



Welcome!

A Handbook for New Members

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



Welcome to the League!

You have joined an organization that has provided leadership on a myriad of national, state and local issues and has given its members a network of friendship and involvement for 100 years. When you joined our local League, you automatically became a member of the League of Women Voters at both state and national levels. Your support will help us accomplish so much in our mission in [Making Democracy Work](#).

What is the LWV?

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

The LWV neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for political office but does encourage its members as individuals to take part fully in the political process.

The League operates at the local, state, and national levels in every state, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. In New York State there are 50 local Leagues.

Mission and Purpose

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

League Principles

The League believes:

- in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.
- The democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires 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.

- that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; 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.
- that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among its different agencies and levels.
- that responsible government is 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, 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.
- that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of an international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

History of the League

The League of Women Voters grew out of the suffrage movement. In 1920, after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Carrie Chapman Catt, one of the battle's leaders, organized the League of Women Voters of the United States. Its 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 increasingly diverse agenda.

From the archives of SUNY Albany

The League of Women Voters of Schenectady County Records includes eighty years' worth of information about all aspects of the local organization. The 10.4 cubic ft. collection is divided into six series according to the organizational structure and activities of the Schenectady County records, flowing from administrative files to publications that the League created. The collection contains meeting minutes, bulletins, and information on studies done by the organization. These collections will give researchers insight into the rights that the League fought for, the local issues they discussed, the goals they set, and how all of these evolved throughout the years. The League of Women Voters of Schenectady County is arranged alphabetically by format and then chronologically within each format, except for the scrapbooks which are arranged chronologically.

The collection contains information on the city of Schenectady. The League's Schenectady County branch focused on issues in the Schenectady County including their criminal justice system and healthcare facilities like Glenridge Hospital. The League also looked at the committees the County ran, including the committees on the county charter and the county manager search. The League's involvement in the Schenectady County ranged from the years of 1935-2005. The collection also contains scrapbooks ranging from the years of 1933-1990. The scrapbooks hold newspaper articles that the local League was featured in, as well as photographs of members and local events that the League participated in.

On April 30, 1925, Mrs. Charles Richmond, wife of the president of Union College, invited approximately fifty women to her home for a talk by Mrs. F.W. Slade, chairman of the New York State League of Women Voters. After Slade's talk, the women at the meeting decided to elect officers and adopt by-laws thereby forming the Schenectady County League of Women Voters (later renamed League of Women Voters, Schenectady County).

The League of Women Voters of the United States is a, "nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy, issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy." Originally, the organization began at the National American Women Suffrage Association's 50th convention in St. Louis, Missouri, when President Carrie Chapman Catt proposed the creation of a "league of women voters to finish the fight and aid in the reconstruction of the nation." One year later, on February 14, 1920 – the League was officially created in Chicago, Illinois. At a national level, the League has helped further Social Security, the Food and Drug Acts, as well as the involvement and legal status of women in the United States. The League was also one of the first organizations in the United States to be recognized by the United Nations has a non-governmental organization.

League Activity

VOTER SERVICE AND CITIZEN INFORMATION

The League is perhaps best known for its service to voters. We help citizens register to vote and encourage participation in government and politics. We sponsor and/or provide:

- candidate forums and debates.
- voter registration drives and Get Out the Vote activities.
- information on voting procedures, including absentee and early voting; printed guides with information on election requirements and specific ballot proposals for upcoming elections; printed guides for specific populations such as homeless individuals, college students, and people with disabilities;
- printed political directories
- new citizen voting information and assistance for US citizenship preparation

STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Leagues at each level choose issues for their members to study based on certain criteria:

- The issue must be one on which government action is needed.
- The issue must fall within the principles of the LWVUS (national).
- The issue must inspire member interest and commitment.
- Duplication of effort must be avoided.
- Funds, time, and people must be available to do a thorough job.

Final decisions on state and national programs are made by a vote of the delegates at the respective conventions. At the local level, the voting members in attendance at the annual meeting perform this function.

After a topic is selected and all aspects are examined, the League, through its consensus process, strives to reach agreement on which to base a new position. The League's reputation for fairness rests on its practice of thorough and impartial study. Members discuss the issues; review relevant research on all sides of the issue; express opinions and debate in forums open to all members. Once a League has a position on the issue, material is published to promote that position, always ensuring the distinction between League action on specific issues and the League's nonpartisan voter information.

Recent NYS studies and forums have included running for office in New York City, saving local tax dollars through government shared services and consolidation, and maintaining integrity of the vote in this era of post-lever voting procedures.

ACTION, ADVOCACY, AND LOBBYING

The League arrives at its positions through a grassroots process that is effective and highly respected.

