from local park facilities to election reform, from childcare to nuclear waste disposal, from air pollution to international trade, from mental health to energy policy. (The national League's positions on issues can be found in [Impact on Issues](#) .)

Studies and Program Adoption

League program arises from the suggestions of members. At every level of the League, the board of directors is responsible for reviewing and discussing these suggestions, formulating them in appropriate language, and recommending all or some of them for adoption according to procedures specified in the bylaws. A local League's "action" or advocacy program is determined by members at its annual meeting; state and national programs are voted upon by delegates at state and national League conventions. In the course of the program adoption discussion, members often give suggestions to the board on scope of inquiry, timing, emphasis and ways to handle the study and/or action phases.

Reaching Member Agreement

Before the League can take action, members must agree in broad terms on what they think about various aspects of the policy issue. The nature of the issue will affect how it is studied and how positions are reached. The board usually selects the method to be used: consensus (where agreement is reached using League responses to specific questions) or concurrence (where agreement or a vote on a pre-stated position is required).



The technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement is consensus by group discussion. It is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the *overall sense of the group* as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a meeting of the full membership or a series of smaller discussion meetings.

Regardless of the method used, it is essential that members have an opportunity to become informed before being asked to make decisions on the issue under consideration. It is through this process that League members become educated on a given issue, and this is what makes subsequent League action on that issue uniquely credible and respected. During the study phase, members have an opportunity to examine the facts and key pro/con points. They are encouraged to discuss the political realities of action and to contribute ideas for the board to consider when it formulates an action strategy after a position is reached. If the League has a position on a given issue, action can be taken as appropriate. The issue does not need to be studied each time action is thought to be necessary.

Formulating League Positions

A League's position reflects membership understanding and agreement on a particular public policy issue. In formulating a position, either prior to seeking member agreement through concurrence or following member agreement through consensus, the board must keep in mind the importance of wording the position in terms broad enough to enable the League to initiate, support or oppose a variety of specific legislative and executive proposals over a period of time.

Determining whether consensus has been achieved and how it should be expressed is the responsibility of the board. Through an interpretive process, the board first evaluates the reports of member views and then determines the broad areas of agreement and disagreement that emerge.

Once a League board has finalized a position on an issue, it is announced to members and can be shared with the public. It becomes part of the League's position statements, and the board can begin taking action on it immediately. Like all statements of position, it must be readopted each year by League members at the annual meeting (or biennial convention) in order to remain on the program of issues for possible action.

A local League's views during a regional, state or national study do not constitute a final League position and should not be publicized, either to members or to the public. In this case, each local board's responsibility is to report its members' areas of agreement and its level of member participation to the regional, state or national board. In turn, the appropriate board analyzes the member agreement reports from local Leagues, develops a position statement that reflects member thinking and announces the position to members and the public. That position is then available immediately to be used as the basis for action.



Impact on Issues

The publication *Impact on Issues: A Guide to Public Policy Positions*, contains all LWVUS positions agreed to through study, consensus and concurrence. It provides invaluable information and history for Leagues wishing to take action. National positions can serve as the basis for action at the state and local levels, as well as nationally. You may wish to contact the LWVUS for assistance in applying national positions locally or in your state.

The League's Principles

In addition to positions on public policy issues, *Impact on Issues* lists the League's Principles. These are broad "concepts of government" to which the League subscribes. They can serve as a basis for support for: responsible, responsive, efficient, representative government; protection of the right to vote of every citizen; support for free public education; and international cooperation, for example. However, since they are broadly worded, caution should be used in applying them to specific issues.

Key Points of the Study Process – Local Leagues and Members:

It is important to remember that the study process is a cooperative effort between the local League board and the study committee. It is the board's responsibility to monitor the entire process to ensure that the membership is able to come to consensus in an unbiased and nonpartisan atmosphere.