



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®
OF VIRGINIA

MAKING
DEMOCRACY WORK.

Membership Handbook

April 2017

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League of Women Voters® of Virginia

Welcome to the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA). The League is exciting and challenging. We are committed to defending the rights of voters, to providing a broad array of information and opportunities to educate and engage voters, to promote nonpartisan redistricting, and to reform money in politics. The League offers a variety of options for member participation as time and interest permit.

We have prepared this handbook to introduce you to the League and the many ways that you can take part in its programs. We have other League publications to keep you informed about your local Leagues, the Virginia Legislature and Government. We provide timely study materials at state and local League meetings.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to reach out to anyone on the LWV-VA or local Leagues' Boards of Directors. The League leadership teams are here to help you.

*Welcome to the organization where we do
hands-on work to safeguard democracy
encourage civic engagement.*

The League is non-partisan. We do not support or oppose candidates or political parties. Our members are women and men who make a visible difference. They use their League experiences to serve as leaders who make democracy work and create lasting change in the communities where they live.

If you know someone who may want to know about the League, share this handbook with them and ask them to join us and become part of a community that shares a passion for creating positive change on the local, state, and national levels.

**Membership Handbook revised by the
League of Women Voters of Virginia
© April 2017**

PRINCIPLES:

The League of Women Voters believes....

- that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.
- that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental 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 that 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 the different agencies and levels of government.
- that responsible government should be 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 in the public interest, 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 development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

League of Women Voters of the United States, 2010

ABOUT THE LEAGUE

Mission Statement

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.

History

The spirit of the suffrage movement and the shock of the First World War gave rise to the idea of a nonpartisan organization that would provide political education and experience for women, contribute to the growth of the citizen, and strengthen democracy in the United States. In 1919, at the 50th convention of the National American Women Suffrage Association, 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.”

1. On February 14, 1920—six months before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified—the National League of Women Voters was formed in Chicago, and the League of Women Voters of Virginia was established in Richmond immediately thereafter.

From the beginning, the League’s activities were not focused exclusively on women’s issues. Over time, the League’s legislative priorities have evolved to reflect the changing needs of society and critical issues of concern. The organization remains true to its basic purpose: to make democracy work for all citizens. The League of Women Voters makes a difference in the lives of citizens because of the energy and passion of thousands of members committed to our principles. See Page 9 for a list of policy positions held by the Virginia and National Leagues.

Nonpartisanship

The League of Women Voters is strictly nonpartisan; it neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for office at any level of government. It has guidelines for directors and members who publicly represent the organization restricting their participation in political activity affiliated with any party or candidate.

Organization

The League of Women Voters is organized to parallel the three levels of government: local, state and national.

- Local Leagues address concerns on the level of county boards of supervisors, city and town councils, and other local appointed or elected bodies.
- The League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA) is composed of all the MALs (Page 5), local, and Members-at-Large units in Virginia; it addresses concerns on the state level of government.

- The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) is composed of all state, ILO, and local Leagues. It addresses concerns on the federal level.
- Northern Virginia Leagues are also part of the National Capital Area League, an inter-league organization (ILO) that also includes the District and some Maryland Leagues.

At each level of League, boards are elected by the membership to manage the activities of the League. There are usually elected officers: president or co-presidents, one or two vice presidents, secretary, and treasurer. The remainder of the board is composed of elected and appointed directors. Each member of the board has a portfolio (a specific area of responsibility) such as program, voter services, membership, action, and newsletter editor.

Membership

Any persons over 16 years of age may be a voting member of the League. Additional residents of the same household can join as voting members, with reduced dues. All others may join as Associate Members.

Generally, members belong to a Local League. See the back cover for those in Virginia. Membership in it confers membership at the state and national level. A portion of dues paid by members to local Leagues is paid to the state and national Leagues through per-member payments (PMP).

Member-at-large (MAL) status is available to people who live outside of the area of a Local League. When enough MALs live in an area, an attempt is made to form a Members-at-Large Unit there. They pay their dues directly to LWV-VA and are national members. They may attend any LWV-VA board meeting, and state conventions and councils.

Financing

LWV-VA is a non-profit organization financed by PMPs, publication sales, and contributions from members and other supporters. We also may receive public and private grants for special projects. Dues and contributions to the Operating Fund are not tax deductible. LWV-VA also has an Education Fund to support voter services and community education programs. Contributions to this Fund are tax deductible.

