LWVUS GUIDELINES FOR LEAGUE STUDIES

**Adapted for LWV-VA**

**Two-year timeframe, primarily for consensus study-**

*wording adapted by Sherry Zachry for use at state (LWV-VA) level.*

SZ Downloaded original from LWVUS League Management website, 7/20/2019 :

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/other-issues-tools/guidelines-lwvus-studies>

These are general guidelines for LWVUS studies and may vary somewhat from study to study according to personnel and issue.  Local and state Leagues may adapt whatever parts they feel are pertinent. *(See Notes on Program Planning at the end*)

**Suggested Timeline**:

**Year 1**

* June, even-numbered year (for LWVUS)/ odd numbered for LWV-VA—Convention adopts study.
* July-September—Program director/board appoints Study Chair/Co-chairs who then solicit applications for study committee (some may have already volunteered)
* By Fall Board meeting—Study Committee has formed and communicates with Program Director who reports on status to the board..  Board approves scope-if changed from wording adopted at Convention.
* November-December—Study Committee meets (in person, if possible), reviews detailed scope, develops a detailed timeline, outline of study and recommends to to the Program Director/ board either a consensus or concurrence process for the study, unless otherwise determined by the Convention delegates. Note all processes must be concluded by three months **before** next Convention, to allow board to approve final wording of consensus/ concurrence statement.
* January—Board adopts specific timeline with dates when Leagues will receive consensus materials and deadline for reporting to results to LWV-VA.
* December-March—Study Committee gathers and disseminates information; suggests activities, speakers and reading material; and appoints subcommittees if needed and begin preparing written material Local Leagues should be apprised by Program Director of timeline and furnished any preliminary materials..
* April-May—Study Committee develops and widely distributes overall summary of issues involved in study in easily printable format with links to references presenting various sides of the issues involved; local Leagues hold meetings on topic.

**Year 2**

* June-October—Study Committee develops consensus questions or concurrence statement, submits to board which approves and/or modifies the preliminary statement; then Program Director/committee disseminates to local Leagues. Local Leagues plan their study/consensus calendars (to complete report before the reporting deadline established prior year).
* October-February—Local Leagues continue research, hold consensus meetings and report results (again before reporting deadline).
* February-April—Program Director works with Committee Chair to tabulate results to determine areas of consensus; Study Committee submits a proposed position to the members from the Study Committee and Program Director may be assist in drafting the position.
* April— Program Director recommends position statement to the Board; Board adopts final position, announces position and posts online with info on local League participation, areas of agreement, etc.
* June—Results of study are reported to Convention, discussed. New position is adopted as part of Convention program adoption (either as a separate item in position booklet, or as part of the “revised” *Positioned For Action*. Program Director is responsible for updating *Positioned For Action* with any new or reworded positions, once adopted by the board.

# DETAILED PROCESS

**Study Committee Appointment**

As soon after Convention as possible, the President/Board will appoint a Study Chair and, in some cases, a co-chair and/or Off-board member to assist the Chair.   The Study Chair(s) will use direct-to-member electronic communication and other means to distribute the study motion adopted at Convention and invite members to apply for the Study Committee.  The Study Chair(s) also may invite members with expertise valuable to the Study Committee to apply.

The appointed Study Committee will be as neutral or as balanced as possible, with members on all sides of the study issue. Experts in the study subject, as well as generalists and members knowledgeable about the League of Women Voters, should be considered, as well as representatives from different areas of the country and different types of communities. The size of the committee will depend partly on the complexity and scope of the study. An ability to work within a diverse group is essential.

**Study Committee Operation**

The Study Chair(s), in consultation with Program Director, or League member not on the Committee, will develop a preliminary project management plan. In order to determine where each committee member might best fit into the research process, it is recommended that the Study Chair consult with each member to define that individual's specific roles. The Program Director and Chair’s contact information should be provided to the Study Committee members to enable direct consultation if necessary.

Since issue study and position development are essential to League process, some funding ideally will be provided for all studies for travel to meetings, etc.

Communication between the Study Committee and the Board through the Program Director will be ongoing, with feedback loops at every stage of the process to facilitate identification and solution of any problems.  Brief periodic written summaries or minutes will be shared with all Committee members, and the Program Director. The Study Chair(s) will report directly to the Program Director and attend board meetings, if necessary. Any subcommittees will communicate regularly with the full committee.

**Scope**

The LWV-VA Board will adopt a Scope of Study based on the action and intent of Convention to adopt the new study or to update an existing position. The Scope of Study statement provides information to allow local Leagues to plan programs and gather materials early in the process. During the entire process, the Study Committee is encouraged to provide suggestions for engagement of both members and the community.  The Scope may be adjusted as needed as the study progresses.

**Tasks and Products**

The Board, with input from the Study Committee and the Program Director, will choose early in the study between a consensus or concurrence process, unless previously determined by the Convention delegates.  This depends in part on how simply the issues of the study may be presented to members.

