

The Road from Study to Action: A Guide to Local Program

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INTRODUCTION: The League Study

The study of governmental issues is one of the basic functions of The League of Women Voters. Study is undertaken at all three levels: national, state, and local and leads to both education and advocacy, two of the basic missions of the organization. The League's process for study has acquitted a solid reputation for its in-depth and unbiased exploration of an issue submitted to its grassroots membership for informed discussion. Consensus or concurrence of the members on various aspects of this issue results in a League program position. Such a position becomes the foundation for League advocacy (action).

While the study process may sound complicated and labor intensive, it is based on sound principles, which are designed to produce a credible, unbiased product and, at the same time, maximize member input and involvement. And a local study is within the capabilities of a League of any size. Large Leagues have the person power to take on large, complicated issues. Leagues with fewer resources undertake more limited studies. For instance, one League may have the resources to perform a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of its community's transportation system, while another League may limit a similar study to the system's provision of services to the handicapped, possible planning to expand the study to other groups at a later time.

Regardless of circumstances, local League should seriously consider, as need arise, conducting a local issue study, which properly conducted and publicized, has enormous potential to increase membership, visibility, and support while performing an important, if not unique, services for the community.

Points to Consider When Adopting Studies

1. League studies evolved during a time when there were few organizations with resources to devote to studying issues. Today, there are many organizations studying issues. This is a significant cultural change.
2. League action evolved during a time when there were few paid lobbyists. This is a significant cultural change.
3. League operates in a deliberative style utilizing slow communications media (monthly or quarterly publications, monthly/annual/unit meetings, etc.). For the most part, other organizations and business, including government, operate at a much faster tempo. This is a significant cultural change.
4. Today's issues are extremely complex not easily lending themselves to thorough study within the League's framework. Nor can we compete with the "think tank" operations that are so well funded.
5. Networks of institutes/organizations operate today throughout 50 states and overseas. They are connected by intranets, fax, and video conferences and staffed by experts who are well acquainted with how to feed the press. Issues can emerge instantly.
6. These institutes/organizations are our competition. They compete for corporate and foundation resources, media attention, and the attention/support of policy makers and public. They develop and advance positions with lightning speed, and modify them quickly in response to environmental conditions. Many young people who might join the League, now get paid to enjoy the opportunity to influence public affairs faster.
7. Well written, general positions have served the League well over time. Today, because of the complexity of issues, even our opposition can agree with many positions. In other words, they are apple pie and motherhood in some instances.

8. Today's organizations are specialized. They don't claim that *all* public policy is their domain. They are able to adapt much faster than the League is able to do. League has become spread too thin trying to be all things to all people.
9. It is a myth that multi-issues bring the League members. Our membership statistics testify otherwise.
10. Today's working women do not have time to read, study, and absorb voluminous study materials. Often they cannot participate in consensus meetings.
11. The League's consensus process comes into question because so few people participate in the study/consensus process. The LWVF could not reach consensus on two recent studies when the number of participants was too small a fraction of the total membership.
12. Sometimes study chairs come to the process with preconceived ideas. We tend to go to the same sources for information.
13. There is always a cost associated with studies which often cannot be adequately funded in the League.
14. Today's volunteer wants to participate and see quick results.

CHAPTER 1. Choosing a Study Topic

Choosing a study topic involves the entire membership, and the process is usually begun at a program planning meeting early in the calendar year. This should allow sufficient time for the local League board to consider the suggestions made at the planning meeting and to publish them in the annual meeting workbook before the members make their final choice by vote at the annual meeting. State or national program planning needs to be done at this time also, depending on whether it is an even-numbered year (state) or an odd-numbered year (national). Some Leagues do both at the same meeting. If so, it is important to keep them separate.

It is the program vice-president's responsibility to organize the local program planning meeting and to prepare any materials she/he deems useful in order to stimulate the members' thinking on a variety of options. Below is a list of tools to consider using.

Sources of study topics

- Your own members
- Members of prior study committees
- Your League's observers at various governmental meetings
- The local media and other community resources
- Suggestions by public officials, civic leaders, members of local boards and commissions
- Other Leagues or similar organizations
- A local program exploratory committee formed to research possible program issues

For background information

- *Impact On Issues*, LWVUS (An explanation of LWVUS program.)
- *Agenda for Action*, LWVO (An explanation of state program.)
- Local League bylaws
- Current local League positions
- *In League*, LWVUS

Be careful to avoid duplication of past studies. Members may recommend an update or more action on an existing position. If so, be sure to communicate their wishes to the board.

When guiding the members' deliberations in choosing their favorite issue, it is important to remind them to consider the following criteria for choosing program:

- Is this issue politically relevant? Can local government address it? Will it have long-term impact? Is it timely?
- Can the League be effective on this issue? Is there community interest and possible support? Will it generate opportunities for education and advocacy by the League?
- Does the issue fall within the League Principles? (See Appendix I.)
- Is it a manageable topic for your League to study? Are the members and the resources available? Is there strong member interest? Is there a potential for coalitions with other community groups?