WHAT THE LEAGUE DOES

Establishes our Program

Leagues' programs consist of action and education efforts regarding governmental issues at the local, state and national level. League members choose the issues on which they will focus, based on their interests, previous League work and perceived needs in the community. The program is developed consistent with the League principles—the philosophy or concept of government—outlined on page 2 of this booklet.

The program development process begins at the grass roots with the selection of a topic for study and discussion: At program planning meetings, members discuss their ideas for local, state, regional, or national programs. The relevant Board of Directors reviews the members' proposals and recommends proposed program items for adoption to the League's annual meeting or convention. If, after an adopted item is studied, a consensus is reached by the membership and approved by the Board, a policy position is created. See our pamphlet "*Positions in Brief*" for a short description of all our state positions or go to www.LWV-VA.org, under Publications.

Takes Action

Action by League members shapes the issues that ensure a community's health, vibrancy, fairness and strength.

A League can undertake "action" on any position. Action may include:

- providing information to members and the public
- influencing public opinion
- forming and joining coalitions
- urging governmental action
- supporting or opposing legislation
- meeting with, or contacting elected officials

The League only takes action on issues that have been studied and on which the members have reached agreement regarding the position. The League's political effectiveness rests on its reputation for thorough study. There is an old League saying, "Study without action is futile; action without study is fatal."

Educates Members

Most Local Leagues have monthly meetings for members. Many of them are informational: they present studies or speakers to educate members and guests on a range of local, state or national topics. Members then have a chance to discuss and ask questions of the speakers and study resources. League members become the "go to" person on many issues because of what they have learned at League meetings and through League publications.

Provides Voters Service

Voters Service is directed toward encouraging citizens to register, vote, and participate in government and politics. The League provides unbiased, factual information about voting procedures, candidates and ballot issues to voters. Leagues publish *Voter's Guides* and/or *What's on the Ballot* online or in newspapers for mass distribution and provide this information to the national LWV website, Vote411.org.

Observes Government

League members serve as "observers" at meetings of various local, state, regional and national governmental bodies. Observers do not speak for the League but attend these meetings as individuals to listen, learn and make factual reports of the proceedings for other League members.

Publishes

Leagues at the national, state and local levels publish reports of their studies and other information about governmental operations. We digitally publish *The Virginia Express*. Every second year, we publish the *VA Legislative Directory*. During General Assembly sessions, we publish the weekly *Action Alerts*.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

As a League member, you can be as involved with League as you choose. But to get the most out of your membership and to help the League be effective, get involved!

Lobby Public Officials as an Individual

All League members are encouraged, as individuals, to contact public officials about public policy decisions or pending legislation. As a member, you may receive an 'Action Alert' for issues that are nearing a vote or decision. It is important to call or e-mail your elected representative quickly when you get an Action Alert. Contacts with public officials are important to the passage of legislation and implementation of public policy.

Written letters, postcards, and faxes are effective tools to communicate your concerns. Whether you call or e-mail public officials or write a letter, remember:

- Mention the issue or bill number in the subject line or first sentence.
- State your purpose or position. Use your own words, they are more convincing than rote responses. You can support your ideas with information from the Action Alert.
- Discuss only one issue in each communication.
- Put your address in the e-mail or tell the aide where you live: it shows you are a constituent.
- Information for state and federal officers representing Virginia, including maps of their districts, is at www.LWV-VA.org.

Attend the Women's Legislative Roundtables

Hosted by LWV-VA every Wednesday morning during the Virginia General Assembly session.

Join a Committee

Every League member is encouraged to join resource or working committees that focus on specific issues in various areas of the current League program. Members of these committees do research, clarify issues, identify options and present the information to other League members for their consideration. Committees do the work of creating and amending the policy positions used for action. LWV-VA committees write studies and consensus questions that formulate the positions approved by the State Board. Committee members may also spearhead action on their study area. You can find opportunities League websites and Facebook pages.

Become a Leader

Members who seek leadership positions can chair committees, serve on a League Board of Directors, or become an official representative for a League. Official and designated representatives testify about public policy issues; lobby regarding legislation; raise public awareness by giving speeches or writing letters to the media or government officials, newspaper, etc. Members may also represent the League on committees, boards and commissions. Official representation of the League is limited to the League's positions and the extent to which the representative is authorized to speak for the League. League leaders also further our work through fundraising, and heading up voter services activities.

