



Organizational Structure Task Force Report and Recommendation

I. Introduction

In June 2023 the League Women Voters Beaufort Area reached a crossroads where a decision needed to be made for its future. The options were to disband the League or search for a path forward. A motion was made to form a Task Force to explore possible options for restructuring of the current league. The motion passed.

The mission of the Task Force was to research a path forward for the League of Women Voters Beaufort Area and present their findings and their recommendations to the membership at a September meeting. Volunteers to serve on the Task Force were solicited.

Members of the Task Force are Jeanne Elmore, Catherine Forester, Bernadette Hampton, Beth Hawks, Susan Levin, Barb Nash and Maureen Woodlock.

The Task Force met 10 times with much work, and research, conducted between meetings.

We would like to thank many people who assisted the Task Force. Thank you, Nancy Williams, President of the South Carolina League of Women Voters, for the help and support of the State League as we navigated through the past few months.

A special thank you goes to Anne Bander for volunteering her services as Treasurer for three months and to Anne Dickerson and Maureen Woodlock for serving on the Finance Committee.

Additionally, we wish to acknowledge the help provided by Barbara Childs, Peggy Reider and Alison Davidow when the Task Force requested information or assistance.

II. Guidance For Recommendation

The Task Force took guidance for the structure recommendation from the national and state leagues in addition to surveying the local league membership.

National League of Women Voters

In 2018 the League of Women Voters National published a Transformation Roadmap with guidance for the focus, programming, and structure of the national, state and local leagues. The 41-page report addressed common challenges including: membership that is not reflective of our communities, a lack of tools to carry out the mission of the organization more effectively, and our inability to demonstrate our collective impact as an organization.

While the report stated that the core elements of the League would remain, it laid out changes and guidance in the areas below which were included in the Task Force recommendation:

Advancing a Clear Strategic Focus

The programmatic strategies under the Campaign for Making Democracy Work offer the League an opportunity to leverage the competitive advantages of the organization, including its trusted brand, nonpartisan stance, and on-the-ground network for greater mission impact. Telling a stronger story will increase our visibility, relevance, and funding opportunities. It also leads to more engagers in our mission; future leadership of the organization; and, most importantly, increased social impact.

Building a More Inclusive Culture

Create a culture that is welcoming, inclusive, trusting and attuned to the needs of today's volunteers so that we grow our organization and have a greater impact.

Adapt to Modern Nonprofit Best Practices

State and local Leagues should structure opportunities and communications with individuals to facilitate their entry into leadership roles and embrace new ideas about the way League operates.

Building A Healthier League Network

Building a healthy League network requires all levels to focus on the mission and vision, aligned with programmatic priorities, and operate with impact and efficacy. A consistent goal across the organization is being seen as "one seamless League." A key opportunity to support this vision is to make it simpler and easier to join the League as a dues-paying member.

Access the LWV National Transformation Roadmap_executive summary report here:

https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/transformation_roadmap_exec_summary_april_2018.pdf

SC State League of Women Voters

The South Carolina League of Women Voters held two statewide calls for all the leagues this summer. Two of the Task Force members attended the calls on behalf of the Beaufort area league to gather necessary information for our recommendation.

On the first call the state league stressed the importance of communication and transparency - ensuring that information is open and accessible to all members. The league suggested using Google Drive to make documents always available to membership.

The state league also confirmed our commitment to education and healthcare programming and communication in addition to voter services.

The Task Force continued communication with the SC League in order to ensure the Beaufort League's good-faith standing in the state organization and ensure we meet deadlines to submit necessary paperwork.

Beaufort Area League of Women Voters

The Task Force issued a survey this summer to obtain pertinent information to determine the future of the Beaufort Area League of Women Voters.

