



# *Meaning Of Membership*

*League of Women Voters of Loudoun County*

League of Women Voters of Loudoun County  
PO Box 822  
Leesburg, VA 20178  
[www.loudoun.va.lwvnet.org](http://www.loudoun.va.lwvnet.org)  
June 2004

## Welcome

We cordially welcome you to the League of Women Voters. Since we hope you will become an active member in our organization, we've prepared this booklet to give you a better understanding of League terms, program and activities. **Please keep this for future reference.**

We need your participation in the League. **You may spend as much or as little time as you wish.** You are not expected to be an expert in government; we learn as we accumulate information and experience.

As a member you will receive the *National Voter*, the *Virginia Voter*, and the *Loudoun County Voter*. Members who keep these Voters find that they contain valuable reference information.

## What Do We Do?

The League of Women Voters is an action group. It always has been. Taking political action is basic to the League's purpose: "Let the people know, make the people care, help the people act."

The League may take action only on issues that have been extensively studied and on which the members are agreed. This reputation for thorough study is the main reason for our political effectiveness. Full facts, the pros and cons, are studied. Members participate in discussion in small units and in large meetings; everyone has an opportunity to express an opinion. When a position is reached through a consensus, the League and the members as individuals work to implement that position. Action includes (1) providing information, (2) building public opinion, and (3) supporting or opposing legislation. Action methods include testifying at public hearings, use of public forums and mass media, panel discussions, League publications, and letters to local, state and national officials.

The League Board at the appropriate level of the organization decides the timing of action as well as the kind and degree of action the League will undertake.

Local Leagues and their members must support all positions at the national, state and local level when identifying themselves as League members. Only the President speaks in the name of the League. All other members simply speak as themselves without League identification.

## **Purpose**

The League is an organization whose purpose is to encourage citizens to take part in their government. The League is interested in helping all citizens become informed about their national, state and local governments, important issues, and the many ways an individual can effectively influence her or his government.

## **Nonpartisanship**

The League takes action in support of or in opposition to governmental issues that it has studied, **but it does not support or oppose candidates or political parties.** Individual members are encouraged to support the political party of their choice. To protect the nonpartisanship policy of League, Board members do not work actively in their parties while serving on the board.

## **Guiding 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.

The League of Women Voters believes that the right to vote must be protected for every citizen; 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, and 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. 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 stable and expanding 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 the world's problems and the development of international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

## **Organization**

The League is organized for optimum effectiveness on three (3) levels. In a sense, the structure of the League parallels the representative system of government under which we live. Our national, state and local governments are dependent upon each the other, having as their base the individual citizen. The three League levels are also inter-dependent, based on the individual member. The grass roots membership determines the policies and program of the League of Women Voters.

At the state level, a board of directors elected by local delegates to the State Convention performs functions parallel to those of our local board. At the national level state and local delegates to the National Convention elect the directors.

State and national Board members supply excellent materials and bibliographies to the committee members working at the local level on State or National programs.

## **Board of Directors**

At each level boards are elected by the membership to carry over-all responsibility for the management and activities of the League. In addition, each carries what is called a "portfolio" in League lingo. This means that they are the chairpersons for voters service, national, state or local program items, finance, membership, publications, public relations, bulletin, etc. In all instances, however, they are merely the representatives of the general membership and carry out its decisions. They provide information, plan for discussion, and promote action within the limits of a budget adopted by the membership.

## **Membership**

Membership is open to all citizens of voting age who support the purpose and policies of the League. It is a nonpartisan organization. There are leagues in every state, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Students and non-citizens can join as associate members.

When you join the League of Women Voters of Loudoun County (LWVLC), you also become a member of the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWVVA), the

League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS), and the League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area League (LWVNCA). You will receive the National Voter, the State Voter, and the Loudoun County Voter, which includes news of NCA.

## Units

A unit is a small group of League members, meeting to explore governmental issues through discussion, and to learn together in a friendly and enjoyable way. Units meet at regular intervals from September to June either during the day or evening. The unit is the basis of League activity. It is by the give-and-take discussions in units that members choose what issues they want to work on to further the League purpose. In unit meetings, they increase their knowledge about government; arrive at League positions on governmental policies and decide what courses of action are needed to put these positions into effect.

### How Does the Unit Operate?

*Unit Chairperson* - makes the wheels go around

*Discussion Leader* - keeps the discussion running smoothly, and is there to make it possible for all members to participate in an orderly and satisfying manner.

*Resource Person* - is versed in the subject, presents the material and comes to the rescue if the discussion bogs down over questions of fact.