HOW TO ADDRESS PUBLIC OFFICIALS

The President/Vice President

The White House

Dear Mr./Madam President/Vice President:

Very respectfully yours,

All the following are signed "Sincerely yours":

Senators

The Honorable Judith Commons

United States Senate

Dear Senator Commons:

Representatives

The Honorable Judith Commons

United States House of Representatives

Dear Ms. Commons:

Cabinet Secretaries

The Honorable Judith Commons

The Secretary of State

Dear Madam Secretary:

Governor/Lieutenant Governor

The Honorable Judith Commons

Governor/Lieutenant Governor of Virginia

Dear Governor/Lieutenant Governor Commons:

Virginia Senators

The Honorable Judith Commons

General Assembly Building

Dear Senator Commons:

Virginia Delegates

The Honorable Judith Commons

General Assembly Building

Dear Ms. Commons:

Virginia Secretaries

The Honorable John Commons

Secretary of Administration

Dear Mr. Secretary:

LWVUS POSITIONS

The **League of Women Voters of the United States** has adopted positions on,:

Government -----

Federal Agriculture Policy	Election Process
Citizen Rights:	Apportionment
Citizen Participation	Campaign Finance
Individual Liberties/Civil Rights	Election of the President
Reproductive Choice	Fiscal Policy
Congress and the Presidency	Gun Control
D.C. Self-Government and Full Voting Representation	Voting Rights
	Privatization

International Relations -----

Arms Control	United Nations
Military Policy and Defense	U.S. Relations with Developing Countries
Spending Trade	

Natural Resources -----

Resource Management	Pollution Control
Environmental Protection	Public Participation

Social Policy -----

Child Care	Meeting Basic Human Needs
Children at Risk	Urban Policy
Equality of Opportunity	Violence Prevention
Health Care	Human Trafficking
Education	Food Safety

The full description of these positions is available at www.lwv.org, in "Summary of Public Policy Positions."

LWV-VA Positions

The **League of Women Voters of Virginia** has adopted positions on:

Government -----

Delegation of Power	Reapportionment and Redistricting
Election Laws	Transportation
Fiscal Policy	Women's Rights in Virginia Law

Natural Resources -----

Air Quality	Water Supply and Distribution
Land Use	Fracking

Social Policy -----

Adult Domestic Violence	Juvenile/ Adult Restorative Justice
Child Care	Juvenile Justice
Children at Risk	Mental Health
Education	Civil Rights for Felons
Justice System	

A full description of these positions is available at www.LWV-VA.org, under Publications, *Positioned for Action*.

LEAGUE LINGO: A GLOSSARY

ACTION ALERT: A request from the national, state, or local League asking members to contact an elected representative in support of or opposition to proposed legislation. Members respond as individuals; only the president or designated representative speaks officially for a League. See Page. 6

ADVOCACY AGENDA: Priorities for legislative action; issues on which the League intends to take a leadership role.

ANNUAL MEETING: Held by a local League to elect officers, approve budget, adopt program, and consider other business.

CONCURRENCE: Agreement by League members with a policy position reached by another League.

CONSENSUS: Collective opinion of a substantial number of members, representative of the membership as a whole, reached after objective study and discussion of an issue.

CONVENTION: LWVUS or LWV-VA meeting where delegates elect officers, adopt new positions, budgets, PMPs, and bylaws, etc. LWVUS holds conventions in even-numbered years; LWV-VA in odd. Any member may attend as a non-voting delegate.

