



New Member Handbook

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
MICHIGAN
2023**

LWVMI.org

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

- Mission: Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.
- Vision: We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate in the democratic process.
- Value: We believe in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy.

HISTORY

Carrie Chapman Catt and others organized the League of Women Voters of the United States in 1920. The League of Women Voters of Michigan was formed a year earlier on April 4, 1919 at a convention of the Michigan Equal Suffrage Association. 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 never supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office. Because of scrupulous adherence to this nonpartisan political policy, the League takes action only in the public interest and only on issues on which members have reached consensus after conducting studies. However, as individuals, League members are encouraged to join fully in the political process.

ORGANIZATION

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to all persons who are at least 16 years old.

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.

The League of Women Voters Education Fund, created to strengthen League activities in education and voter service, functions under the auspices of the League of Women Voters, but legally exists as a discrete organization. Contributions to the Education Fund can be considered tax-deductible. The Education Fund never advocates and never lobbies.

MEETINGS

Each local League determines its own schedule. 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 may attend the Annual Meeting.

PRINCIPLES

Governance

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 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 in the following ways. 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.
- adopt domestic policies which facilitate the solution of international problems.

Rights of US Residents

The League of Women Voters believes that:

- every citizen should be protected in the right to vote.
- every person should have access to free public education which provides equal opportunity for all.
- no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation 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.

World Citizenship

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.

ACTION

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

- 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).
- 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.

VOTER SERVICE*

The League encourages people to register, vote and take part in government and politics. League members register voters, sponsor candidate and issue forums or debates, and provide information about voting. Some Leagues prepare a *Voters' Guide* providing objective, balanced election information. A *Voters' Guide* does *not* state League positions. The *Voters' Guide* may be available in many formats including online or print. Some Leagues coordinate a mock election for schools to help students learn the importance of participating in democracy.

**These activities are supported by the Education Fund*

COMMUNITY INFORMATION*

Educating our citizens about government and relevant state and local issues 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.

PROGRAM*

Annual Program Planning

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.

Deciding What to Study

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.

The Study Process

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 report is published.

Formulating a League Position

Before the League can act, members must agree in broad terms on various aspects of the issue. To formulate a position, or statement of action, 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.

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.

PUBLICATIONS

League publications are important tools for carrying out our purpose. They are researched, written and distributed by members at every level. The League provides its materials free of charge to members, and in most cases, to the public.

Aside from program study reports and *Voters' Guides* mentioned earlier, other publications include member newsletters published locally, nationally, and at the state level (usually titled *The Voter*). Other publications include annual reports, study report summaries, presentations, web sites, and more. In order to accommodate a diversity of needs, items are published in multiple formats, including print and on the Internet.

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 Michigan holds its Convention in odd-numbered years.

FINANCE

League is a nonprofit organization that must have adequate financing to operate and to achieve its goals. The League adopts a budget to support local activities. Financial support comes from members, non-members and the community at large.

Dues are one source of League income. Each local League decides the amount of dues and the method for collecting them.

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.

Education Fund

LWVUS, LWVMI, and some local Leagues 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 activities or balanced, impartial information on

governmental issues, study guides, surveys, research projects and litigation in the public interest.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION POLICY

LWV is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in principle and in practice. DEI is central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

Diversity refers to population groups that have been historically under-represented in socially, politically, or economically powerful institutions and organizations. These groups include but are not restricted to populations of color, those who identify as LGBT, people with disabilities, women ETC.

Equity is an approach based in fairness to ensuring everyone is given equal opportunity; this means that resources may be divided and shared unequally.

Inclusion refers to the degree to which diverse individuals can participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group.

We commit to increase diversity in the recruitment, retention, and retainment at the national, state, and local level, and in the leadership and executive roles.

We commit to making deliberate efforts to ensure LWV is a place where differences are welcomed, and every individual feels a sense of belonging.

LEAGUE LANGUAGE

Arranged alphabetically by topic.

Membership

Household Membership - Two or more members at the same address; one person pays full dues and each additional person pays half the amount.

Life Members - Those who have belonged to the League for 50 or more years and no longer pay dues.

Members At Large - Members who do not reside within the geographic area of a local League, and therefore pay dues at the state or national level.

Voting Members - Individuals at least 16 years old who have paid dues or who are Life Members.

Organization

Board - Administrative body consisting of officers plus elected and appointed Directors.

Education Fund - 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 *Voters' Guide*.

Nonpartisan - Describes the League's policy of not supporting or opposing political parties or candidates.

Geographic Unit - An entity of a local League (designated as the mentor League) formed with the intent of ultimately becoming a local League.

Members-at-Large State Unit – A entity of the LWVMI board, organized at the request of Member-at-Large, as a progression from Geographic Unit status, or the LWVMI board.

Principles and Action

Democracy Agenda – Including voting rights, improving elections, campaign finance/money in politics, redistricting, and direct election of the president by popular vote.

International Relations - The relationship of our country to other nations in trade, peacekeeping, the United Nations, etc. LWVUS leads in international relations issues.

Local Item – Position adopted by a local League on an issue of local concern. .

Natural Resources - A major area of League interest. It includes air and water quality, land use, energy, transportation, and waste disposal.

Social Policy - An area of concern to League members. Social policy covers education, health, housing, corrections, issues affecting women and children, human rights and civil liberties.

Program

Concurrence - 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.

Consensus - General agreement of League members following thorough study and discussion. League positions are based on member consensus.

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

Position - 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 carried out on the basis of positions.

Study - The process of researching and analyzing an issue from all sides.

Finance

PMP - *Per Member Payment*—monetary support for the state and national Leagues as decided by Convention delegates

Educate!

Advocate!

Empower!

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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The New Members Handbook is available for duplication in the Members section on the LWVMI.org website.