Be sure to steer members away from issues that come under the state or national Leagues' jurisdiction. For more information about state program, see *Agenda for Action*, LWVO; for more information about national program, see *Impact on Issues*, LWVUS.

Tips for a Successful Program Planning Meeting

Tantalize your members with some “hot” topics when announcing the meeting in your VOTER. Encourage them to bring their own “hot” topic to advocate to their colleagues at the meeting. See a sample article for your local VOTER in Appendix II.

Explain the program planning process to the members (see Chapter 8: Summary). Emphasize the importance of their participation in the discussion and of their individual input during the selection of a topic for study (They are the League!).

Review with the members the criteria listed above (or distribute a list of them). Remind them in the VOTER that bringing their own copy of current local League program would be very helpful.

Use a seasoned discussion leader to keep the debate moving, on tract, and stimulating. Appoint a reliable recorder to note highlights and final results of the discussion. Ensure that everyone has a chance to participate.

The format of the local program planning meeting may vary depending on the size of your League membership or the preference of your program vice-president and/or board. In a large League, the traditional small unit meetings work well, always conducive to active involvement and vivid deliberations. Another possible option is a general meeting divided into two parts: the first to be a presentation by community leaders and/or experts on various issues of the day, followed by small group discussions by the members as in unit meetings. Or, if your calendar permits, both a general meeting with presenters of issues and subsequent unit meetings for membership discussions could be scheduled. The least desirable program planning method is a tear-off in your VOTER, but if this is the only feasible method, it may certainly be used. This method does not allow interactive involvement of members.

Giving the Proposed Study Focus and Scope

Once the members have chosen one or several possible study items, they need to express their recommendation in a clear and concise statement, giving the study FOCUS and SCOPE.

The FOCUS is the main statement of the topic to be studied. Wording should be brief and intelligible to both League members and the community at large. It should state its intent clearly: a study may be broad, leading to a fairly general position or it may be more specific, focusing on one aspect of a large issue. In any case, wording should be general enough to allow flexibility as the work proceeds.

Good Examples:

“A study of the feasibility of recycling in Hometown” (a rather broad topic)

“A study of housing alternatives for the elderly in Hometown” (more specific but still general.)

Bad examples:

“A study of recycling” or “A study of housing” (too vast)

“A study to determine whether housing for elderly in Hometown should be integrated with other public housing or be separate and what types of facilities should it include” (too specific)

Implied conclusions and negative wording should always be avoided.

The SCOPE provides a more detailed explanation of the focus, outlining the areas to be explored, the emphasis to be given a particular aspect of the issue and the general parameter of the study.

Good Examples:

“Study the range of possible methods for recycling waste products, with particular attention to paper recycling.”

“Study methods of private and public collections of recyclable materials, including cost-effectiveness.”

“Study the current housing stock for the elderly; assess future needs, funding availability, community resources and support.”

Bad Examples:

“Interview senior citizens and agency heads.”

“Organize go-see rip to elderly housing sites.”

“Plan a general meeting with housing experts and senior citizens’ advocates as speakers.”

After the program planning meeting(s) the program vice-president reads the reports she/he receives from the various units or groups and submits to the board a prioritized list of all the topics suggested.

The board reviews the proposed items to ensure that they fit all the League criteria and that there is not already a position (local, state or national) covering any of them. The board then decides which study item(s) it will recommend to the membership at the annual meeting (usually this decision is based on the strength of the grassroots support an issue has received.)

If no clear choice emerges, board members may decide to recommend one or more of the items discussed and listed by the members (basing their choice on League criteria and their own preference).

The board also reviews the wording of the focus and the scope of the selected study(ies) and makes any changes it deems necessary. This then becomes the “recommended program,” and generally consists of several choices for the membership to vote on at the annual meeting; whether one or more studies are chosen depends on the resources (people and finances) of the particular League.

The annual meeting workbook *must* list both the “recommended program” and the “not-recommended program” i.e., all topics discussed (suggested) by members during the program planning process.

CHAPTER 2. Adopting a Local Study

The recommended program and the not-recommended program must be submitted to the membership before the deadline specified in the local bylaws. This is usually done by publishing the lists in the annual meeting workbook.

At the annual meeting only the items recommended by the board and the not-recommended items listed along with them may be debated, amended and voted on. Amendments may not change the intent or enlarge the scope of the study. Members vote to adopt program for the ensuing year according to the provisions of the local bylaws.

CHAPTER 3. Conducting the Study

After adoption of the local program, it is the responsibility of the program vice-president, with the help of other board members, to select a chair for the group of volunteers who will perform the necessary tasks to complete the study. This group is called the study or resource committee.

