

# ABCs

# FOR A STREAMLINED LEAGUE



LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS®

**With appreciation for collaboration and contributions made by Leagues and the work done by the *LWVUS STREAMLINING THE LEAGUE COMMITTEE***

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# **ABCs FOR A STREAMLINED LEAGUE**

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## ***ABCs FOR A STREAMLINED LEAGUE***

### **INTRODUCTION**

What makes us uniquely valuable to our communities rests in the fact that we are truly non-partisan, volunteer based, and believe that better solutions are designed when citizens are educated about the issues. Citizens can then join with government to create those solutions through thoughtful, civil discourse on decisions made in the full and transparent light of day. This unique organization is as important today as it was at our founding in 1920. Communities depend on our contributions to democracy, and we must have relationships within and with our communities to ensure that both the League and our democracy thrive. To that end, this publication has been created to offer a more flexible, streamlined, and sustainable model for operating some Leagues.

Current local, state, and national League structures and bylaws allow Leagues to operate as independent political advocacy organizations within the regulatory structure of American nonprofit corporations – a model that has worked well for over fifty years. But times have changed, and the League membership and leadership has changed, too. Leagues today may need more focused, flexible, and streamlined alternatives to accommodate changing lifestyles and busy schedules.

An alternative structure may work equally well while demanding less of League leaders. The streamlined model presented here focuses on:

- The LWV mission-critical, year-round activities that increase a League's community involvement, generate visibility, build community awareness of the League's mission, and attract an expanding membership.
- Continuing key components that retain our trusted reputation, nonpartisanship, volunteer engagement, deliberation, consensus-based decision making, and civic improvement.
- Leading through smaller and focused teams to address modern time limitations and reduce leadership pressures on just a few people.

*ABC's For a Streamlined League* is designed to help Leagues adopt these changes using pre-fabricated tools developed and supported by state and national leaders. At the heart of this approach is a focus on doing important and visible work in our communities. Successful

Leagues lay out a calendar of events and activities for the year that create community interest and awareness of the League and its mission. It's as easy as ABC!

A calendar planning tool is included here that helps local Leagues do just that. Additional resources are included in the Appendices that help Leagues produce events important to our communities and our mission, such as candidate and issue forums, in a streamlined, yet highly visible way.

Experience shows that Leagues do best when they successfully connect with their communities. The **Observer Corps "Easy Start Guide"** appendix helps Leagues start an Observer Corps and make this connection. Resources for sponsoring **"Building a Better Community Forums"** are also included. Future tools in this area will include a step-by-step guide for gathering *Know Your Community* information to assess issues important within our communities and the political players and community "assets" that can have an impact on these issues so that our community outreach has meaning. A **"Taking Action Checklist"** is included, too.

While we're building connections with our community, we also need to build our League. Tools to strengthen Leagues through Fundraising, Membership Development, and Visibility are provided here.

Of course, some degree of organization management is necessary. Resources in the League Management section, including simplified Agendas, Minutes, and Board Orientation, will help you organize your League easily. Finally, because evaluating the success of League activities is so important, a streamlined Assessment tool is currently under development.

The League is one organization with three levels. Remember that you have people resources -- from volunteer colleagues such as yourself in other local Leagues to your state League and your LWVUS Board Liaisons. Sharing ideas and supporting each other between levels of the League is an important benefit of belonging to the League! Leadership in the League can be easy and fun, and these ABCs will help you make it so.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

### **Planning to Do Important Work**

A community-focused approach is essential for a Streamlined League. This section provides planning tools, event and activities resources, and guidance for local Leagues doing important work in their communities.

The mission of the League of Women Voters is to promote informed citizen participation in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. As part of a multi-issue organization that addresses public concerns at every level of government, each League has a wide range, (a veritable banquet or feast) of topics to choose from in deciding how to pursue this mission in its own community.

Assessing what the key community issues are and how your League will engage on these issues is essential. Leagues can enhance their effectiveness by selecting issues that the people in their communities see as affecting them directly—issues that citizens consider to be truly vital to the public interest and where citizens believe they can bring about positive change. Ask yourselves what public concerns are of the most interest to your community:

- What issues do people in your community make time for—by attending meetings, by volunteering, by taking action, by writing letters to the editor of your local paper?
- What issues are of special concern to other groups in the community?
- What issues would interest and involve new members?