*The Member* - makes the unit discussion successful by her or his participation. Here are some personal tips to ensure a good discussion:

- **Read** about the subject ahead of time if possible.
- **Speak up** if you have information or an opinion that will add to the discussion.
- **Stick to the point.**
- **Listen and think about the comments of others.**
- **Analyze** the discussion as it progresses. Help keep it moving. A discussion is **more** than just a conversation, a debate, a lecture or a question and answer period.
- **Have a good time!** At unit meetings you have the opportunity to know the League and other League members, and that's fun.

### General Membership Meetings

These meetings preserve the unity of League by enabling all members to come together at one time, usually to get information about League program through a speaker or panel. They also offer a fine opportunity for the widest possible

discussion and interchange of ideas, allow the Board to inform members of its plans for carrying out program and receive suggestions from the membership.

### **Annual Meeting**

This is a special type of general membership meeting, and is the convention of the local League. At this meeting business includes:

- Adoption of local current agenda.
- Election of officers, directors and members of the nominating committee:
- Adoption of a budget for the coming year

### **Program**

The Program and the Principles are the bases for all action taken by the League. The Program consists of government issues, which arise out of the needs of the local community, the state and nation as determined by League members.

### **Program Selection**

At the annual Program Planning meetings, members discuss and recommend the issues they believe are most important and which meet the criteria for program selection. Local Leagues do biennial program planning for the State, National, and National Capital League as well as their own organization.

The appropriate Board considers all ideas of the members and recommends a **PROPOSED PROGRAM**. Any items presented to the Board but not included in the **PROPOSED PROGRAM** appear as **NON RECOMMENDED** items.

The Program to be adopted is voted on at Annual and Biennial Meetings by the members and in the case of State and National Conventions by the delegates. The number of delegates from a local League is determined by that League's membership total.

The recommended program requires a majority vote for adoption. A non-recommended item may also be placed before the convention if there is a majority to consider it- it then requires a 2/3 vote of the delegation for adoption. There have been many lively close and spirited conventions when several items have been on the floor for consideration, making each delegate weigh her important vote. Choosing the program of study for such an influential group as the League of Women Voters is serious business indeed.

### **Study Committee**

This committee does the program groundwork in the League. There can be a study committee for each new program item. The committee does the research, gets the basic facts, clarifies the issues, and studies problems. For state and national programs, complete bibliographies are supplied and well prepared study guides and publications are issued to assist this fact-finding group. For local current agenda, the committee digs in and rounds up the facts from every source-libraries, newspapers, discussion, and opinion.

## **What Else We Do**

### **Voters Service**

Voters Service activity includes: informing the public about registration and voting procedures, urging citizens to vote, giving factual information about candidates based on their records and their opinions on important issues, holding candidates meetings, and publicizing voting records of legislators. Voters Service provides factual information as well as pro and con opinions on ballot issues.

When women received the vote in 1920, the League was formed as an outgrowth of the National American Suffrage Association. The organization that helped women become voters was transformed into one to help them, and all other citizens, to be well-informed voters.

One of the most often misunderstood aspects of League is that the speakers and publications supporting a position League has taken after careful study are not the same as the speakers and publications disseminating impartial information to the voter as a service to help her/him make his own decision. Be sure you understand this yourself, so you can help make it clear.

### **Financing**

The League of Women Voters is a non-profit, volunteer organization. None of the officers or directors at any level receives remuneration. Your dues are spent entirely on League projects and League publications.

Members' yearly dues and contributions finance the League. Nonmember contributions are solicited from public-spirited citizens, businesses, and community people who support League and augment funding.

Educational projects can be financed through the League's Education Fund (ED Fund). Contributions to this fund are tax deductible and cannot be used for operational expenses or to fund advocacy projects. Some Leagues maintain their own ED Fund, and others use the LWVUS ED Fund.

### **Observers**

League keeps abreast of what is going on by sending observers to the meetings of governmental bodies. These observers do not speak for the League or express any opinion, but simply take note of what occurs and report pertinent information to the appropriate study committees or to the Board for possible action in areas where League has a position. Without observers many opportunities for action would be missed. It is an important position for League, and it is also an excellent way for new members to learn first hand about the community.

### **Publications**

There is no organization that supplies its members and its leaders with more and better tools for carrying out its purpose than does the League of Women Voters. The League has a large and growing list of publications on local, state and national issues. League publications are the result of countless hours of research and study. They are used by schools, libraries, community organizations and businesses, as well as by interested citizens. Publications are available for sale at the National League office.

### **Public Relations**

The League of Women Voters is a community service organization promoting citizen responsibility of all voters, not just League members. Part of the job of public relations is publicizing the results of League studies and voter's service information through public brochures, newspaper articles, public service meetings, the speaker's bureau and our web site. Another part is gaining community acceptance by showing that the League, through its program, is dedicated to the public interest, is capable of leadership in building and advocating for a better community, and is identified with worthwhile undertakings. Public relations are an integral and inescapable part of every League activity; implementation is the job of the public relations chairperson.