The Study Chair. Ideally, the candidate for this job should have a strong interest in, but not a biased position on, the issue to be studied. Knowledge is not necessary but enthusiasm and commitment are a plus! The basic qualifications of the chair should be:

- Strong leadership and organizational skills;
- Familiarity with League procedures and standards;
- Strong interest in and enthusiasm for the issue to be studied;
- Ability to work well with diverse and often strong-minded people;
- Willingness to devote all the time and energy needed to bring the study to its conclusion.

Once chosen, it is helpful if the study chair is appointed to the board. This will permit continuous interaction with board members and keep them informed on the progress of the study.

The local study is an important priority for the League. It can become a membership recruiting tool as well as a means of promoting League visibility in the community. Remember that the board must approve any public announcements or press releases on the study.

The study chair's responsibilities are:

- To recruit, with the help of the program vice-president, a committee large enough to handle all aspects of the study;
- To create and coordinate a timeline and a calendar for the study (working the calendar backwards from the following year's annual meeting is a good plan);
- To schedule and chair regular committee meetings with a specific agenda for each meeting;
- To delegate job and research assignments; to keep the study moving and on track;
- To disseminate information on the subject of the study to the membership through periodic newsletter articles;
- To organize, with the help of the committee members, periodic membership meetings or general meetings on the study issue to educate members and the community at large on the various aspects of the topic being explored;

- To develop, together with the committee, a set of consensus questions for the membership to discuss and answer at the conclusion of the study;
- To submit regular reports as well as the consensus questions to the board for its review and endorsement;
- To keep in close communication with the program vice-president on all facets of the study (always invite the program vice-president to attend committee meetings);
- To draw up a budget for the study, obtain board approval for expenses in advance, keep track of disbursements for the treasurer's records;
- To organize a briefing meeting for resource people and discussion leaders before consensus meetings take place, draw up a consensus meeting discussion plan for them, and rehearse it with them.

Clearly, serving as study chair is a job for an energetic, creative, positive and people-oriented person, requiring substantial commitment, but one that provides invaluable enrichment and satisfaction.

The Study Committee. Recruitment of committee members is the joint responsibility of the board, the program vice-president and the study chair. See Appendix II for helpful tips.

The size of the committee depends on the scope of the study and member interest. It should be large enough to handle the work without burdening any individual member unduly, but not so large as to become unwieldy.

The composition of the committee should represent a cross-section of the local League itself, expressing a range of opinions and viewpoints. Recruitment may come from a variety of sources. Vocal participation in the selection process of the study topic may indicate strong interest or new members may wish to become involved and educated in community issues. No one needs be an expert on the subject but may well become one in the course of a League study (there are many such examples in League history!).

Finally, any task requested of committee members should be manageable and strictly voluntary.

The responsibilities of the study committee are:

- Developing an “outlook for work;”
- Gathering information and preparing material to share with the general membership in a Facts & Issues or similar final report;
- Developing questions for discussion and consensus by the membership for prior board approval;
- Planning and organizing workshops, unit discussion meetings, panel presentations in general meetings, or any other means of informing and educating the members and, if possible, the community at large, on the issue under study.

The Outlook for Work is a general plan for the study based on its focus and scope as well as on the time available for the work involved. It should include:

- A statement of the study item
- A definition of the scope
- Possible areas of member agreement
- A calendar with deadlines for research, interviews, go-see tours and other activities, including preparation of written material (Facts & Issues)
- Suggestions for resource materials needed and for possible publications

Plans for member/community education and involvement (number and types of meetings needed)
Possible action to which the study might lead

This outlook for work should be in the hands of every committee member. While important for keeping the work moving and on track, it should be flexible enough to accommodate emergencies as well as new developments in the issue being studied. Remember to allow sufficient time for the editing and the production of any written materials. The board reviews the outlook for work to incorporate it in the total workload for the year. For sample questions to consider when developing the outlook for work, see Appendix IV.

Tasks for the Committee Members

Research. It is of paramount importance that both pros and cons of all aspect of the issue be researched and included in the final material. Printed resources may consist of:

- Current laws, ordinances, statutes, codes, etc. applicable locally;
- Publications such as books by experts on the subject, pamphlets from organizations or agencies, studies by other Leagues, newspapers, periodicals, etc.
- Budgets and minutes from appropriate government departments or agencies;
- Pamphlets, fact sheets, and reports from conferences and forums on the issue.

Interviews. People are among the best sources of information. They may include:

- Local officials involved or interested in the issue;
- Heads of agencies that work with the issue
- Community activists interested in the issue
- An individual with knowledge about or experience with the issue (see Appendix V for interview tips).

Questionnaires or surveys. Feedback from appropriate groups in your or other communities, as well as from other Leagues, is often very helpful.

Community monitoring. Observers should attend the meetings of any local government body, agency, board, or commission likely to be involved in taking action on the study item.

