

# Welcome to the League

*Since 1920*

## A Handbook for New Members



The League of Women Voters of Ohio, 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 of Women Voters of Ohio! Please use this handbook to become familiar with the League. From all levels of League—local, state, and national—we are honored that you have joined us and invite you to help in Making Democracy Work®.

## **Mission and Purpose**

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO), 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;
- that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens 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 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; and
- 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.

## League Accomplishments

### NATIONAL

The spirit of the suffrage movement led to our founding in 1920. LWV is a grassroots organization committed to citizen involvement in government. We work on educating and informing voters, reforming money in politics, defending the environment, promoting responsible fiscal policy, ensuring equal opportunity in education, employment and housing, and global democracy. The national level of League is generally referred to as LWVUS.

### STATE

Also formed in May 1920, the LWV of Ohio (LWVO) has focused on election laws, the judicial system, protecting our natural resources, equitable financing, public education, health care and protection of women and children. We have actively sought equitable reapportionment legislation. The state League has made voting information accessible throughout the state through use of VOTE411 even if a local League does not service a region.

### LOCAL

Local Leagues have spearheaded improvements in the structure and efficiency of their local governments, and worked on issues including public education, housing, health services, racism, local planning, sanitation, recreation, public transportation, and tax and charter reform. The local Voter Guides are an essential tool for voters. Local Leagues in Ohio are listed on the website [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org).

## League Activity

### VOTER SERVICE AND CITIZEN INFORMATION

The League is perhaps best known for its services to voters. We register people to vote and encourage participation in government. We sponsor candidate forums, provide voting information, and work to get out the vote. The League never supports or opposes any political party or candidate for elective office, but does speak out on legislation and ballot issues on which it has a position based on study and consensus (a key word for League, it means a meeting of our minds, not a vote). League also encourages its members, as individuals, to take part fully in the political process.



### VOTE411

Launched by the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF), VOTE411.org is a “one-stop-shop” for election-related information. It provides nonpartisan information to the public with both general and state-specific information on all aspects of the election process.



A key component of VOTE411.org is the polling place locator, which enables users to type in their address and retrieve the poll location for the voting precinct in which that address is located. The League has found that this is among the most sought after information in the immediate days leading up to, and on, Election Day.

## League Activity

### STUDY

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

- The issue must be one on which governmental action is needed.
- The issue must fall within the principles of the LWVUS.
- 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 the League has a position on an 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.

### ACTION AND ADVOCACY

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 on that position can then be taken, often in the form of lobbying elected officials, testifying before committees, submitting letters to the editor, conducting media outreach, holding public forums, organizing coalitions, initiating litigation, and producing publications.
- Positions may be evaluated periodically, with members determining whether to retain, modify, or drop positions.

## League Activity

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS**

The results of League studies and action are conveyed to the public via print and electronic media. The effective use of LWV blogs, social media, news conferences, radio and television programs, statements to governmental bodies, are all part of the strategies used to promote our positions.

The League's goals are addressed, very importantly, through its publications that are researched, written, and distributed by members at every level. Local bulletins are published as needed, typically monthly, while the *Ohio Voter* and the national *VOTER* are published quarterly.

### **OBSERVER CORPS**

Many Leagues appoint observers for meetings of various local, regional, state, and national governmental bodies. Observers do not speak for the League but attend these meetings to listen, learn, and make factual reports to our members of the proceedings. The observer program has earned the League's reputation as a fair and accurate civic monitor.

### **SPEAKERS BUREAU**

Many Leagues have members who are available to speak on League issues to organizations within the community.



## Sources of Funding

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) is supported by two separate funding sources. The educational activities of the LWV Ohio are supported by the Education Fund our 501(c)(3), while our advocacy and membership programs are funded by the 501(c)(4). Under the Internal Revenue Service's Code, donations to the 501(c)(3), i.e., LWVO Education Fund are tax deductible charitable donations as permitted by law, but those funds can only be used for supportive education efforts, not for the advocacy campaign.

The League is a nonprofit organization that relies on dues and contributions to operate and to achieve its goals. Support comes from members, non-members, and foundations. Each local League decides the amount of its dues and the method for collecting them. From its funds, the local League pays a Per Member Payment (PMP) to support both the national and state (or regional) Leagues. The League also raises funds from major donor giving and special events.

## Hear what our **members** have to say about their **League experience...**

"I've been a member since the late 1960's. It was the best decision I ever made. The best training I ever got on how to give fair minded presentations on issues was through the League."

*-Jane Anderson, LWV of Cincinnati Area*

"I joined the League because it's a recognized voice working for our democracy. It's one of the few noted voices that can still be heard today."

*-Alex Davis, LWV of Wayne County*

"League members are the best informed women with the greatest amount of energy and humor."

*-Vivienne Himmel, LWV of Greater Dayton Area*

## Organization and Membership

The League is organized around three levels – national, state and local. There is one National League in Washington, D.C., state Leagues in each state, and numerous local Leagues. Joining the League at any level automatically confers membership at all three levels – local, state, and national.

Our organization is driven by grassroots leadership and actions. You may support the League with membership dues, read League material, attend meetings and social events, observe/lobby government officials, elect officers, or serve on committees and boards.

Membership is open to women and men who support the purpose and principles of the League and provides the opportunity to be actively involved in local, state, and national issues. Members living outside the area of and not enrolled in a local League are called at-large members (ALMs).

The League is a nonpartisan organization that committed to diversity, recognizing that diverse perspectives and political opinions are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making in a democracy. Diversity also enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs.

Types of Membership:

- Voting members are persons at least 16 years old.
- Household members are two or more members living at the same address.
- Associate members are persons who are under 16 years old.
- At-large members (ALMs) are League members who live outside the area of a local League or choose not to enroll in any local League, but are members of the state and national LWV.
- A student member is anyone who is enrolled in any type of full-time education program.
- Life members are voting members who have belonged to the League for 50 or more years. Life members pay no dues.
- An organizational member is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that shares similar League values and goals. An organizational member is a non-voting member at LWVO Convention.

## MEETINGS

Each local League determines its own schedule; most meet at least once a month. Each local League holds an annual meeting to elect officers, set local dues, and adopt local program, bylaws, and budget. All members should attend the annual meetings.

## KEY EVENTS

### Statehouse Day

The annual Statehouse Day event offers engaging sessions and workshops on key public policy issues that are of interest to League members. The event provides an opportunity for members to lobby their legislators. This whole day event is open to the public and generally held in spring in Columbus.

### Convention

A state convention is held every other year in odd years. It is comprised of delegates elected by local Leagues in numbers proportionate to their membership. Observers and guests may attend but may not vote. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support, and bylaws as well as elect officers for the next biennium.



## Local Leagues in Ohio

The number and name of Local Leagues change over time. Refer to the LWV Ohio website for current information: [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org).

## 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 as a whole, 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

**ILO - Inter-League Organization** - A group of local LWVs which have collaborated to study and act on joint problems

**LWV** - League of Women Voters

**ALM** - At-Large Member - a member who is not part of a local LWV

**ALU** - At-Large Unit - group of LWV members, not organized formally as a local League that participates in limited League activities

**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

**Observers** - LWV members who attend and monitor meetings of government councils, boards, and commissions

**PMP - Per Member Payment** - the portion of member dues which goes to support the national, state, or regional Leagues; typically, PMP due to state and national combined represents more than 90% of local League dues.

**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 (also referred to as VIB or Voter Information Bulletin)

**Voter Service** - year-round activities to help citizens be informed, active, and politically effective (e.g., voter registration, voter guides)





## **THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OHIO**

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