The Study Committee will write a limited number of brief issue papers on the topic or prepare introductory or summary comments when referring to existing material that can be accessed on line.  They also will prepare a Leaders' Guide, which is a guide for consensus or concurrence meetings, including tips for conducting the meetings and clear pointers or links from the questions to the materials.

All reports produced by the committee will be balanced and based on data from valid sources.  If committee members lack training needed to evaluate materials from specialized disciplines, they should seek outside assistance. For complex studies, a summary with analysis of issues involved and suggestions for further reading, will be prepared to educate the members prior to their consensus meetings.  A single-page handout for meetings also is advised. Materials will be designed to allow easy reprinting by local Leagues.  A meeting-ready summary of the study, possibly including visuals, may be made available to Leagues in time for use in meetings preparing for consensus. Videos, webinars, and other formats for presenting material also may be considered.  All materials should be readily available on the LWV-VA website.

A summary of the results of each study will be posted online in a timely manner to allow members to become familiar with the material. The next Convention will include time early in the Convention and prior to any votes on program items to discuss the results of any studies completed during the preceding biennium.  Suggestions for potential advocacy will be presented.

**Communications**

Two online discussion groups may be established, a closed one for the Study Committee and an open one to support members involved with the study and provide a forum for exchanging ideas and locally produced materials. The Study Chair or designee will monitor the open discussion.  It is suggested that the monitor not be too quick to jump in, but let the participants take care of the question/issue, if they can.  However, if something is blatant, the monitor should jump in immediately.  In other words, use good judgment for each situation. The monitor may start the conversation if things are moving slowly. In case of technical difficulties, the monitor should contact the appropriate staff member.

No member of the committee should monopolize the conversation in the open forum.  The forum is for members to discuss and pose questions.  When committee members participate in the open member forum, they speak as individuals, identifying themselves as committee members, but adding that each is speaking as an individual.  Only the study chair speaks for the study group. The study chair can designate a committee member to speak for the committee on specific issues.

**Local League Role**

Early in the process, local League boards are encouraged to appoint study committees to implement and conduct the study in their local areas. This is an ideal time to engage state or local experts on the topic and to investigate potential impacts of the study on their own state or local area.  Local Leagues may take advantage of local speakers and resources and plan and conduct general meetings.  All Leagues are encouraged to prepare and conduct local consensus or concurrence meetings, as well as using studies as an opportunity to engage and educate their members and the public in depth, to hear expert speakers and to attract new members.

**Consensus Questions**

The Study Committee will propose consensus questions through the Program Director to the Board with adequate time for the Board to consider and adopt them. The writing of the consensus questions is a critical task in the study process, so the Study Committee will want to allow time for the Board to consider the questions carefully.   Consensus questions ideally are written so that the answers lead directly to a statement of position. Each consensus question is framed so that it is neutral and not intended to lead to a conclusion. Each consensus question is limited to one topic or idea to ensure that no confusion exists as to the intent of the answer. Each consensus question allows for discrete answers that can be easily tallied.  The consensus form will contain text boxes to allow for general comments.

**Concurrence Statement**

If the Board or Convention has recommended a concurrence process, then the Study Committee will propose a concurrence statement to the Board. A concurrence statement is a proposed statement of position on which Leagues or **members may only agree or disagree** (cannot be reworded at time of vote). The proposed concurrence statement follows the same process used for consensus questions. If possible, it is suggested that the proposed concurrence statement be disseminated to local Leagues BEFORE final adoption in order to allow for some changes, if members suggest. Study Committee and Program Director will consider any proposed changes and create final wording for board approval. Once approved by the board, the statement goes to convention for final adoption (without changes to wording). (In some situations, a concurrence statement may be adopted by Convention without a study, and in those cases, these guidelines do not apply—would follow different guidelines set out by respective League.)

**Consensus or Concurrence Meeting Reports**

The Study Committee and Program Director will prepare a survey form of consensus questions with a deadline, for Leagues to use to for their meeting reports.

**Determination of Consensus/Concurrence**

The Program Director (with help from Study Committee) recommends to the Board whether or not consensus has been reached.   Consensus is defined as agreement by a substantial majority.  Criteria include a minimum number of Leagues participating and some diversity of Leagues, including geographical distribution, If consensus is determined to have been reached, the Study Committee and Program Director, will write a draft position statement and propose it to the Board. Since many League positions are retained for decades, they should be worded generally and flexibly so they can be used in a variety of advocacy situations. The first paragraph is very important.  Often it is an overarching statement of the position. Specific details, such as references to legislation or technology, must be avoided in a position statement, since they could limit League advocacy in unknown future situations.

**Position Adoption by the Board**

After receiving the recommendations of the Study Committee and Program Director, the Board will review and then recommend the new or updated League position [note this will become part of the board’s “recommended program” to be approved at Convention]. Publication will include an electronic notice to the membership and inclusion in the next edition of LWV-VA’s *Positioned For Action.*  It could also include a press release to the public.

