



Starting a Local League

Membership Steering Committee

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower all people to shape better communities worldwide. By joining the League, they can gain the information and skills needed to become effective participants in government. Belonging to an active local League offers additional opportunities to take part in the democratic process. For the organization as a whole, new members and new Leagues mean fresh ideas, innovative approaches to resolving public policy concerns, and ongoing sources of leadership.

The League of Women Voters is organized on three levels--national, state and local—with inter-League regional organizations (ILOs) in some metropolitan areas. Recognized local Leagues function in some 1,000 communities throughout the United States. In areas where there is no local League, interested persons can join as Members-at Large (MAL). MALs automatically become members of the state and national League. A group of MALs may become a local League by first becoming an MAL Unit under the direction of the state League.

What is a State League Unit?

Members-at-large are League members who live outside the area of and are not enrolled in a recognized local League. When members-at-large in a given geographical area want to work together, they may request recognition as a unit of the state League. These units give a group of members-at-large an opportunity to participate in League activities even though there is no local League in the area.

MAL Units undertake community service projects that encourage citizen participation in government, such as candidate forums and informational meetings on public policy issues. They also are encouraged to participate in local issues, in LWV state and national program studies, and to respond to LWV action alerts.

Units operate under the direction and guidance of the state League, which handles various administrative and financial duties for the members of the unit. Typically the responsibility for engaging, supporting, and monitoring these units is assigned to a person designated by the state Board. This state advisor represents the state League, acts as the link between the unit and the state board, and supports and assists the unit in whatever it undertakes, to keep up the interest of the members and to guide and counsel its leaders.

How do we get started?

The first step is to organize an initial meeting to learn about formal League involvement. The meeting can be handled in one of two ways: It can be a small gathering with the handful of people who have expressed an interest in forming a new League or it can be a community-wide meeting to which the public is invited. One or more representatives of the state League will be available to participate with you.

The purpose of the **first meeting** is threefold: to introduce the League, to discuss the MAL process, and to plan an organizational meeting if there is interest in becoming a local League.

The purpose of the **second meeting** will be to generate wider community interest in the League, recruit additional members, select a leadership team, adopt a nonpartisanship policy and outline a calendar of activities. The date and time selected for the organizational meeting should be

convenient for the widest audience possible. Choosing a site that is open to the public can help attract potential members from outside the group's immediate circle of friends and colleagues. Everyone present at the planning meeting should contribute to an extensive list of friends, neighbors, business associates and community leaders to receive personal invitations to the organizational meeting, and a plan to publicize the meeting should be developed.

The representative from the state League will play a key role at this point by helping the members identify and reach out to all segments of the community as they prepare to launch their new group. The organizational meeting sends an important signal about the League's commitment to support the expansion of local Leagues. It gives the group an opportunity to share leadership and chart the League's future with diverse community members, enhancing the organization's ability to bring about positive change.

Before adjourning from the second meeting, everyone attending this informational meeting should be encouraged to join the League as a MAL member, if they have not already done so.

How Do Members-At-Large Apply For Recognition As a State League Unit?

In order to apply for recognition as a unit, the members-at-large must have the following:

- Five – 10 enrolled members
- A nonpartisanship policy
- The following leadership positions filled: President, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Chair and Voter Service Chair
- Planned meetings or activities for the first few months.

The leadership should submit these materials to the LWVMA State Board through the LWVMA office (lwvma@lwvma.org). The state Board will then vote to recognize the unit. Throughout the process, the unit will have assistance from the staff, and one or more representatives of the LWVMA Membership Committee and/or a nearby local League.

How Should State League Units Handle Their Finances?

The state League handles the day-to-day finances for units. Specifically:

- The state League will collect dues from the unit's members and pay per member payment (PMP) to LWVUS.
- The state League will provide each unit with \$300 initial "seed money" for initial expenses. Units may also apply to the state League for Lotte E. Scharfman Citizen Education grants (\$400) for any planned voter service or citizen education activities. Units should also plan to fundraise to cover additional expenses.
- Any donations received by the unit should be sent to the state League, which keeps separate accounts for each unit. (Please note: checks for the benefit of a unit should be made out directly to the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (not tax-deductible) or the LWVMA Citizen Education Fund (tax-deductible).)

- When the unit incurs any expenses, it should submit a reimbursement request to the state League. Expenses cannot exceed the amount the unit has in its account with the state League.

Although LWVMA will act as the "bank" for the unit, the unit's treasurer should maintain records of all income and expenses; the unit's records and LWVMA's records of the unit's activities should be periodically reconciled to ensure that they match.

How Should State League Units Handle Administration?

The state League handles basic administration for the unit, including: 1) maintaining a list of members and sending out membership renewal notices and 2) setting up a webpage for each unit on the LWVMA website so that units do not have to incur the initial expense of a website. However, units can and should set up their own Facebook pages.

How Does a State League Unit Become a Local League?

A unit is usually a steppingstone to becoming an independent League. Once a unit is ready, it may petition the state Board to be recognized as a local League by taking these steps:

1. Drafting bylaws and creating a budget for the year.
2. Nominating a slate of officers and directors.
3. Planning activities for the year that advance the League's mission, that are of interest to members and the community, and that demonstrate understanding of League policies and procedures.
4. Developing a plan for membership growth and diversity.
5. Meeting financial obligations.
6. Publishing a regular newsletter or e-newsletter for members.
7. Planning and holding an annual meeting where final requirements for recognition are fulfilled (bylaws approved, budget and program adopted, officers and board elected).

Following recognition by the state Board, the state Board will recommend to LWVUS that the unit be recognized as a local League. Once recognized, a local League can apply for an EIN, open a bank account, set up a website, and take control of its finances (including paying PMP to LWVUS and LWVMA) and membership renewals.

As always, the state Board and staff will be available to assist you with each step of the process. Please call 857-452-1715 with any questions you may have at any time.