



Guidelines for local Leagues on ballot questions:

General Information:

LWVMA supports or opposes statewide ballot questions based on our positions, arrived at through study and consensus. If we do not have positions at either the national or state level that permit us to support or oppose a ballot question or if we decide there are conflicting positions, we will not take a stand on that question.

Any forum or published voter information on the ballot questions should make clear the League positions on the questions, or if the League has no position on specific questions.

LWVUS notes that: "It is the responsibility of the board of directors to ensure that voter service activities and lobbying activities are kept clearly separate. Voters' guides and other voter service materials must not contain statements of League positions, and League positions on ballot issues must not be discussed at voter service events." Additional LWVUS information on issues forums is at:

<http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/book/voters-service-and-citizens-information>.

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/voting-rights-tools/voters-service-and-citizens-information>

Forums on ballot questions on which LWVMA has taken a stand:

If LWVMA has a stand on a question it means we are advocating for or against it, and such forums would be advocacy events. They cannot be paid for with education fund money or Scharfman grants.

LWVMA suggests that League forums on questions on which we have taken a stand focus on the reasons we are supporting or opposing a question. There is no need to invite a speaker from the opposing side. The speaker presenting the League side should cover the opposition's arguments and then refute them. Here is the LWVUS statement: "Over the years, the League has built an excellent reputation for providing the public with accurate, nonpartisan services and information on elections and on governmental and public policy issues. The League's voter services activities are designed to provide citizens with unbiased, factual information that can be used as a basis for understanding the election process and reaching their own voting decisions. The League's citizen education activities, on the other hand, provide information on public issues, including those on which we have a position; by law and League policy, it is not necessary to present both sides of an issue in such situations. In other words, Leagues may educate the public about a particular point of view or "side" of an issue (e.g., a League could hold a forum about why the death penalty should be abolished without including experts/panelists in support of capital punishment)."

When we have a clearly-stated position, we suggest that local Leagues stick with presentations which support that position, bearing in mind effective support includes countering the other side's arguments and permitting audience questions from opponents.

Forums on ballot questions on which LWVMA has no position:

In this circumstance, it should be explained that LWVMA has no stand on a specific question because it has no positions at the national or state level on this subject or has chosen not to take a stand.

LWVMA suggests that when local Leagues hold forums on this type of ballot question, they ask credible speakers on both sides of the issue to present their case.

This type of forum is a citizen education/voter service event and can be paid for with educational fund money.

Forums that include both types of ballot questions:

LWVMA recommends that local Leagues not plan forums that include both ballot questions we have a position on and those we do not have a position on in the same event. Such a program would blur the line between advocacy and citizen education. If a local League decides to do such a program, we would suggest dividing it into distinct parts, and treating the two types of questions in the manner outlined above.

Voter Guides on Ballot Questions:

If all the ballot questions are included in a printed piece or on a local League website, it should be treated as an advocacy piece, and not be presented as an impartial voters' guide because we are advocating for certain ballot issues. It should not be labelled a "Voters' Guide," since that term is used for our non-partisan information. The information should state clearly which questions the League has a position on. Those could be listed first, with the reasons for the League stands. The ballot questions the League has no position on could follow, perhaps with the pro and con arguments from credible sources or from the Secretary of State's voters' guide.

Another option is to simply list all of the ballot questions; that information is already sent to every household by the Secretary of State.

League Information Tables:

The question comes up whether Leagues can offer both voter registration and other voter information and information on ballot questions that we have taken a position on at such events as town fairs and harvest festivals, or anywhere a local League may have an information table.

Voter service/citizen education and advocacy are equal but separate parts of the League's mission. When you are presenting the League to the public in a situation such as a table at a townwide event, it is both important and appropriate to show these two sides of the League.

LWVMA urges local Leagues to do that, but carefully. Perhaps offer voter registration forms, information on upcoming Candidates' Nights and similar voter service information on one side of the table, and information on the ballot questions on the other side of the table, with membership information in the middle. Be prepared to explain that the League is non-partisan, never supporting candidates or political parties, but does actively support issues it has studied and reached membership consensus on and seeks to educate voters about those issues.

If the event and resources and volunteers allow, it would be even better to have a separate table for voter and membership information and for ballot question information, but that is not a feasible option in many cases. LWVMA encourages local Leagues to promote all sides of the League.

Individual Member Activities:

Individual League members are, of course, free to advocate for any ballot question. But they must not identify themselves as League representatives unless they are working for a ballot question the League has taken a stand on and in favor of the League position.

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