Clippings. A committee member should monitor the print media for articles to clip as well as radio and television for comments relevant to the study topic.

Arranging a tour of, or planning a visit to, an appropriate site or facility for the committee or the membership at large to help gain a better understanding of the issue.

Organizing a general meeting with invited experts as speakers or panelists.

Writing periodic *VOTER* articles on the topic to keep the membership informed and interested while the study is in progress and the final report for the membership (generally called Facts & Issues in the League) to peruse before the consensus meeting. More than one committee members may be needed for these tasks.

Editing all written material.

Acting as a resource for the general membership when the study is completed and consensus is taken. In a large League every committee member may have to take on this task.

The study committee chair should keep a complete file of all the information gathered and ensure that each committee member be given copies of any material pertinent to his/her work.

Membership Involvement. Facilitating periodic member involvement during the course of the study is an important responsibility of the study committee. Be creative and incorporate the study into the general program as much as possible. The members need to be as well informed as possible when coming to the consensus meeting. To achieve this goal, here are some suggestions:

- Publish articles in the VOTER at regular intervals
- Organize at least one general meeting or public forum (see Appendix VI)
- Plan discussion groups (unit meetings) half-way through the study to familiarize the members with the results of the research in progress and the issues they will confront when asked to reach consensus (a committee member acts as resource or an outside expert may be invited to assist in the discussion).
- Plan a go-see tour if appropriate and feasible. This is always popular, great fun and very instructive.

Remember, any of the proposals suggested above should be submitted to the board for approval.

Presentation of the Material. Once as much information as possible has been gathered it is necessary to compile and edit the collected data into a clear, concise and objective report. Charts and graphs should be included when appropriate. The information presented should be:

- Factual,
- Reduced to its essentials (too much detail can be confusing or tiring),
- Well balanced among pro and con opinions,
- Clearly attributed whenever appropriate,
- Sufficient to cover all areas in which consensus is being sought,
- Written in clearly understandable language (avoid “shoptalk” often used by experts) and presented in a well organized, attractive and readable format.

The members should receive the final report and consensus questions well in advance of the consensus meeting. If the subject is of great community interest and the material compiled by the study committee substantial enough, the committee and board may want to explore the possibility of producing a pamphlet for sale or free distribution to the public.

CHAPTER 4. Reaching Member Agreement

After becoming informed on the issue selected for study, members should be asked to attempt agreement on some of the important aspects of this issue.

To achieve this, the League may use any of the following methods:

- Unit discussion and consensus;
- Unit discussion and concurrence;
- Questionnaire sent in a special mailing or in the VOTER;
- A VOTER tear-off to fill out and send in;
- Any other means that will adequately inform the members and give them an opportunity to respond (e.g. background information and consensus questions presented on a web page with responses given by e-mail).

The board, with the advice of the study committee, chooses the process to be used depending on the nature of the issue or on the circumstances facing a particular League at the time. It is important to remember that any method that precludes free-flowing discussion among members is always the least desirable.

Consensus. The preferred and most commonly used decision-making process in the League is called “consensus.” It is defined as “collective opinion or accord.” It is NOT simple majority or unanimity, but a general and substantial agreement of the members present at the meeting. It is an evolutionary process reached through exhaustive and free-flowing discussion among members in which all points of view have been considered and a “sense of the group” emerges. Voting is *not* a part of the process. Minority opinions are always noted but they do not affect the final consensus response.

Concurrence. Another member-agreement technique sometimes used by the League is called “concurrence,” defined as “agreement with a position previously reached by another person or group.”

For example, a League may be asked to concur with:

- The recommendations of a resource committee, a unit group, or a task-force;
- Statements of agreement from a League board (national, state, or local);
- Positions reached by another League or Leagues;
- A position of their own of long standing which they wish to reaffirm.

Concurrence works best when duplication of research and analysis done by others can be avoided and the action phase of program can thus be reached sooner. National positions needing urgent action are sometimes presented to local League members for concurrence (e.g., the League’s positions on choice and on gun control). It may also be used to update, expand, clarify or reaffirm an existing position or to join forces with a neighboring League or Leagues on an issue of regional interest.

Concurrence differs from consensus in significant ways:

- Members are asked to respond (concur or not concur) to a statement of position reached by another League (local, state or national) or to one prepared for them by a committee of their own members or by their board.

- The concurrence statement must be judged exactly as written and may not be changed or amplified. It is a “yes” or “no” question.

When considering whether to utilize the concurrence process a League board should examine the following questions:

- How important is it to save time?
- How much time can be saved?
- How well can members be educated about the issue?
- How will the concurrence position and its background be presented to the member?
- Who will have the responsibility for carrying the process through?

The Consensus Questions. The most important tool for members in a consensus discussion is a set of well written consensus questions. These must be submitted to the board for review and approval and should be distributed to the membership or printed in the VOTER at least two weeks in advance of the consensus meeting.