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**NOTES ON PROGRAM PLANNING—The start of the “League Program process”**

*(adapted from Frances Schutz, LWV-VA Program Director 2015-2017, instructions to local Leagues in November 2016 for LWV-VA Program Planning 2017-2019 culminating in program adoption at next [2017] Convention***):**

League Program includes the **process by which positions are adopted** (selecting an issue, studying the issue, consensus / formulating a position, and using the position to influence public policy**) and** **the existing positions of that respective League**. The “program planning” stage is selecting an issue or position(s) for study, restudy and/or advocacy in the respective League’s next biennium. The process culminates in delegates **adopting a two-year program** for the next biennium at the respective League’s Convention. (The next LWV-VA Convention will be in an odd-numbered year/the next LWVUS Convention will be in an even-numbered year.)

Remember that “League Program” includes **both study and action** and sometimes can be composed entirely of advocacy (action) on the League’s positions. Advocacy can be holding a forum or seminar on a “hot-button” issue in the community (**on which the League has a** **position**) and/or organizing a lobbying effort composed of letters to the editor, lobbying elected officials on legislation and other efforts.

When considering items to propose, be guided by the following: Is there widespread member interest? Is this a timely issue? Are there already League positions (at the LWVUS level) on the issue? Is government action the most effective way to address the problem? Are there members willing to work on the issue? Is work on this issue likely to attract new members?

For LWV-VA program planning, members are asked to review the positions and decide:

1) are there any **new issues** that should be studied;

2) do any of the current positions need **updating** (restudy);

3) are there any positions/issues that should have **priority for action**;

4) are there positions that **should be abandoned** (deleted) because they no longer apply or have been accomplished; and

5) **who is willing to work** on the issue?

**SZ ADDED NOTE REGARDING PROGRAM PLANNING CYCLES (11/13/2019):**

*taken, in part, from LWV-VA website, on forming positions*

Home→Action & Advocacy→LWV-VA Positioned For Action→Forming Positions

<https://lwv-va.org/action-advocacy/lwv-va-positioned-for-action/forming-positions/> *(Red font represents SZ’s suggested additions/edits to current language which is in black font.)*

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**How does a League form a position?**There are four major steps in developing a position

* The League selects an issue to be studied *(see how issues get to Convention below*) at Convention or Council at state or by LLs at annual meetings.
* The League studies the issue in a non-partisan, unbiased and objective manner.
* Members come to an agreement about the issue using either the process of consensus or concurrence.
* Based upon the result of the consensus or concurrence, a position statement is written, adopted by the respective League board, and subsequently approved by the League membership at an annual meeting or convention.

**Process before Convention - “Program Planning”** (includes Program Planning part of selecting an issue to be studied—or updating an existing position).The process for developing positions begins with the selection of an issue and subsequent adoption of the “program” for the respective level of League (local, state, regional or national). ***The start of the process******is called “program planning”*** *and follows specific guidelines (deadlines, etc.), some of which are outlined in the* ***each League’s Bylaws in the Program and Program Adoption sections.***

. . . .

Traditionally, the program process for local League items and for state League items occur in alternate years. **And the program adopted at the respective annual meetings or conventions is to be carried out over two years (or a biennium**), with the approved state League program being studied or carried out by **all Leagues** *(and MAL Units*) **in Virginia**. This process also applies to items approved at the **LWVUS biennial** Convention where the adopted program will be carried out in **all Leagues in the United States**. *Note that an Adopted Biennial Program can include action/advocacy on existing League positions (at all League levels)—it is not always a “study” for consensus or concurrence*.

LWV-VA is also part of a regional League, called an Inter-League Organization or ILO. The regional League of which LWV-VA is a part is the LWV of the National Capital Area, or LWVNCA, which includes Leagues in Maryland, the LWV of the District of Columbia and Leagues in Northern Virginia surrounding Washington, D.C. The LWV of Maryland and the LWV of Virginia are also members of the LWVNCA. The LWVNCA adopts positions on issues that affect the region, such as transportation, water resources, and environmental quality. The Leagues that comprise LWVNCA give recommendations to the LWVNCA for program items using the same process described above *[in the same year as recommendations for LWV-VA].*

Convention timing in LWV-VA BYLAWS - (highlights on timing/deadlines added)

# ARTICLE VII. Convention

**Sec. 1. Place, Date, and Call.** A convention of the LWV-VA shall be held **biennially in the odd-numbered years** at a time and place to be determined by the board of directors. A first call to convention shall be sent to the presidents of local Leagues and ILOs and to the chairs of member-at-large units at least **six weeks** before the date fixed in said call. Thereafter the board may advance or postpone the opening date of the convention by not more than two weeks. A final call giving the exact time and place of the convention shall be sent to the presidents of local Leagues and ILOs and to the chairs of member-at-large units **at least thirty days** before convention.