

THE LWVDV OBSERVER CORPS

What is it and why is it important?

LWV principles include the requirement that government bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. Observer programs ensure that citizens are aware of the decisions that impact their communities and promote government transparency and accountability. They keep elected and appointed officials on notice that someone is watching what decisions are being made and how they are being made.

Observers attend governmental meetings, note what happens at the meeting and report back to the League. Observers monitor both the issues being discussed, especially issues that are League priorities, as well as how they are being discussed and acted on. While not every item up for discussion will relate to a League's priorities, ensuring conformance with California's open meeting law, the Brown Act, always provides important oversight.

Observers learn more about what their governments are doing as well as about the issues facing their communities. Observer programs are *not* vehicles for individuals to work personal or partisan agenda. Observers generally do not "act" on issues or share their personal opinions on issues in these meetings. If an Observer flags an issue requiring League action, the Board or President responds.

Observer Reports are posted on the League website where members can read them and apply the information to their League work.

Observer Responsibilities

- Discuss your interest in the Observer Corps with the Committee Chair and learn what local government bodies need an Observer. The LWVDV Observer Corps currently covers City Council and School Board meetings in our area as well as the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors.
- Learn about the Brown Act (information attached, or https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/publications/2003_Intro_BrownAct.pdf).
- Commit to attending a public Council or Board meeting regularly.
- Read your agency's website to learn how to be put on the mailing list for advance meeting agendas and the logistics of meetings.
- If you are unavailable during a scheduled meeting, read the minutes or watch a recording of that meeting.
- Listen - especially to action items - and take notes.
- Be discrete and courteous.
- Know the jurisdiction of your council or Board.
- Wear a League pin to meetings. If asked about your pin, you can say you represent the LWV and that "The League supports transparency in government. Observing this meeting is one way we support that principle."
- Report the key points of the meeting in a short written report or send your meeting notes to your Observer Committee chair ASAP.
- Do not speak for the league at public meetings, only observe or ask for clarification.

What does your League do with the information gathered?

- Post Observer Reports on the Observer Corps webpage so other members of the chapter can reference the information you gathered for use in a variety of committees.
- The Observer Committee Chair shares the information at chapter Board meetings and other committee meetings.
- Observers may bring issues they've flagged to Action and Advocacy Committee meetings for consideration of follow-up by the Board.
- League officers may send written comments to the agency regarding correction of a violation of open government laws.
- The League may publish a short piece in the local and/or regional *Voter* to educate League members on what an agency is doing/not doing.

Comments sometimes lead to significant changes in how an agency runs its meetings or comes to a decision on an issue. League observers extend the League's visibility in their community.