The complete survey results may be viewed here:

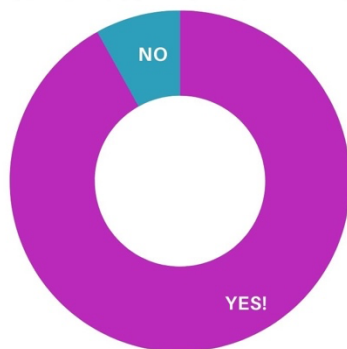
https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/leagues/beaufort-sc-area/survey-summary-export_0.pdf

The survey elicited a 35% response rate. Most of the respondents indicated that they were in favor of maintaining the local league but that it was time for leadership and structural changes to be made. Additionally, the respondents indicated that they would like to be more involved in the league and that there is a need for a membership drive to include new and younger members.

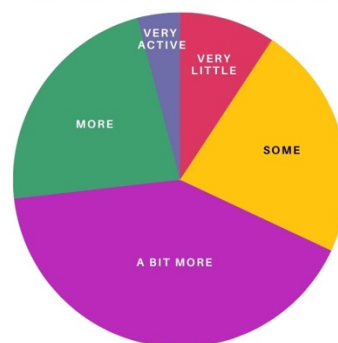
91% of respondents wished to continue their membership in the LWV Beaufort for the 2023- 24 year.

Some key responses include:

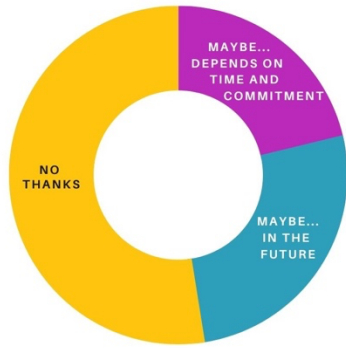
DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE YOUR MEMBERSHIP?



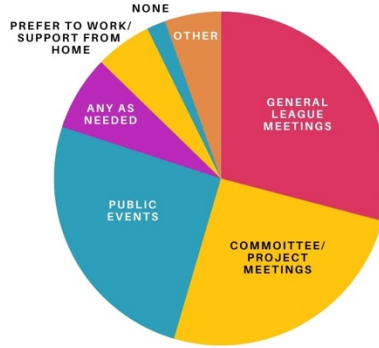
LEVEL YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE



INTERESTED IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION?



TYPES OF EVENTS YOU WOULD PARTICIPATE IN



MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF STRUCTURE FOR OUR AREA



MOST PRESSING ISSUES



III. Organizational Structures Reviewed and Considered

Community Engagement

This model extends responsibility for governance to the constituents and stakeholders, with the idea that the nonprofit’s success positively impacts the community, so the board should share the responsibility for governing it.

Cooperative

Nonprofit organizations that favor the cooperative model do not employ a CEO or manager. It is the most democratic model because the board makes all decisions by a consensus of the board. This model does not have a hierarchy, and the balance of power is equal among all board directors.

Hybrid Governance

Time has proven that none of the governance models work extremely well for all, or even most, nonprofit organizations. Boards can combine any of the above models to create a unique hybrid form of governance that fits their organization’s specific needs.

Sociocratic (Dynamic Self-Governance)

Sociocracy (Dynamic Self-Governance) provides a non-authoritarian organizational structure that empowers people to make decisions within their domains, and fosters trust and effective decision-making. It organizes participants in circles, has feedback loops and uses consent (not consensus) decision-making.

IV. Dynamic Self-Governance Structure (DSG) Described

What is a circle?

A trusted team of peers; groups of at least 4 people working together with a defined purpose and with decision making authority in their domain.

In organizations with more than one circle, circles are nested in a way so that each has clarity over their domain and can do its work while still being connected with the other circles. Circles are double-linked by a leader and delegate to ensure flow of information across the organization.

Circle Structure:

- Interconnected set of 'circles'.
- Keep responsibilities of various working groups clear.
- Each circle has a particular *domain* (decision-making) responsibility and purpose.
- Each circle is interconnected by two people; Leader and Delegate.
- Communication is both top down and bottom up.
- Leadership and terms are flexible per agreement created and chosen by the circle group.