- Members propose and vote on issues for study at annual meetings or conventions.
- Study committees investigate an issue through research, interviews, and observation. Members discuss the issue after study committee presentation.
- Consensus (substantial agreement of the members) is developed after the presentation of information and discussion.
- Action (advocacy) on that issue can then be taken, often in the form of lobbying elected officials, testifying before legislative committees, visiting editorial boards, submitting letters to the editor and news releases, holding new conferences and public meetings, organizing forums and coalitions, initiating litigation, and producing publications.
- Positions may be evaluated periodically, with members determining whether to retain, modify, or drop positions.

The League will lobby legislators on specific legislation supporting our issues such as:

- Transparency in government
- Campaign finance reform
- Ethics reform
- Rules reform
- Redistricting
- Court system and judiciary
- Water quality and land resource management
- Health care reform
- Domestic violence
- Equal pay
- State financing of education
- Transportation

League Organization – How Can a Member Participate?

The League operates at the local, state, and national levels. Joining at one level automatically makes you a member of the other two levels. Members usually participate at the local level when they first join.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to any person who subscribes to the purpose and principles of the LWV. The LWV is committed to diversity, recognizing that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible decision making in a democracy. Diversity also enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs.

Voting members are people who have joined the League and who are at least 16 years of age. Life members are those who have belonged to the League for more than 50 years (Life members are excused from paying dues).

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

League officers at all levels are elected by the membership at annual meetings, according to their by-laws. Each board member is responsible for managing the activities of the League as well as for a specific area such as program, voter services, finance, bulletin, etc.

COMMITTEES

Standing committees carry out the balance of the LWV's work in voter services, membership, budget, health, environment, candidate forums, citizenship preparation, nominations, observer corps, advocacy and more. Some committees can become inactive from time to time.

MEETINGS

LWV of Schenectady County meets approximately once a month, unless there is a need for additional meetings. Meetings are open to all members of the League Committees, they meet on separate dates and provide committee reports at the monthly meetings. LWVSC holds an annual meeting to elect officers, adopt local programs, and approve yearly budgets. A program meeting is also held yearly to review state and national positions and our local program.

LEAGUE FINANCE

The LWV is a non-profit organization that relies primarily on dues and contributions to operate and to achieve its goals. Each League member has a minimum contribution of \$20.00 with a suggested membership contribution of \$75.00 this is paid online to the National League, who in return gives our local league back 20%. If you contribute more money to dues than \$75, our league will only receive 20% of that. There is an option online to donate to your individual league this amount will go directly to the league. This is a new policy that started in January of 2025. Since LWV is a lobbying organization, donations for advocacy activities and League membership dues are not tax-deductible.

NATIONAL AND STATE CONVENTIONS

A national convention is held every other year in even years. A NY state convention is held in the odd-numbered year. Both are comprised of delegates with voting privileges who are elected by local Leagues in numbers proportionate to their membership. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention delegate. Other members and guests may attend but cannot vote. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support, and by-laws, and elect officers for the next biennium. In addition, a selection of sessions and workshops are held on current issues and/or topics of League interest at both conventions.

HOW MUCH TIME MUST I DEVOTE TO THE LWV?

The level of involvement is up to you although we hope you will enjoy being an active participant in our activities. Those with busy professional schedules often volunteer for time-limited projects that can be completed on their time schedules. Examples of this service include writing letters to elected officials, volunteering for a few hours at voter registration events, helping at a candidate forum, or assisting at a citizenship preparation class.

Those with more time to devote to the LWV can become involved with the organization of major or ongoing projects or elect to assume board or committee positions.

League Lingo

Action – promoting LWV's positions on public policy issues to elected officials, government agencies, the media, and the public

Advocacy Agenda – program priorities established each year for action

Concurrence – shortened process for reaching member agreement whereby members vote to agree with another League's or League board's positions

Consensus – collective opinion of a substantial number of members, representative of the membership, developed after objective study of an issue

Education Fund – the tax-deductible arm of a League which handles funds to be used only for educational purposes, not for action on issues

Nonpartisanship – LWV's policy of neither supporting nor opposing political parties or candidates, distinct from LWV's ability to take positions on policy issues and lobby for change

Observer – LWV members who attend and monitor meetings of government councils, boards, and commissions

Position – LWV opinion derived from consensus upon which action can be taken

Program – selected governmental issues chosen by members at the local, state, and national levels for study and action

Voter Guide – nonpartisan publication about candidates and ballot issues

Voter Services – year-round activities to help citizens be informed, active, and politically effective (e.g., voter registration, candidate forums, etc.)

For additional information on the League of Women Voters

Schenectady (Local): www.lwvschenectady.org

LWVSC on Facebook: League of Women Voters-Schenectady County

Bluesky: @lwvschenectady.bsky

State: <https://lwvny.org/>

National: <https://www.lwv.org/>