Drafting consensus questions should start early in the study process to help the committee members zero in on the important aspects of the issue and to put some clear guidelines into place. The objectives should be:

- To stimulate lively discussion;
- To provide guidelines for a logical decision-making process among the members;
- To obtain membership agreement on general concepts within the focus and the scope chosen for the study;

To that effect, good consensus questions should be:

- Short, simple, and easy to understand by non-experts (no technical language, no acronyms);
- Strictly within the range of the focus and scope of the study;
- Unbiased, non-suggestive, free of “loaded” words;
- Such that they can be answered by any thoughtful person based on the material submitted;
- Open-ended to allow expanded discussion (avoid “yes” or “no” and “true” or “false” questions);
- Targeted to future action possibilities;
- Broad enough to produce a flexible and lasting position for your League;
- Limited to a manageable number within the time allotted to discussion and agreement.

See examples of consensus questions in Appendix VII.

The Consensus Meeting. A successful consensus meeting is well prepared and well run. The purpose of the meeting is to present the results of the study to the members, to stimulate and guide their discussion and to record their responses to the consensus questions.

Members should have received and read all written material in advance. A member of the study committee, acting *as resource person*, introduces the subject by giving a brief summary of the committee’s findings before the start of the discussion and supplies factual information as needed.

The *discussion leader* should have a discussion outline based on the consensus questions and the meeting’s timeline. Discussion should be open and free-flowing but kept strictly on track so that all consensus questions can be given equal consideration.

A *recorder*, appointed in advance of the meeting, is responsible for noting salient points of the debate and responses to consensus questions, including all minority points of view. It is important that the recorder read these notes to the members before the meeting is adjourned.

Prior to the consensus meeting(s) a briefing meeting should be held as a rehearsal for resource persons and discussion leaders. This is especially useful if a number of unit meetings are held to reach consensus: every unit should benefit from the same discussion plan.

The resource person is a well-informed member of the study committee, who attends a consensus meeting to act as a resource, i.e., to answer members' questions about background material, facts, statistics, etc. during the discussion. The resource person introduces the topic and its principal issues and may also distribute a handout with helpful data relevant to the consensus questions. There must be no perception of bias on the part of the resource person at any time during this meeting.

The discussion leader is the key to a smooth and productive meeting, whose job is to:

- Remind those present that only League members may participate in the consensus process;
- Pick up from the resource person's introduction of the material and start off the discussion;
- Be inclusive of every member present;
- Allow dissent to be heard fully;
- Diplomatically keep the discussion focused on the consensus questions;
- Keep members from arguing with one another;
- Keep track of time and move the discussion on as soon as no more new points of view emerge;
- Recognize when consensus cannot be reached and move on;
- Recognize when consensus is achieved and recapitulate the agreement before moving on;
- Make sure the members hear and agree with the recorder's summary of the discussion results before they leave the meeting.

The discussion leader's job is greatly enhanced by a well conceived discussion plan prepared by the study committee chair who presents it to all resource persons and discussion leaders at the briefing meeting. See examples of discussion questions in Appendix VIII.

The recorder has the responsibility of understanding the gist of the members' discussion and of noting their conclusions as accurately as possible. The notes taken will help determine if consensus has been reached and can be useful when writing the position statement.

A recorder's notes should include:

- The group's responses to the consensus questions;
- Areas of agreement and disagreement;
- Minority views and their strength;
- Areas in which the group was undecided or needed more information;
- The number of participants.

The recorder should be free to ask for clarifications whenever necessary so that there will be no doubt as to what the members have concluded.

The consensus meeting has achieved its goal when it has educated League members on the many facets of the topics they chose to study, sparked lively debate around the consensus questions posed to the, and allowed them to reach well-informed, well thought-out "citizen decisions" on the issues discussed.

CHAPTER 5. Formulating a Position Statement

The Study Committee's Wrap-up Meeting. As soon as possible after consensus has been taken, the study committee prepares for the board a comprehensive summary of the consensus discussions, including:

- The number of members attending each consensus meeting;
- The areas and the degree of agreement;
- The minority views and their strength;
- The areas in which the group was undecided or laced sufficient information to make a decision.

The committee formulates a position statement covering areas of agreement and based on perception of member intent for board approval. A position statement should be:

- Clear, succinct, and easily understood;
- Reflect all the broad areas of member-agreement; realistic in its scope and its goals;
- General and broad enough to allow the League to initiate, support, or oppose a variety of present and future proposals on the issue.

Often the position statement consists of a brief and very general statement, followed by a longer, more detailed explanation listing the desired goals agreed upon by the membership and giving the rationale for the position. See examples in Appendix IX.

In addition to the committee's final and comprehensive report on the consensus meetings' outcome, the board should have access to any summaries, charts, compilations used, as well as to all recorders' notes, in order to make the final decision as to whether there IS substantial enough member agreement to support a position.

