

Local League Basics

The logo for the League of Women Voters (LWV) consists of the letters "LWV" in a bold, sans-serif font. A thick, grey, curved brushstroke underline is positioned beneath the letters.

Governance, Membership,
Communications, and Finance

The League of Women Voters
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Introduction

Congratulations on being elected to a leadership role in your local League. LWVMA looks forward to providing you with the resources and support you need to be successful.

The success of your local League depends on a number of components. While the substance of your activities — such as voter service, citizen education, and advocacy — is critically important, this handbook was designed to introduce you to one particular aspect of your League’s work: the nuts and bolts of local League management. It includes valuable information in the areas of Governance, Membership, Communications, and Finance.

No document has answers to all questions; please don’t hesitate to reach out to LWVMA for help at 617-523-2999 or lwwma@lwwma.org.

League Governance

A. General Requirements

Local Leagues are self-governing—that is, they exist as separate entities and are responsible for their own governance, finances, and legal reporting. However, since a local League is part of a three-tier organization, it must also meet the following requirements in order to maintain its status as a part of the League of Women Voters:

- **Have bylaws (first three articles must be consistent with those of the LWVUS)**
- **Establish and maintain a nonpartisan policy.**
- **Hold an annual business meeting of the membership.**
- **Hold regular board meetings.**
- **Meet financial obligations (per member payment) to the state and national levels of the League and adopt a financial plan for sustainability and for carrying out the League’s mission to its community.**
- **Have a plan for membership growth and retention that encourages a membership as diverse as the community.**
- **Act in ways that are consistent with League principles, positions, and policies.**

B. Leadership Models

Traditionally, local Leagues have been governed by a Board of Directors led by a president and other officers. However, in recent years, some of our local Leagues have moved to a Steering Committee model. Both of these models are described below.

1. **Board of Directors:** The board of directors is the administrative and policymaking team for the League. All members of the board are responsible for planning and decision-making in several broad interdependent areas: Organization and Management (membership growth and participation; adequate financing and

realistic budgeting; internal/external communications; visibility; and efficient administrative operations); Voter Service/Citizen Education; Program (study, consensus, advocacy).

The Board of Directors is led by officers, consisting (at a minimum) of a president or co-presidents, treasurer, and secretary, but often also including vice presidents. Board members often assume specific duties and/or portfolios, including Voter Service, Program, Communications, Membership, etc.

2. **Steering Committee:** The Steering Committee model is an alternative governance approach that works for Leagues who feel a new leadership model may be a good fit for their situation. It is a management team model where leadership responsibility for the local League is shared.

There are no rules governing the composition of a steering committee. Leagues can develop a model that works for them as long as they meet the basic requirements of being a League. It is recommended that the leadership team includes a Spokesperson/Convener, Treasurer, Webmaster/Communicator, and Member Coordinator. More information regarding this model can be found here:

<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/management-team-model>

A steering committee is charged with the same responsibilities and duties as the Board of Directors.

C. Bylaws

Bylaws are fundamental rules drawn up by organizations to govern their internal affairs and their dealings with members and others. Local League bylaws are developed by the Board/Steering Committee and approved by the membership at annual meeting.

The first three articles of the national League bylaws set forth the League name, present the League's purpose and policy, and define membership in the League. The first three articles of all local and state League bylaws must be consistent with those of the LWVUS in order to define and maintain the unity of the organization and the powers and privileges of members. *Please note that a change to Article III, Section 2 of the national bylaws was approved at the LWVUS Convention in June 2016, and all state and local League bylaws should be revised to reflect this change. Because this change was approved at a national convention, a vote of local membership is not required.*

D. Policies

Policies are developed by the Board/Steering Committee and approved by the membership at annual meeting. To be recognized by the national League, each local League must adopt a

nonpartisan policy. In addition, we strongly suggest that local Leagues adopt policies to address each of the following topics: conflict of interest, candidate debates and forums, e-meetings held by telephone, e-mail, or other electronic methods, and diversity. The versions of these additional policies adopted by both LWVUS and LWVMA (available on their respective websites) can be used as templates for local Leagues.

E. Additional Governance Resources

- Best Practices <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/best-practices>
- Board Policy Handbook <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/board-policy-handbook>
- LWVUS Bylaws <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/bylaws-and-certificate-incorporation>
- League Basics <http://forum.lwv.org/sites/default/files/member-resources/league-basics.pdf>

Membership

Members are the League's most valuable asset. The organization's strong grassroots system distinguishes the League from other organizations; the League is *the* organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Members belong to all three levels of the League—local, state and national. Member categories (e.g., individual, household, student, associate, life member) are defined by the LWVUS Bylaws.

A. Membership Recruitment Plan

Leagues need to recruit new members to continue, advance, and hopefully expand their good work. A growing, thriving membership enables the organization to succeed in accomplishing its goals and fulfilling its mission. Membership recruitment and growth is the result of intentional actions by both leaders and members and occurs mostly at the local level. It requires planning, year-round attention and a strong partnership among all levels of the League.

In addition to its leadership role in building an organization that will attract new members and promote the involvement of current members, the Board of Directors—collectively and individually—is responsible for:

- Building membership recruitment efforts into all League activities.
- Designing activities that will appeal to diverse groups.
- Individually promoting the League and League membership at every opportunity.

