



SPOTLIGHT ON....

Your Observer Corps

“The League has been a champion of government transparency since our founding in 1920. It is one of our core principles and a vital part of our mission. Our efforts in this area reinforce our reputation of fairness, nonpartisanship and trust. League members attend governmental meetings to learn what their government is doing and to monitor whether those meetings are conducted in an open and transparent way. Experience has shown the importance of the League being present to watch—and to take action when necessary.”

Mary Wilson, LWVUS, Past President in the publication *Observing Your Government in Action*.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has an excellent, comprehensive publication dealing with Observer Corps. The link to *Observing Your Government in Action* is: <http://tinyurl.com/lwvo-10-06> (You may need your ctrl button to access)

The first things a League will need to think about when planning for observers are: what agencies or offices or committees will it monitor, what types of information will observers be monitoring, and what will be done with the information collected? Keep in mind the “hottest” issues in your community and where those issues will be resolved.

Observers do not need to be experts but should be good listeners and be able to summarize what they have heard without editorializing. The observer should be interested in local government and be a good representative for the League and not have their own agenda.

When you have decided the above questions, think about where you want to put the observer's report. Obviously, the League's newsletter and web site are primary locations, but you may want to send e-mails to members to make them aware of special happenings. Honor the observers by using their information at regular meetings or have a meeting dedicated to their information and experiences or give them special notice at the annual meeting.

Remember to use the information gained by the Observer Corps to help the League connect with the larger community. Using the information gained or the public's recognition can increase membership, visibility, and respect for the organization. Public ways to keep the organization visible are to write letters to the editor on topics important for the community to know about. Op-eds (opposite page editorial) written by League Presidents or Observers at the request of the League can be used to highlight an issue.

Your observer program is a benefit to the community. It protects the public's right to know. The League is a respected, trusted and impartial group which government officials often call on for its expertise and knowledge of local issues.

Observers have a responsibility to do their best at giving the League membership information that is correct and impartial. It helps to think about your audience- who will be reading what you have written? In a report, observers should state the group and its members and the location, date and time of the meeting.

An Observer Program is a valuable addition to any League's agenda. They are the eyes and ears who help the League carry out its mission of advocacy, education and empowerment of citizens to participate in government.