Leagues have a range of options available to them in deciding how best to address an issue of public concern. Each approach—community collaboration, citizen education, action, or study—can be a valid and effective means of pursuing the League’s mission. The set of circumstances surrounding each issue—complexity of the subject, timeframe for action, needs of the community, goals of your League, resources available—helps determine the most appropriate method to use in working on that issue.

To engage both members and other citizens in playing a more active role in addressing public concerns, Leagues must provide opportunities to have a real impact on a problem. To respond effectively to the challenges facing our communities, Leagues must ensure that all interest groups have a chance to participate in the problem-solving process. For help determining the key issues in your community, see “**Selecting Issues of Concern to Your Community**” and a “**Planning Worksheet**” provided in **Appendix A**.

## **CALENDAR PLANNING**

A calendar is an essential planning tool that helps League leaders articulate their important work; enlist the help of others in accomplishing the work; and plan effectively to carry out their goals and priorities. It is a guide to League activities that is flexible enough to allow for changes during the course of the year.

Developing a calendar helps League leaders think about what they hope to accomplish

during the year and the steps they will take to achieve those goals. It helps them to organize the year's work to make sure the responsibilities for carrying it out are shared. A good plan illustrates the value of the League and attracts new members. Printing the calendar in your newsletter and on the website also encourages members and prospective members to put League events on their own personal calendars and illustrates the variety of ways they can be active in the League.

Your leadership team should set your community outreach in motion by creating a calendar that includes at least 6 meetings annually (public and membership), such as; Voters Service activities like candidates forums; Public forums to educate citizens on important issues or on local government and services; and skill-building sessions to help members and others be more effective in their political and organizational work. Use the following section on “Events and Activities” to help you choose your events.

For calendar drafting ideas and a sample calendar see **Appendix B Calendar Planning**.

## **EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

The events and activities that you have scheduled in your calendar need to be well planned. Taking the time in advance to consider all aspects of the event will make it easier to accomplish. Be selective about what you do in order to save you time and energy and to make it easy and fun for everyone. Plan to do a few things well. You can select the right events and activities by using the “**Events and Activities Focusing Grid**” in **Appendix C**.

An “**Event Planning Checklist Sample**” and an “**Event Planning Checklist Blank**” can be found in **Appendix D**. This will help you organize your event with an intention toward making that event very visible, attracting and welcoming new members, and developing new leaders through the event. A blank version is there for you to copy and fill in for each event so you can achieve the dual goals of creating an informative event and helping build and strengthen your League!

The following are some suggestions for events and activities. You will find details for them in the Appendices.

**Elections and Voters Service.** The League is well known for its election-related work. We serve our communities well, and the public depends on our services. Your League may decide to take part in a variety of voter service activities such as voter registration, candidates’ forums, voters guides, etc. You will find a helpful “**Election Activities Checklist**” in **Appendix E**.

**Hot Topics Luncheons.** Another way to engage your League members and the community in a top issue is by sponsoring a Hot Topics Luncheon. It can also be a meal at another time, say dinner or brunch, whichever would be most appealing in your community. The point is to bring people together around something both “social,” such as food, and “interesting,” such as the topic and speakers.

A guide to organizing a “**Hot Topics Luncheon**” is in **Appendix F**.

**Forums On Building Better Communities.** People universally want to live in safe, thriving communities; and they want to be listened to and heard. A public forum on Building a Better Community can be an effective and easy way to engage diverse segments of the community outside the League in a visioning activity that Local Leagues can facilitate for great visibility, recruiting new members, and developing new networks with allied groups for joint work in future projects. **Appendix G “Building a Better Community Forums”** includes a sample agenda, planning details, and a checklist that works!

**Observer Corps.** An Observer Corps is a structured way for individuals to exercise their right to know. An Observer Corps provides a valuable service to the community. It helps ensure that citizens are aware of the decisions that impact their lives, and it promotes government transparency and accountability.