The Board's Approval. There are no hard and fast rules for determining consensus, but the general guidelines below may be followed:

- If there is substantial agreement with only minor disagreement, it is considered that agreement has been reached.
- If a majority agrees, but a substantial minority does not, then, in the League's sense, consensus has not been reached.

It is not unusual for a League not to reach consensus. The issues Leaguers choose to study are often controversial and closely debated. To have studied and understood a topic important to the community is a worthy accomplishment in itself.

Once the board finds that consensus has indeed been reached, it reviews the position statement. In doing so, the board members should ensure that the position statement truly reflects what the members agreed upon during the consensus process. Undecided areas and/or minority opinions should not be reflected. Board members should refrain from introducing new ideas and opinions into the position statement; they must have a clear understanding of the will of the membership and defer to it.

As soon as it is approved by the board, the new position statement becomes part of the League's program; from that point on, action based on it may be taken. It must be readopted by the membership at each annual meeting, along with all the other existing positions.

The new position should be immediately announced to the membership via the local VOTER with a summary of information about the consensus proceedings.

CHAPTER 6. Informing the Community

Good publicity about a local League study can stimulate membership growth and involvement, enhance fundraising efforts and raise the League's profile in the community.

The study committee chair should appraise the public relations (or community relations) vice-president of any activities during the study process which could lend themselves to publicity and involve the community.

These might include:

- The adoption of the study at the annual meeting;
- Any public meetings, forums, panel discussions, or go-see tours held for educational purposes;
- The publication of the results of the study (Facts & Issues);
- A press release or conference announcing the position statement adopted as a result of the study (with a brief explanation of the League's procedures leading up to the adoption of a position and of the anticipated League advocacy efforts concerning the position).

CHAPTER 7. Taking Action

At this point, the work of the study committee and its chair is complete. The program vice-president, action (or advocacy) vice-president, and the president take the responsibility of ensuring that the goals of the new position statement are promoted through aggressive advocacy whenever circumstances call for it.

According to LWVO policy "Action is our League effort to bring about governmental change based on the positions we derive through member study and consensus." Leagues can utilize their local positions, as well as state and national positions, to effectively lobby at the local level by:

- Contacting local officials, elected and appointed,
- Monitoring local boards and commissions,
- Testifying before meetings, such as those of city council or the school board,
- Writing letters to the editor of the local newspaper,
- Sponsoring a meeting to publicize a problem and offer solutions; and even by litigating.

Taking action generally produces positive community support for the League, but depending on the issue, it can create negative ramifications as well. Before making the final decision to act on an issue ask yourself:

- Under what position do you wish to act? Remember that Leagues only act on either a League position or principle.
- What do you wish to accomplish?
- Who is authorized to act and/or speak for your League?
- Will state or national or other Leagues be affected by this action? If so, is authorization needed from LWVO, LWVUS or other local Leagues before you act?

For more information about taking action on issues that affect other levels of the organization, consult “Taking Action: Guidelines for Local Leagues” in the latest edition of the League Directory & Handbook (LWVO).

CHAPTER 8. Summary

The study process is an important function of the League. It involves the entire membership, guided and informed in an unbiased manner by the study committee. The board, through the program vice-president, monitors all study activities to ensure the League Principles are followed.

The process is the same for all League program: national, state and local. Here are the major steps.

Step 1. Members consider various issues for possible study at the program planning meeting early in the year.

Step 2. Members adopt issue(s) for study at annual meeting.

Step 3. Study committee is formed and studies the issue in depth and without bias while educating the membership through *VOTER* articles, discussion meetings, presentations by experts, etc.

Step 4. Study committee prepares a written report (Facts & Issues) and develops consensus questions; both are sent to the membership in advance of the consensus meeting.

Step 5. Study committee develops consensus meeting discussion plan and briefs discussion leaders and resource people on conducting a successful consensus meeting.

Step 6. Members meet to discuss issue and answer consensus questions in an attempt to come to agreement.

Step 7. Study committee prepares report on result of consensus meeting(s) and drafts a position statement.

Step 8. Board reviews and approves results of consensus discussions and adopts position statement.

Step 9. Board is now ready for action on the study issue.

Step 10. Members reaffirm all local positions, including new one, at annual meeting.

APPENDIX I: League Principles

League 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 that 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 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 that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that 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.

Where Do the Principles Come From?

The Principles are “concepts of government” to which the League subscribes. These concepts are a direct descendant of the Platform, which served the League from 1942 to 1956 as the national repository for “principles supported and positions taken by the League as a whole in fields of government to which it has given sustained attention.” By 1956, the Platform had disappeared from the League vocabulary but the principles survived as “The Principles.” Since that time, the Principles have served two functions according to the LWVUS bylaws: (1) authorization for adoption of national, state and local program (Article XII), and (2) as a basis for taking action at the national, state and local levels (Article XII).