### **What Have We Done?**

## **National**

The work of the League has kept pace with the changing times. In the beginning the League worked hard to improve the legal status of women and the welfare of children. It also worked to extend the merit system in the federal civil service, to improve the Food and Drug Act and other legislation protecting the consumer, and supported several measures later embodied in the Social Security Act. It championed the reorganization of Congress, and civilian control of atomic energy.

The League has been devoted to the principle of international cooperation for over 30 years. It has consistently supported the United Nations, the Trade Agreements Program and the Mutual Security Program, technical assistance and economic development.

## **State**

The League of Women Voters of Virginia was established in 1921. In the 1920's attention was mainly directed to state laws concerning the welfare of women and children. In the 1930's the major interests were maintenance of public school standards, the relief program, and taxation.

In the years following, the League has directed its efforts toward support of the merit system for government personnel; establishment of permanent child care centers, improved legislative procedures and support of effective mental health legislation. It supports statewide administration of Alcoholic Beverage Control, improved administration and financing of public education, abolition of cross-filing, revision of the State Constitution, and a statewide master plan for water resources development.

## **Local**

Local Leagues have spearheaded improvements in the structure and efficiency of town and city government, have worked on such issues as public schools, housing, health services, tax reforms, council-manager charters, and community planning. Many Virginia Leagues near large population centers are now studying metropolitan problems.

The League structure is designed to give each member a chance to voice her or his views and take an active part in all activities.

## **League Glossary**

**ACTION** - Steps taken to influence public policy consistent with League positions. Techniques used to achieve League goals include lobbying, legislative

testimony, monitoring, public statements, media campaigns, public forums, coalitions, and litigation.

**ANNUAL MEETING** - A general meeting of a local League held once a year to make decisions affecting local League goals and operations. The annual meeting elects officers, amends bylaws and adopts a budget, local positions and studies.

**BRIEFING** - A training session held prior to unit meetings to prepare discussion leaders, resource persons, committee members and others for presentations and discussion of the subject at units. "Briefing" is also used for meetings used to prepare for conventions, legislative interviews and ballot measure presentations.

**CALL TO ACTION / ALERT** - A carefully timed request from a national, state or local League board asking members to take action on behalf of a League position. A request for action is known as a "call to action" by LWVC and an "action alert" by LWVUS.

**CONCURRENCE** - Substantial member agreement reached through group discussion based on information presented by a study committee or through other methods of member response. Members are asked to concur or agree with a statement rather than to answer a question as with consensus. A concurrence statement may be a position held by another League or a decision statement recommended by a League board or study committee. The statement must be approved or rejected as written.

**CONSENSUS** – Substantial member agreement preferable reached through a group discussion. Consensus is the sense of the group rather than a majority opinion. Discussion is based on information prepared by a study committee and is guided by consensus questions. Consensus questions prepared by a study committee are approved by the appropriate League Board.

**DISCUSSION LEADER** – The person who guides the deliberations at a League meeting, often when it is aimed at reaching agreement on an issue; usually a person trained to encourage maximum participation and exchange of ideas.

**EDUCATION FUND** – The tax deductible "arm" of League; this fund underwrites educational projects.

**ELECTION EXTRA** – A League publication containing pros and cons of ballot measures and other relevant information for voters.

**GENERAL MEETING** – A meeting at which all members are invited.

**INTER – LEAGUE ORGANIZATION** - A group of local Leagues with shared interests organized as a separate metropolitan area or region.

**OBSERVER** – A League member who attends, on a regular basis, meetings of such official bodies as city councils, schools boards, or boards of supervisors for the sole purpose of listening and learning about these bodies, how they function, and with which issues they are concerned.

**PORTFOLIO** – The office, job(s) or position of a Board Member. Portfolios may also be handled by a member who is not on the Board, an “Off Board” member.

**POSITION** – The stand on a public policy issue and basis for action. It includes a position summary as well as specific positions established through the study and consensus process.

**PROGRAM** – Those government issues chosen for a concerted study and action. League principles provide the authorization for the adoption of program.

**RESOURCE PERSON** – A knowledgeable member (often a study committee member) who provides impartial factual material to members, usually for discussion. A member serving as a resource does not express his/her opinion on the subject so that members participating in the discussion can reach their own conclusions.

**VERTICAL PROGRAM POSITION** – National, state or inter-League organization positions are designed as vertical if they may be used as the basis for action at lower levels of League without prior permission.

**VOTER** – The monthly newsletter published by the Loudoun County League.