Taking Action
Working Together to Influence Public Policy

In the League, we tend to focus our efforts on influencing legislative measures in the U.S. Congress and state and local legislative bodies by preparing testimony, lobbying legislators, and initiating advocacy campaigns on issues of interest to our members. At the same time, we file lawsuits and amicus briefs in court cases and monitor and comment when regulations are being written for executive branch agencies. The following guidelines apply to all these activities.

General Guidelines
This section is organized with general guidelines for action, followed by the role of the national office and staff in advocacy, then how to use Impact on Issues to take action at the state and local level, and finally how state and local Leagues can request permission to take national action on non-priority federal issues.

The goal is to work collaboratively among the levels of League with consistent messages and strategies. Effective advocacy efforts on national issues depend on a partnership at all League levels—lobbying in Washington and constituent lobbying at home. This one-two punch reinforces the League’s impact in influencing national and state legislation.

Working Together to Influence Public Policy.
The process used in formulating positions and acting at the grassroots level makes the League unique and sets the League apart from other organizations. The fact that we are members not only of a local League, but of a state League, and of the League of Women Voters of the United States, makes us a powerful force.

Speaking with One Voice
“Speaking with one voice” is one of the most important tenets of the League. The national League is responsible for determining strategies and action policies that ensure that the League’s message on national issues is consistent throughout the country. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for a consistent state message, and local Leagues must cooperate with one another to ensure that regional issues are addressed in a manner consistent with neighboring Leagues. Typically, the president of the national, state, or local League is the only person who speaks for the League in an official capacity, unless another person has been designated as the official spokesperson on a specific issue. This may be a League expert, a senior staff person, or a former board member. The key is that this designation is explicitly made by the appropriate Board. This helps to ensure that the League speaks with one voice, which is essential for our effectiveness as an advocacy and lobbying organization.

Voter Service.
The League’s nonpartisan voter services activities and lobbying activities must be kept separate, and voters’ guides and other voter service materials and publications must not contain statements of League positions.
League Lobbying
League lobbying is based on member study and agreement on selected issues and involves concerted efforts to achieve public policies consistent with League positions. League Boards at every level set their own priorities. League lobbying promotes or opposes specific pieces of legislation. The LWVUS public policy positions are the official statements of positions for each issue area and reflect the program adopted by the most recent national convention.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying
Advocacy is a broader concept than lobbying. Advocacy activities are often considered “educational.” This is the case even when only one side of an issue is presented if no action on a piece of legislation is requested. Such activities can include: 1) developing public policy briefs that analyze issues and provide detailed information and recommendations for addressing them through specific reforms and 2) providing forums for discussing issues and educating policymakers and the public. Speaking in support of the organization is also advocating, i.e., for the overall cause of the organization.

Lobbying is defined as an attempt to influence specific legislation, both legislation that has been introduced and specific legislation that has been proposed. Lobbying includes actions that transmit a point of view on a specific piece of legislation to elected officials or their staffs, as well as action urging the public to contact their legislators about a specific piece of legislation. It also includes communications to the general public expressing a view on specific referenda or other ballot measures.

Applying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Lens to Our Work
The DEI lens is a way of examining a program, a process, a product, or otherwise in relation to how it will be perceived by a variety of communities, voices, and perspectives, and what barriers may exist that are preventing it from being equitable or inclusive to everyone. All League work should be examined through this lens to best ensure that we are reaching the full diversity within League communities and are being equitable and inclusive in how we approach and execute our work. Applying a DEI lens asks that you consider the following key questions:

1. Who is involved in the process? Leagues should consider whether this work impacts a group or community, and is their voice represented and how diverse is the group of decision makers who represent a variety of relevant viewpoints.
2. Who will be impacted? Leagues should consider who benefits from this, how it helps meet the needs of underserved voters, and how we address various specific marginalized groups and how they’ll be impacted.
3. What are the intended and unintended outcomes? Leagues should consider the issue we are trying to solve, what we hope will happen, what the potential negative impacts are, who could be hurt by this, what data or evidence supports this, and how might this be perceived by others.
4. Does this align with our vision for an equitable and inclusive organization? Leagues should consider how equity is addressed, what barriers might this place in the way of achieving equity, and how does this impact the organization’s culture.
5. What changes could be made to make this more equitable? Leagues should consider what the short- and long-term goals are, what policies or bylaws need to be added or amended, what the benefits to members are, and what the benefits are for partners and/or members of the community.
Please consider downloading our DEI lens resource at [https://www.lwv.org/league-management/dei-resources/dei-lens](https://www.lwv.org/league-management/dei-resources/dei-lens) for inclusion in your planning documents.

Leagues should be aware that this process will take more time in the beginning, but as the DEI lens is regularly applied it will become easier to move through the questions, identify opportunities, and react in a way that bolsters DEI. In instances where Leagues go through the questions and find that the DEI lens is not present fully or partially, Leagues should work to include as many factors as possible and consider obstacles that led to gaps in one area versus others and how to continue to build upon this work anytime the League is taking action. When applying the DEI lens to events, Leagues should consult the DEI checklist, [https://www.lwv.org/sites/defBault/files/2019-10/deichecklist_module2.pdf](https://www.lwv.org/sites/defBault/files/2019-10/deichecklist_module2.pdf).

**Advocacy at the National Level**

**Establishing National Priorities**

To guide its work in Congress, the LWVUS Board adopts lobbying priorities every year. The goal is to maintain focus on issues of primary importance identified by LWVUS. The goals are to:

- Project a focused and consistent message,
- Enhance the League’s effectiveness and impact,
- Build the League’s credibility and visibility,
- Ensure that the League has sufficient issue and political expertise,
- Reflect program decisions made at convention and/or council,
- Build on strong member interest and support, and
- Enable the League to manage resources effectively.

**LWVUS Advocacy Team**

The advocacy team, working in collaboration with the LWVUS Board, is responsible for developing and implementing strategies for lobbying and advocating on national issues. LWVUS staff lobbyists carry out the day-to-day monitoring and action plans for the League and oversee the LWVUS Lobby Corps.

**Action Alerts**

Based on League priorities, the LWVUS advocacy team sends out regular Action Alerts detailing the subject under consideration, the proposed action steps, and the individuals to be contacted. Action Alerts are sent to the League’s online grassroots supporter list and state and local League presidents who are expected to respond with the appropriate action.

**LWVUS Lobby Corps**

The Lobby Corps (LC) is made up of Washington, DC-area League member volunteers who lobby each month when Congress is in session. The LWVUS advocacy staff acts as liaisons between LWV lobbyists on Capitol Hill and local and state Leagues. Advocacy staff works with LWV leaders and activists in targeted states and congressional districts to help develop and implement grassroots lobbying strategies.

**Grassroots Lobbying**

The LWVUS online grassroots support list provides another good way for Leagues to keep in contact with Members of Congress (MOC). This online network of activists sends the League message to
Congress in a highly effective way. League members with email addresses are automatically enrolled in this list. The list also includes activists and other interested members of the public who believe in the League’s mission.

State and Local Advocacy/Lobbying on LWVUS Priority Issues
Once LWVUS has identified its advocacy priorities, state and local Leagues are requested to act on those issues under guidance from LWVUS. Optimally, state and local Leagues should encourage members to contact their national legislators on key League national issues; their action greatly enhances the League’s clout. Lobbying in Washington is vitally important, but direct lobbying of MOCs by constituents often is the key to persuading them to support the League’s position. The arguments that League leaders and members make to their Representative or Senators can make the difference in how they vote. MOCs return to their states or districts regularly during congressional recesses. This is a good time to schedule meetings with them or to talk with them at public events.

