

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ORANGE, DURHAM, AND CHATHAM COUNTIES



NEW MEMBER HANDBOOK

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(Originally published by the LWVs of Iowa and North Carolina. Edited and
reprinted by LWVDC in 2009)

United States Constitution – Article XIX

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

--Ratified August 26, 1920

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 all ages and backgrounds.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the League of Women Voters 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.

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.

MEMBERSHIP

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

- Voting members are citizens at least 18 years old who have paid dues.
- Associate members are under 18 years old or are non-citizens who have paid dues.

- Members-at-Large have paid national League dues.
- 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 pays one half of dues.

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

ORGANIZATION

The League of Women Voters works on 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 the 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. 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 State and National Conventions are held biennially. They are composed of delegates elected by local Leagues. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention delegate. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support, and bylaws, and they elect officers for the next two years. LWWNC has conventions in odd-numbered years and councils in even-numbered years, whereas LWWUS has conventions in even-numbered years and councils in odd numbered years.

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 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 organizations 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 making 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 not 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 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 the 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 of boards can concur with recommendations or 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 e-mail 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 policy-making decisions
- Monitoring elections and other government activities
- Litigating to help clarify laws in the public interest

VOTER 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.

CITIZEN INFORMATION

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

NEWSLETTERS

The newsletter called *The Voter* is sent by each League level to its members. Local *Voters* are usually published monthly, state *Voters* are published quarterly and the

national *Voter* is published bimonthly. In most recent years these newsletters have been sent out electronically.

FINANCE

The League is a nonprofit 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. A large portion of the dues, called per member payment, goes for the support of the state and national levels.

To augment income for members, the League conducts fund-raising campaigns at each level. Both the Citizens Information Service at the state level and the Education Fund at the national level 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.

LEAGUE LANGUAGE

CEF/ED Fund - Citizen Information Service (state level) or Education Fund (national level) – a branch of the League whose activities are limited to education and are therefore eligible to be funded by tax-deductible contributions.

Consensus – The process for reaching member agreement on selected issues that members have studied. It can also refer to the agreement itself.

Local Item – A topic concerning local government, chosen by members for study and action

Observers – League members who attend and monitor meetings of government councils, boards and commissions

Orientation – A briefing about the League – its history, purpose, policy, and achievements

PMP – Per member payment – monetary support for the state and national levels decided by convention delegates

Units – Small discussion groups – used mostly by larger Leagues to accommodate the needs of all members

Voter Service – The highly visible year-round service of registering voters and giving factual information to voters on candidates and issues

A HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA THE EARLY YEARS

The League of Women Voters – and therefore also the North Carolina League of Women Voters – grew directly from the suffragist movement. Suffragists organized in North Carolina as early as 1913. However, woman's suffrage was never popular with North Carolina legislators, and they successfully defeated ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Finally, in 1971, North Carolina ratified it.

On September 24, 1920, Miss Gertrude Weil, President of the Equal Suffrage Association of North Carolina, called an organizational meeting for a State League of Women Voters. On Thursday, October 7, 1920, in Greensboro, the women assembled elected their first slate of officers and their first chairman of committees – all seasoned suffragists. They also agreed that the Leagues within the State League would be county Leagues.

The North Carolina League reported in 1930 that four leagues were celebrating their tenth birthdays: the Wake County League, the Duke University League, the Goldsboro League, and the Mecklenburg County League. There is no other evidence that the four were founded that early, and there is no positive evidence which League came first.

From the beginning, the North Carolina League of Women Voters was a small but formidable force in state government. It organized not only its members but also the women in other organizations throughout the state to bring their pressure to bear, particularly for education and the working child, raising the age of consent from 14 to 16, improving the justice system particularly for women and children, and surveying the working conditions of women in industry.

The State League began to falter in 1932. By 1936, apparently only the Mecklenburg League was still in existence, and the National League closed NCLWV down.

In 1951, North Carolina women organized a new state League, this time called the League of Women Voters of North Carolina. It continues to this day.