Circle Leader: (Connector)

- Pays attention to the circle's operation.
- What needs to be done, who agreed to do it, how does all the circle's work come together.
- Represents circle at next 'higher' level.

Circle Facilitator:

- Plans and manages the circle's meetings.
- Plans the agenda with input from the leader and secretary.
- Guides members through agenda according to dynamic self-governance principles (no one ignored).
- Leader and facilitator are separate roles. Circles may have either two individuals or one person hold both roles.

Circle Delegate: (Connector)

- Selected by the circle to represent the circle at the next 'higher' circle - creates a double link.
- Cannot be the circle leader.

Circle Secretary:

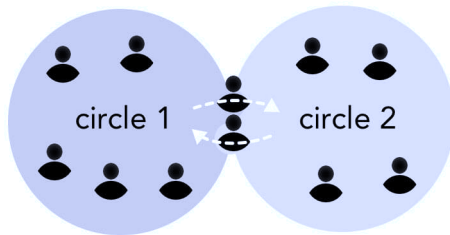
- Take notes during the meeting.
- Makes minutes accessible to the whole organization.
- Maintains circle's records – Google.

Linking = Connectors

Links between circles helps align circles, help information flow and balance circles with each other.

This creates Double-linking:

the principle that two circles are connected by a double link: the circle leader is the top-down link, representing the next-higher circle's voice in the circle but being a full member (with consent voice) in both circles. The delegate is the bottom-up link, representing the circle's voice in the next higher circle (but, again, being a full member of both circles).



Benefits:

This model ensures flow of information and transparency in all directions. It also makes sure there is no power-over because two individuals who are members of both the higher and the lower circle have consent rights in both circles. The higher circle cannot make a decision over the lower circle because of double linking. Double linking also increases the level of information because two people filter information according to their perspective.

***Mission circle:** (LWVB's Mission & Vision (Domain). *The Organization's Big Picture Thinkers; Long-Term Planners; Keeps Organizations True to its Mission*)

- Compared to the Board of Directors, the Steering committee... (3 min elected based on the IRS) below is an outline of how to elect people. They do not need to have a title. Operational Leader aka Executive Director is appointed within the Mission circle & is a member of the General circle.
- Operational leader of the General circle which is appointed within the General circle is a member of the Mission circle.

***General circle:** (Focuses on operational day-to-day coordination.)

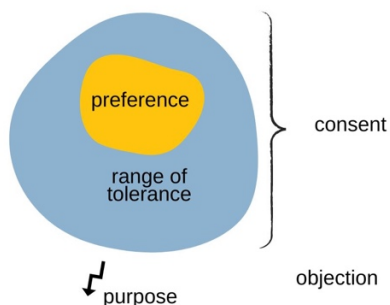
- Has operational sub circles where the work gets done.
- Serves to coordinate between all of the sub circles.
- Each sub circle will have two members in the General circle. (*Double linking*)

****** *The Task Force recommends that the Mission circle and General circle will be one circle in the beginning of adopting this new structure. It may change later. Three elected board members will come from this circle and will be elected by the circle members.*

“No decisions that are in the domain of the workers in a circle can be made by anyone outside the circle. There is no one ruling top-down.”

Decisions = Consent

Circles set their agreements by consent - if a circle member has an objection, the proposal needs to be improved.



Consent decision making is more clearly defined, both in its process and conceptually. If you want to put a slogan on it that makes the difference clear, one could say that in consensus, we ask everyone “do you agree?” In consent, we ask “do you object?”

What is range of tolerance?

The range of tolerance is everything that might not be your preference but is something you can work with.

Example: As a picky vegetarian, I might not prefer to eat Brussel sprouts (I would not make them when cooking for myself) but I’ll eat them when they are there. I’d object to meat, however.

Feedback

Build-in feedback and increase information flow to make incremental improvements a habit.

