

THE DIMENSIONS OF A LOCAL LEAGUE STUDY

WHY STUDY?

- Leagues study to educate members on a public policy issue and reach member agreement on an appropriate League approach to influence the outcome:
 - League is seeking to address a public policy issue in its community;
 - Leagues study as a prelude to action.
- Leagues study when there is no League position at any level - local, state or national - that addresses the issue or a current position needs to be updated.

ADOPTING A STUDY: QUESTIONS TO ASK FIRST

1. Is there a current local, state or national position that addresses the issue?
2. Is there a local government solution to the problem?
3. Is there sufficient member interest to sustain study and action?
4. Can a study be completed in a timely manner?
5. Will your community look to your League for its position on the issue? Will the League provide a unique perspective?
6. Will League's participation in the public debate make a significant difference?
7. Will political realities permit effective action?
8. Will action on the issue further an important League goal and/or enhance League visibility and stature in your community?

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Membership

- suggests issues for study and action - often at the local program planning meeting
- adopts the study or action item at the annual meeting
- participates in the study and member agreement process

The Local Board

- recommends study items to the membership prior to the annual meeting
- approves the member agreement process: consensus or concurrence

Consensus is a process in which members participate in a group discussion on the issue; the collective opinion of the membership is reflected by the consensus.

Concurrence is agreement with a position developed by a League research committee, other Leagues or groups of Leagues. It is an appropriate process when the issue is straightforward and non-controversial.

- approves the member agreement technique: including traditional study with unit meetings, questionnaires, mail-in surveys or non-traditional methods

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- with the president, recruits the committee chair and assists in recruiting the committee members
- approves the consensus questions
- adopts the position
- publicizes the new position to members and the community
- initiates and directs action on the issue

The Committee Chair

The study chair does not need to be an expert on the subject, but a member with good organization and people skills, who is committed to the study and the process. Although not necessary, it may be advantageous for the chair to be a member of the board: ongoing reports to the board are essential. The chair should not have strong and/or vocal viewpoints on the study issue. She/he may be called upon to speak for the League during the process and identification with a bias will discredit the League's work.

- convenes committee meetings
- coordinates committee activities
- reports to the board

The Study Committee

In all likelihood, the study committee will be comprised of members and non-members with a variety of viewpoints - opinions on all sides of the issue. It is reasonable to expect members to come with opinions; those with strong views should be encouraged to put aside preconceived perceptions and make the effort to see all sides of the issue.

Recruit non-members to join the committee. A local study is an excellent membership tool. Most importantly, non-members will enhance the League's reputation and role in bringing people of diverse views together to search for solutions to issues of public policy. Community involvement in the process validates our work, giving our conclusions a wider sense of ownership. You'll form a valuable partnership for eventual action on this issue and for future projects. It is important that non-members of the committee understand from the start that they can work in all aspects of the study, except for the member agreement - the consensus. They should be invited to join - often!

- establishes timeline and workplace
- reaches out to the community for input via public meetings, invitations to join the committee
- researches the issues
- develops consensus questions
 - designed to allow for League action
 - designed to express agreement on general concepts, not specifics
- keeps the membership informed and interested as study progresses via bulletin articles, public meetings, web site information, site visits -
 - serves as presenters/facilitators for consensus discussion
 - compiles and analyzes member responses and areas of agreement
 - drafts position statement for Board discussion
 - prepares a final written report

**The League of Women Voters of Illinois • 332 S. Michigan Avenue • Suite #1150 • Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: 312/939-5935 • Fax: 312/939-6887 • info@lwvil.org • www.lwvil.org**

ACTION DURING A STUDY

There is no League action on the issue during a study. A restudy of a current position requires setting aside the position until the restudy is completed.

THE CONSENSUS MEETING

The Study Committee

- Outlines possible alternative solutions to the public policy issue as objectively as possible - including the pros and cons of each alternative
- Designs a discussion to
 - focus on the consensus questions
 - maximize member discussion
 - bring out an exchange of ideas
 - allow for areas of agreement to emerge
- In preparation for the meeting and with consultation with the Board
 - distributes an all-member study packet of well written, succinct background information and consensus questions
 - seeks out an experienced discussion leader
 - seeks out an experienced recorder
 - decides when, where and how many discussions to hold
 - decides which Committee members will present at which meeting
- At the meeting
 - determines who is eligible to participate in the consensus
 - committee members - and League members - may participate at only one consensus meeting
 - members of the public may not participate in the consensus, but may attend the presentation
 - committee members may present at all consensus meetings
 - introduces the moderator and recorder; explains the ground rules

ANALYZE THE CONSENSUS

The Study Committee

- reviews the results of each consensus meeting, looking for areas of member agreement and disagreement
- summarizes what members have said
- drafts a position statement for the Board

The Local Board

- reviews the results of the meetings
- fine-tunes the position statement
- approves the position statement
- recommends to the membership adoption of the position at the next annual meeting or a special membership meeting (consult LL by-laws)
- develops an action plan

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WORDING THE POSITION STATEMENT

- write a position that is broad enough to initiate League action to support or oppose a variety of proposals over time
 - an overly detailed position will limit League action and be less useful over time
- write a position that articulates the broad areas of member agreement: an expression of League's collective views, which forms the basis of League action
- if there is a substantial minority, there is no consensus: minority views are not written into a position

ARRIVING AT CONCURRENCE

- concurrence can be reached at a meeting, with background information on the issue statement provided to the membership per local League by-law requirements
- or concurrence can be reached by all-member mailings which include appropriate background material and mail-in response

FROM STUDY TO ACTION

- League studies in order to act on public policy issues
- after a study has been completed the board determines the steps needed to influence public policy
- the goal of the action is clearly stated; tactics are designed to achieve the goal

LEAGUE RESOURCES TO CONSULT

Dimensions of a Local League Study was compiled from a presentation at the 1999 state convention by Judy Berliant, past Program VP, and the following League publications:

- *In League*, available on line from LWVUS
- *Planning Program: From Choice Through Action*, included in the LWVIL President's Handbook