What About Action on the Principles?

The national board suggests that any action on the Principles be taken in conjunction with present League positions to which they apply and on which member agreement and understanding are known to exist. The Principles are rather broad when standing alone, so it is necessary to exercise a certain degree of caution when considering using them as a basis for action. Furthermore, since 1974 most of the Principles have been an integral part of the national program, most notably in the criteria for evaluating government action that appear at the end of the formal listing of program.

APPENDIX II: Sample Article for LWV HOMETOWN VOTER

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEAGUE STUDY

What do you want to study next year?

EDUCATION. How are our schools functioning? Does education in our city meet parents' expectations? Are we preparing our children to meet the challenges of the 21st Century? (Tailor questions to your own circumstances.)

CITY-SUBURBS RELATIONSHIP. Are suburbs draining the city's tax revenues? Should suburbs participate in the support of services provided by the city such as mass transit, the arts, etc.? Should suburbs help in providing housing and other services to the underprivileged of the city?

PLANNING AND ZONING. Is Hometown's growth adequately monitored to ensure well-balanced development? Can downtown be revitalized? How?

It is time again to take a close look at our immediate surroundings (city, county, region) and discuss the hot issues confronting us today or likely to confront us tomorrow. At our January unit meetings you will be asked to make suggestions for next year's local League program study to be adopted at the annual meeting on May 12-15, 2005.

Remember, we are a grassroots organization that relies on its members' ideas and choices for its program and eventual positions. So put on your thinking cap and come to the meetings brimming with suggestions. **IMPORTANT:** Bring your copy of current Hometown League program to the meeting.

When considering possible issues for study please take the following questions into account:

1. Is this issue politically relevant? Does it need government action? Will it have long-term impact?
2. Will there be member and community interest and support? Is there a current need for it to be addressed?
3. Can the League be effective on this issue? Does it fall within League Principles listed in Appendix I?
4. Will there be opportunities for effective League education and action?
5. Are there sufficient members and resources to carry through such a study?

APPENDIX III: Tips for Recruiting Committee Members

- Time is of the essence. Begin recruiting as soon as the study is adopted. Competition for volunteers is intense!
- Supporters of the issue in pre-adoption discussions and at the annual meeting are likely prospects. New members or returning members may welcome the opportunity to become involved.
- Members, former members, or prospective members whose work or previous volunteer activities are related to the study topic should also be contacted.
- Write a recruiting article in the Voter emphasizing the salient points of interest of the issue, the benefits of becoming involved, and describing clearly the parameters of a committee member's commitment.
- Always make personal contact with prospective study committee members.

When asking for a commitment to a study committee, be:

- Personal
- Positive (“great study, just right for your skills”)
- Specific and honest (describe the job and the time demands)
- Convincing (find reasons why this person is essential)
- Supportive (mention members/friends who have already committed)
- Enthusiastic about the study and the member you are trying to recruit.

Recruit committee members representing a range of opinions.

APPENDIX IV:
Questions for Developing an “Outlook for Work”

When planning tasks to be accomplished in the year ahead, the study committee might consider the following questions:

What is the history of this issue in your community?

What is the present situation?

What changes, if any, have occurred over the years?

What are the standards advocated by authorities on the subject? How does the situation in your community compare to these standards? To situations in other communities? If different, why?

What factors have influenced the present situation?

What are the alternatives?

What would be the effect of each alternative, including doing nothing?

All or any of the above questions could be used to shape an education program in the community.

APPENDIX V:

Tips For Conducting Interviews

There are no hard and fast rules in interviewing. Much depends on the conditions of the interview and the personality of the interviewee.

The purpose of an interview may be:

- To learn facts not otherwise obtainable
- To verify facts already obtained
- To find out where certain materials can be obtained and to gain access to such materials
- To elicit the interviewee's point of view and, at the same time, to inform him/her of the League's interest in a particular issue.

Before the interview:

- Be well informed on the subject. Have background material available to support your questions.
- Do some research on your interviewee, his/her point of view, personality, political agenda (if applicable).
- Know your purpose and stick to it.
- Plan questions carefully; they should be clear, directed at achieving your goals but never imply an answer.
- Make an appointment in advance, identify yourself as a League member, state your purpose for the interview, and give an estimate of the time you will need.
- Confirm the interview the day before; arrive promptly; bring a colleague (two remember better than one); be friendly, appreciative and complimentary.
- Explain again the purpose of the interview and how the information given will be used. Let the interviewee do the talking, take notes and request fact sheets or any other materials that may relate to the interview.
- Never express an opinion or engage in an argument. Keep a tight control of the course of the interview while being polite and tactful.
- Keep track of time and end the interview when promised and with due appreciation.
- Review the material with your colleague as soon as possible after the meeting. Separate fact from opinion and write a comprehensive report. It is always a good idea to send the interviewee a copy of your report along with a thank you note.