The key is to *ask* people specifically to join the League. No opportunity is too small or too big to promote League membership. LWVUS' Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) site provides useful ideas for recruiting and retaining membership. <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/sections/membership-and-leadership-development>

B. Dues and PMP

Membership dues make up a significant portion of the income in most local League budgets. Dues levels are set by each local League, and collecting dues is the responsibility of the local League. A proactive and structured dues renewal process is important to member retention.

Leagues are responsible for paying a per member payment (PMP) for each locally recruited member to the LWVUS and their state League. National PMP is set by delegates at the national convention, and state PMP is set by delegates at the state convention.

C. Membership Database

Both LWVUS and LWVMA maintain membership databases and aim to keep them up-to-date. It is critical that local Leagues communicate with both the state and national Leagues throughout the year if their membership rosters change, so new members receive newsletters, action alerts, and event invitations from either state or national—a benefit of belonging to a three-tier organization.

Updating LWVUS: All local Leagues should have login information for the national database and can update their rosters themselves. (See instructions for using the LWVUS database at: http://forum.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lwvus_database_user_guide_2016_1.pdf)

Although new members should be added as they join, it is *essential* that local Leagues update their rosters with LWVUS annually by January 31. A local League's roster on February 1 of each year forms the basis for its PMP assessment (national and state) for the following year.

Updating LWVMA: Local Leagues should report new member contact information to LWVMA (617-523-2999 or lwvma@lwvma.org).

Leagues should keep LWVUS and LWVMA informed of their **leadership**, especially after your Annual Meeting. Leaders receive League management information, reminders, and have access to leader tools. Leaders should be entered in the LWVUS membership roster and by contacting LWVMA (see above).

Communications

Everything a League does involves communications. To be effective, a communications strategy must be built into every activity and project on the League's agenda.

1. Contact Information

Every local League needs a permanent address, phone number, and email address. This contact information is critical so that the general public, the press, and potential and current members know how to reach local Leagues.

- Consider getting a post office box so that your League's address remains the same despite leadership changes.
- Your League's telephone number should have voice mail, which should be monitored routinely and often. Consider getting a phone number through Google Voice, a service that gives you one number that is tied to your League, not to a device or a location. More information is available here: <https://support.google.com/voice/answer/115061?hl=en>
- For a League email, Gmail will allow you to set up a free League email address (e.g. lwwalthamma@gmail.com), and web hosting services and League Easy Web include email forwarding service (e.g. league@lwwlexington.org).

2. Website

Every League should have its own website, which should be linked to the national League website. A website is the League's face to the community—both the public and its members. The website should be well designed, easily navigable, and updated on a regular basis. LWVUS encourages Leagues, especially those without websites, to use League Easy Web (LEW), created by the LWV of California. It is an easy and affordable option. More information about LEW is available here: <http://www.lwwnet.org>.

3. Newsletter

A local League's most basic tool for communicating with its members is its newsletter, whether in print or emailed. Every League should include the League's registered logo on the newsletter masthead. A good newsletter should be an effective tool for membership involvement and retention; it should convey a sense of enthusiasm about the League's accomplishments and expertise as well as communicate information to its members. The League should distribute its newsletter on a routine schedule.

4. Facebook and Twitter

Technology has changed the way people interact and take action on the issues they care about. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media allow local Leagues to quickly and easily communicate with both their members and the general public. We strongly recommend that all Leagues maintain a Facebook page. And once your League decides to use a specific social media site, regularly updating the site is key, since allowing a site to go dormant may mean loss of participation and followers. More information about the strategic use of social media can be found here: http://forum.lww.org/sites/default/files/complete_online_organizing_toolkit.pdf

5. Media

The League's visibility in a community or state depends largely on how successful it is in getting stories carried by the print and electronic media. Press releases and letters to the editor are invaluable tools for winning the media's attention, and the LWVUS and LWVMA have templates for both.

6. Logo

To facilitate a uniform image of the League, it is advisable for every League to use the League's registered (trademarked) logo on all publications, League letterhead, and the website.

Downloadable logo files and standards for use of the League logo can be found at <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/league-logos-available-downloads>

7. Additional Communications information can be found here: <https://lwvma.org/member-resources/toolkits-for-members/communications-toolkit/>

Finances

Local Leagues are responsible for managing their own financing. Whether a League is governed by a Board or a Steering Committee, it should select one individual to act as treasurer. The treasurer's duties include:

- **Keeping careful records of all income and expenses and report regularly to your board.**
- **Collecting and depositing dues and other income.**
- **Paying the bills.**
- **Preparing voucher form for reimbursement.**
- **Keeping an accurate record of your League's membership.**
- **With the membership chair, keeping the LWVUS and LWVMA informed of changes on a regular basis.**
- **Arranging for liability insurance for events.**
- **Paying PMP to LWVUS and LWVMA.**
- **Closing the books and filing your League's tax return.**

Local Leagues in Massachusetts are considered nonprofit organizations under a group exemption held by the LWVMA and are exempt from the payment of certain federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. However, your League **MUST** file informational tax returns with the IRS. Tax returns are due on the 15th day of the 5th month after your year ends. So, if your fiscal year ends on June 30, your return would be due November 15. If your League's gross receipts are normally \$50,000 or less, you can file a Form 990-N, Electronic Notice (*e-Postcard*) for Tax-Exempt Organizations and are not required to File Form 990 or 990EZ.

Some local Leagues have also created education funds under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; these Leagues will also have to file tax returns for their education funds.

More detailed information about your League's financial requirements and filing obligations can be found on the LWVMA website here:

<https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Information-for-Local-League-Treasurers.pdf>