

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

## **Guidance for Local League Collaborations with Other Organizations**

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*Approved by LWVMA Board of Directors March 8, 2019*

A heightened interest for civic activism in recent years has led to the emergence of new advocacy groups in our communities. This influx of new groups presents an excellent opportunity for collaborations and spreading the League’s mission and message to a wider audience.

This document gives guidance to local Leagues given this recent need to share the “democracy space.” LWVMA recognizes that every community has its own culture and League history that local Leagues should also consider when making decisions about collaborations.

If, after reviewing these guidelines, you have any questions related to collaborating with non-League groups, please direct them to LWVMA ([lwvma@lwvma.org](mailto:lwvma@lwvma.org)).

### **Types of Collaborations**

#### **Member Organization of a Coalition**

As a coalition member, a local League is one of several organizations within an umbrella organization. Membership in a coalition is a more permanent arrangement that implies that a local League supports the mission of the coalition, and the coalition can effectively contribute toward a local League’s educational and advocacy goals. The activities of the coalition must be non-partisan, though other member organizations may engage in partisan activities outside of the coalition’s shared work.

#### **Collaborating on Events**

Collaborating on events is generally only for a specific event or related events. A local League lends its name, reputation, experience and organization. A local League may contribute financial or in-kind support. The local League may be the lead organization, co-sponsor, or simply support the event by lending its name and/or making a donation.

#### **Action Campaigns**

A local League may collaborate with other organizations on an action campaign to support or oppose a local issue, Town Meeting article, or local ballot question. A local League may be part of the campaign committee, may support a campaign, or may take action on its own.

Before lending its name in support of a campaign, the local League board or steering committee must vote in support or opposition to the issue, and the stand must be based on a local, state, or national position.

A local League may participate in a statewide action campaign through the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts. If there is any question about statewide campaigns, contact the LWVMA.

## Guidelines for Collaborating

### Considerations

The following considerations will guide a local League board in determining whether to collaborate. The criteria also apply to decisions on whether to have a representative attend the meetings of an informal group on a regular basis.

- There must be clear and compelling reasons for collaborating.
- The goals and actions of the collaboration should be in accord with League mission and positions.
- The lead organization of an event or action should be transparent in its planning and ensure the event does not advocate for parties or candidates.
- The collaboration must not compromise the League's nonpartisanship. The collaborative activity must not be in support of a candidate or party. However, the collaborating organizations may support parties or candidates in activities outside of the collaborative activity.
  - For example, a local League may decide to collect signatures for a ballot question at a table with a group that endorses candidates. It is OK to do that as long as there is no campaign literature, signage or other campaign activity at the table.
  - A local League may co-sponsor an event with a group that endorses candidates as long as there is no written or spoken support for candidates or parties at the event. During the campaign season, as collaborators may begin endorsing and campaigning for candidates, the League should be particularly careful to make clear to the collaborating group(s) these conditions. A local League should not co-sponsor a candidate debate or forum with any group that has endorsed a candidate.
  - A local League should not do anything under the umbrella of a political party, unless all parties are represented equally.
  - A local League should consider opportunities to state the nonpartisanship of the League of Women Voters when speaking at the event and/or in the printed program.
- A local League should ensure that collaborating organizations work effectively and are responsible and reliable.
- Inclusion and diverse participation should be a focus of the event planning.
- Potential for visibility and/or expansion of League membership should be considered.
- Access to names and emails of event attendees should be assured.
- If there is a cost to participating, the local League should consider the financial standing of the collaborating group.

### Co-sponsoring a Candidate or Ballot Question Forum

A local League must approve any co-sponsorship of a debate/forum. In doing so, it will consider carefully potential effects on the LWVMA's nonpartisan status or the public's perception of its nonpartisanship.

A local League cannot waive its nonpartisan policy, its general debate/forum policies, or any procedures that ensure fair treatment of candidates.

In addition, the following considerations will apply.

- Co-sponsors cannot have endorsed or be affiliated with a candidate prior to the debate/forum.
- If possible, the local League will take the lead in contacting the candidates, negotiating disputes, preparing and sorting questions, and controlling the format for a debate/forum that is co-sponsored. If at any time during the planning of the debate/forum the local League believes co-sponsorship of the debate/forum will jeopardize its nonpartisanship, the League should withdraw from its co-sponsorship.
- The local League should provide the moderator and timekeeper or approve of them in advance. The moderator may not be identified as a member of a political party or campaign committee or have any relationship with any of the candidates. The best practice is for the moderator to live outside the district.

## **Local League Roles**

### **Role of Local League Board and President**

- The president/leader should ensure that the local League has a representative involved in the collaboration.
- The local League board or Steering Committee will vote on all collaborative activities.
- If there is an opportunity, the president/leader should speak for the local League at the event, or delegate that role to an appropriate League member.
- A local League will encourage its members to participate in the collaborative activity.
- A local League will not be responsible for any collaboration expenses beyond amounts specifically budgeted or approved by the board.

### **Role of Representative**

- The local League representative must keep the board informed of the activities and actions resulting from the collaboration.
- The representative is responsible for ensuring that the use of the League's name on statements, letters, press releases, publications or any other materials is reviewed and approved by the local League president/leader or designee.
- The representative and the local League president/leader are responsible for ensuring that coalition actions, events, or action campaigns are in accordance with the League's policies, mission and positions.
- The local League representative can publicly speak for the League only if authorized to do so by the president/leader.
- The representative may serve in a leadership capacity in the coalition.

## Resources

### LWVUS

Opportunity for Guidance: Collaboration

[https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/sept\\_guidance\\_final.pdf](https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/sept_guidance_final.pdf)

The Changing “Democracy Space”: Guidance on Opportunities

[https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/democracy\\_space\\_jan\\_2018\\_0.pdf](https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/democracy_space_jan_2018_0.pdf)

Working with Activist Groups as a Non-Partisan Organization

[https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/workingwithactivisitgroups\\_march2018.pdf](https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/workingwithactivisitgroups_march2018.pdf)

### LWVMA

Policy for Participating in Coalitions

<https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/LWVMA-coalitions-policy-012216-3r.pdf>

Policy for Candidates Debates and Forums Sponsored by LWVMA

<https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Debates-and-Forums-Policy-Final-040216r.pdf>