APPENDIX VI: Planning A General Meeting Or Public Forum

A League general meeting should always be open to the public. It is an educational tool for both members and the community at large. It increases League visibility and highlights its commitment to public service.

Planning. such a meeting requires several committee members under the supervision of the program vice-president. Some Leagues have a “facilities person” in charge of finding locations and supplying refreshment for events.

Location. A community meeting place, such as a school, library, community center, or a facility that relates to the study topic and can be toured, is an appropriate location and will probably be free of charge. The board will need to approve any meeting room expenses.

Evening meetings allow better attendance by the public. Be sure the area is well lit and that ample parking is available. Morning or lunch meetings can also be planned.

Format. Invite experts and public officials (if appropriate) as panelists, suggest the use of visual aids, if available, and *always* allow for audience participation in a question/answer segment.

Panel. A balanced panel of speakers is essential to a League forum. Choose speakers with differing points of view and appoint an experienced League moderator to allow them to respond to one another. Three or four panelists will make for a lively and diverse presentation. More may become confusing.

Preparation. (by the program vice-president and committee members) The following guidelines will help in your preparations for a successful forum.

1. Develop a list of potential panelists (in order of preference).
2. Invite them far in advance for the date set in your calendar; confirm their acceptance as soon as possible and supply them with background materials on your study and parameters for their presentation, possibly submitting questions developed by the study committee. Request biographical data for their introduction.
3. Reconfirm their commitment by telephone at least a week before the meeting.
4. Have one or two alternatives in mind in case a last-minute cancellation.
5. Prepare an introduction of the topic and of the panelists and moderator for either the League president or the program vice-president to deliver at the meeting.
6. Ensure that the public relations (community relations) vice-president is given all the necessary information well in advance to plan publicity for the event.
7. Ask the study committee to develop a set of questions for the question/answer segment in case the audience is unresponsive. These may be asked by the committee members.
8. Thank the panelists in writing or ask your League president to do so.

When planning a forum, ask other organizations interested in the same topic if they would like to co-sponsor. There is strength in numbers.

APPENDIX VII: Examples of Consensus Questions

Keeping in mind the objectives of and guidelines for good consensus questions explained in Chapter 4, here are a few examples:

Preferable: Do you favor long range planning for the county? If so, what guidelines should be used in developing the plans?

Not preferable: Do you favor the county's long range plan for 2005?

An answer to the second question would limit action to one specific proposal but answers to the first question would provide guidelines for the board to evaluate long range plans for 2009, etc.

Preferable: What types of social activities for the elderly should be implemented in our city?

Not preferable: Should there be social activities for the elderly in our city?

The first question allows members to discuss a whole range of options and to choose categories, which will engender a broad position. The second question requires a "yes" or "no" answer and is a dead end.

APPENDIX VIII: Examples of Discussion Questions

When League members leave a discussion meeting (or a consensus meeting) they should feel that they have had a lively exchange with friends and that they have learned a lot about an issue and understand it sufficiently to discuss with others.

Discussion questions should be worded to stimulate a wide ranging debate questions on the various aspects of the issue.

Examples:

1. What would it take to leave your car at home?

This provocative introductory question may bring out considerations of cost and convenience, of the problems of the current public transportation system, of the environmental risks and human stress resulting from individual car driving, etc.

2. What would be adequate library facilities to supply the needs of all our citizens?

This leaves many areas to be considered: number of facilities, accessibility to diverse neighborhoods, services to citizens in all age groups, etc.

3. How many books do you think are in our library?

This is a dead end question.

APPENDIX IX: Sample Position Statement

The sample position statement below is drawn from the LWV-Connecticut local study guide:

Following the study of libraries, members have agreed that:

- A new building is needed in a central location;
- Services – either small neighborhood branches
- There should be better cooperation between the library and the schools, the jail, the hospitals, and other institutions;
- The book collections should be increased

The position in brief could read:

Support of a new central library which provides expanded services.

The full statement of position would include both the details and the rationale:

The member of LWV-anytown believe that a new centrally located library building is needed in Anytown. In order to serve all the citizens, books must be available to all. Therefore, there should be small neighborhood branch facilities or bookmobiles so that access to library books and services is within walking distance of residents.

The book collection should be expanded to meet at least the criteria established for a city the size of Anytown.

In order to provide reading material for all people in Anytown, the library should arrange to lend books on an adequate basis to the schools, to people homebound or in hospitals, jails and institutions so that no one is denied access to books from the public library.

Both the rationale – that the public library is for everyone and its books should be accessible to all – and some of the specifics are included. Yet the wording does not set the number of books, the specific places that branches or the main library should be, nor the exact methods of serving various institutions. The board has room to maneuver, to act in support of, or opposition to, specific proposals.

Many other examples of excellent position statements can be found in the national, state and undoubtedly your own local program.