- The strength of DSG comes with the ability to make decisions effectively in small groups while including intentional feedback from outside of the circle. (double-linking)
- One solution is to have a discipline of reviewing agreements. Every agreement decision in DSG has a term end when the agreement will be up for review. It is like a regular check-up of our tools. All in order, all working and doing what we intend them to do? Term ends remind us to do that check-up. For instance, we could make a new agreement and consent to reviewing it again in 3 months, or in 10 years. How long of a review term you set depends on the circle agreement. In general, we try to make the cycles long enough to not overload our circle meetings with agreement reviews. Dynamic Self-Governance is about getting work done, not only about talking *about* work!

Helping Circles

Helping circles are ad hoc circles (Task Force) that are only temporary. They could be created to do research and report back to its mother circle or to manage a temporary project. The helping circle has a clear domain and aim which it receives from the circle creating the helping circle. The mother circle would typically select the helping circle's leader and ask the leader to convene the circle. No circle can be without a clear mandate and leadership.

In Dynamic Leadership, a structure of interconnected circles helps support the values of effectiveness, equivalence, and transparency.

- **Effectiveness:** What we do makes a difference
- **Equivalence:** Everyone's voice matters. This does not mean we are all identical or equally persuasive. It does mean we exercise "power-with" rather than "power over."
- **Transparency:** We work openly. No backroom deals, secret ballots, or private information. Meeting minutes and budgets are accessible to all in the organization.

V. Reasons for Choosing Dynamic Self- Governance Structure

Over the past few years the National League and state leaders have engaged in a process of self-reflection, just as we are doing now. Common challenges identified include: membership that is not reflective of our communities, a lack of tools to more effectively carry out the mission of the organization, and our inability to demonstrate our collective impact as an organization. Participants at every level have embraced the need for change, and our structure recommendation aligns with the following actions outlined in the LWV National Transformation Roadmap.

1. **Advancing a clear strategic focus.** We do this by adhering to our mission which is empowering voters and defending democracy. This creates clarity for the members and aligned purpose. We need to ensure that all members have the desire, knowledge, and confidence to participate.
2. **Building a more inclusive culture.** We need to commit to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We need to create a culture that is welcoming, inclusive, trusting, and attuned to the needs of today's volunteers so we can grow our organization and have a greater impact. We should welcome new members, even those who don't want to become traditional members.
3. **Build a healthier network.** We need to move from a hierarchical structure to a more transparent structure that enables all members to find their level of involvement and participate. Linked circles help to build this network and ensure that no one is ignored.
4. **Increasing capacity at all levels.** Administrative demands at all levels limits the ability for mission impact work. We need to support technology, communications and develop our ability to work with the community.

The State LWV website states, “we need to ensure LWVSC is a place where differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion” and that is key with the Dynamic Self-Governance structure.

VI. Summary

In conclusion, the Task Force, after many hours of diligent work and analysis recommends that the League of Women Voters Beaufort adopt the Dynamic Self Governance model presented here.

The League of Women Voters is a well-respected organization that the public looks to and relies upon to provide services and information to aid them in participating in exercising their right to vote. Next year is a critical year in our democracy and the League of Women Voters Beaufort must be present in our community.

We are not any different than many other organizations in our difficulty to recruit officers and board members, and members are reluctant to commit to “serving a term or two.” The responsibility for the work of the League does not fall on the shoulders of a few in this model.

This model was chosen because it does not require any one person to be the leader and everyone can participate to the degree that they wish.

This model is active, dynamic, and promotes communication and transparency. It is flexible and able to respond to situations as they arise.

It supports everyone having a voice and fosters consent decision making.

This is a drastic change from what we are used to, it will take some time to learn and implement, and our bylaws will need to be changed to reflect this model.

The Task Force recommends that we adopt this model and begin using it immediately at our next meeting.

Examples of Possible LWV – Beaufort Area Dynamic Self- Governance Circle Structure