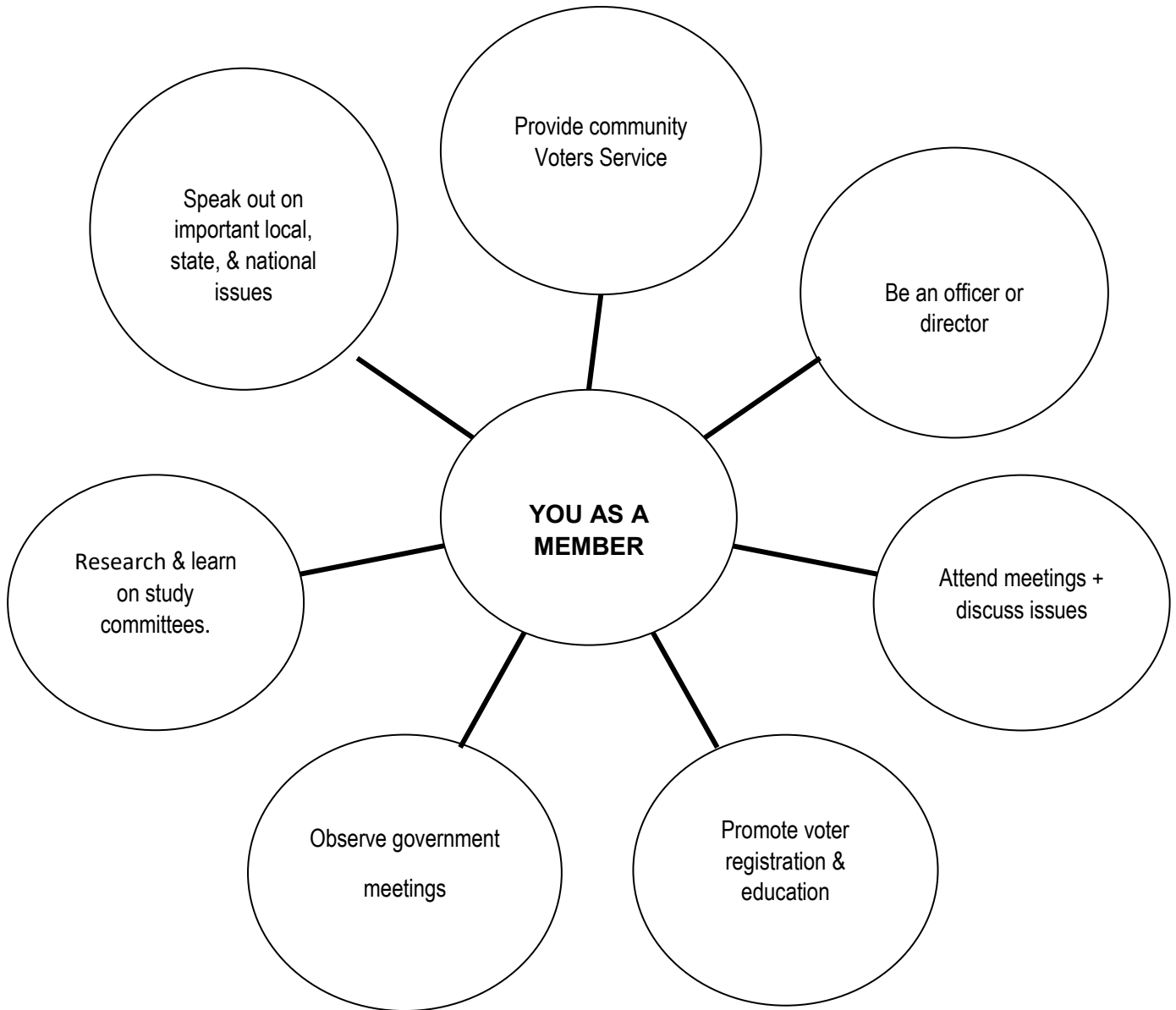
COUNCIL: LWVUS or LWV-VA meeting held between conventions, with a limited number of delegates.

DELEGATE: A member appointed by a LWV board to vote at Convention or Council.

DISCUSSION LEADER: Member from a Unit who volunteers to lead a discussion following an outline keyed to a study. *EDUCATION FUND:* The tax-deductible arm of many Leagues. Funds can only be used for voter services or educational activities. Action or membership support is not allowed.

Forum.LWV.org: LWVUS INTERNET SITE LEAGUE MANAGEMENT

GENERAL MEETING: Periodically held for members and others for information, policy discussion, consensus or concurrence.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF VIRGINIA

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League of Women Voters of Virginia

LOCAL LEAGUES IN VIRGINIA

Arlington
Charlottesville Area
Fairfax Area
Falls Church
Fredericksburg Area MAL*
Loudoun County
Lynchburg
Montgomery County
Prince William Area
Richmond Metropolitan Area
Roanoke Valley Area MAL*
South Hampton Roads
Washington County
Williamsburg Area

* Member-at-Large Unit

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