On key issues LWVUS may call on League presidents to take state specific actions before critical votes in Congress. LWV presidents also will receive sample messages to be used on issues on which the organization is actively lobbying. Each state and local League president is expected to take whatever official action is requested in response to the requests.

Local Leagues and Members
While the LWVUS Board takes the lead in national action and keeps League action synchronized with the U.S. Congress, there is a role for every League in national legislation in many circumstances. For example, when responding to an LWVUS Action Alert, a local League president would send a message on behalf of the organization (i.e. on League letterhead). Members are also encouraged to respond to Action Alerts, noting their League affiliation.

Sharing Information
Whenever state or local Leagues succeed in communicating with their Members of Congress or their staffs, it is very beneficial to send a report to the advocacy team at LWVUS.

State and Local Action on Non-Priority Federal Issues
A state or local League wishing to act on an issue at the national level that is not a priority of the national board must consult with the LWVUS. The state League must support a local League’s action request. Leagues and League members must lobby only their own legislators. Individual members are welcome to act on their own behalf without any mention of or attribution to the League. Actions affecting other Leagues must be coordinated with those Leagues. When action is considered at the regional level, all the Leagues in the affected region must be part of the decision-making. LWVUS often helps to facilitate such regional efforts, particularly when the situation involves federal law.

Federal Action Request Form
For League convenience and to ensure a prompt reply, LWVUS has developed an online form that goes directly to the advocacy team at LWVUS. The Federal Action Request Form should be used any time Leagues would like to act at the federal level or are contemplating litigation in the federal courts. The form can be found on the LWVUS League Management Site at the following URL: https://www.lwv.org/federal-action-request-form
As part of the consultation process, the state/local League needs to provide the following information in writing:

- The proposed action and the message to be conveyed.
- The LWVUS position on which the action is based.
- The timeline for sending the message or signing the letter.
- Evidence that the issue is a priority for that state or local League.
- Any relevant additional supporting documents.

The LWVUS staff will review and consult as needed with the LWVUS Board regarding the action request to determine that it is consistent with League positions and that it will not interfere with LWVUS action on a priority issue or issues.

**State and Local Action Using Impact on Issues**

**Using National Positions at the Regional, State, and Local Level**

Both the Principles (broad statements of beliefs) and Positions (specific statements and guidelines) can be used at the state and local level to develop support for actions taken at those levels. *Impact on Issues*, while often citing the federal level of government, is also designed as a guide to encourage state and local Leagues to develop plans for acting at the community level.

League positions at the national level are by their very nature broad and general in scope: they are guides for acting. Local Leagues are responsible for determining action at the local level, and state Leagues are responsible for determining action at the state level and ensuring that the action is consistent throughout the state. Therefore, state and local Leagues must determine that members understand and generally agree with actions taken based on League positions; they should ensure that the action reflects the unique circumstances of the affected community. As with other action, when there are ramifications beyond a League’s own governmental jurisdiction, that League must consult other Leagues that may be affected.

Typical actions include any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a federal issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter-to-the-editor.

**Acting in the Community**

Interpretation of a League position is the responsibility of the board wishing to use a position. Local League boards are responsible for interpreting local, state, and/or national positions before acting. State boards interpret state, regional, and/or national positions; the national board interprets national positions. Interpretation may be influenced by local conditions. LWVUS staff is available for consultation related to national positions. A League contemplating action on a community issue should consider the following questions:

- Does the League have a position that supports the proposed action?
- Is there broad member understanding and agreement?
- Is it a priority for the League?
- Does the League have a unique role to play or a chance to take the lead?
- Are other organizations or a coalition already working on the issue?
• Is this the best use of the League's resources (time and money) or would they be better spent on other activities?
• Is the timing right? Is action likely in the present time frame?
• What kind of community involvement would best support the League’s efforts?

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 of the United States 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.

The League of Women Voters believes 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.

The League of Women Voters believes every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes 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 that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy, and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes 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.