An Observer Corps can be a great way for your members to be active and involved. As observers, they get an opportunity to educate themselves and others in a specific way. This is often enticing to new and long time members because this volunteer role can usually be done once or twice a month for just a few specified hours.

An **Observer Corps “Easy Start Guide”** is in **Appendix H**.

**Know Your Community.** Vibrant and vital local Leagues are those that are deeply engaged and highly visible in their communities. To be effective, League members need to be familiar with the community’s people, its enterprises, its issues, its history, and its governance. A fantastic method of evaluating your community, engaging members in the process, identifying opportunities for future projects, and creating visibility for your League is to undertake a “Know Your Community” survey. A simplified and focused guide is being developed. This will be a streamlined version of the “Know Your Community” publication that was developed for Leagues thirty years ago.

**League Study.** Your League may be motivated and committed enough to undertake a study on an important local issue. This study can be a means not only to educating your members and the community but also for coming to consensus on the issue to create a position to act on.

The “**Key Points for a League Study**” are included as **Appendix I**.

**Advocacy.** Taking action on an issue can raise the League’s visibility in the community and be a good avenue for outreach.

In determining whether to take action, the Leadership Team should review the “**Taking Action Checklist**” included as **Appendix J**.

# LEAGUE BUILDING RESOURCES

## Making your League Stronger

### VISIBILITY

To be effective in the community, a League needs to be visible. People need to know what you are working on and where to find you. Successful Leagues create an opportunity for visibility each month, and that can range from something easy such as writing an Op-Ed or letter to the editor on an important community issue to something more robust such as seeking publicity around your forums and public events. There are many ways to increase the visibility of your League. One rests in developing relationships with local media (reporters, editors, managers from traditional and new media outlets). Another is through publicizing your calendar or activities/events.

The Leadership Team should consider the visibility element of every event and activity. (See the **“Events and Activities Focusing Grid”** in **Appendix C**) A **Communications Toolkit** is available on the LWVUS website at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) is under “For Members” “Leaders Section” “Public Relations”. In addition there are often press templates generated by LWVUS or your state League that can assist in media outreach. Feel free to “borrow” their language! They are easy to customize to fit your own local community. These templates are often updated each year for specific events and released in the Weekly Leaders Update email.

Some helpful **“Media Hooks to Raise Visibility”** can be found in **Appendix K**.

### WEBSITE

Your website is your League’s public face on the Internet. Today it is essential that your League have an online presence that citizens can use to find out what the League is doing. It is important not only that your League have a website but also that the website is maintained and kept up to date.

Several state Leagues offer websites to their local Leagues through their state website. If this is what your state does, then you should discuss how to do this with the state League. League Easy Web (LEW) is a service provided by the LWV of California. For a reasonable fee, LEW helps you set up a website and makes it easy to maintain. You can get more information about League Easy Web at [www.lwvnet.org](http://www.lwvnet.org). These resources offer the ability to have a website consistent with other Leagues across the country. Some Internet Service Providers offer a webpage and help with setting it up at special nonprofit rates.

You can get several useful guides on the LWVUS website, [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org), for example, **“LWV Online: Web, Blogs & Social Networking”** and **“Tips for Local League Websites”** is in the “For Members” “Leaders Section” “Newsletter Editors/Webmasters”.

## **MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

As a volunteer organization, we must always be working on growing our membership. People will want to join the League if they believe we are doing important work and if they are asked to join. Local Leagues must make this a focus of every activity they do by simply and intentionally building membership “asks” into all of our work and creating a welcoming presence in our meetings and events.

**Membership Recruitment Initiative.** To assist Leagues in this area, LWVUS has created a program for membership development called the Membership Recruitment Initiative, which is a partnership between LWVUS, the state and local Leagues. This program focuses on issues and activities important to local Leagues and their communities. It helps develop plans and League skills to increase visibility and membership "asks" around those local issues/activities. It has specific elements, planning resources, leadership development, and coaching. There are resource materials available online for all Leagues to use. Eventually the successful components of the Membership Recruitment Initiative will be established in every state. If it has not started in your state, LWVUS will be working with state League leadership to establish it in your state over the next few years, and you can find the materials for use by all Leagues now on the LWVUS website at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) “For Members” “Membership Recruitment Initiative”.

**Membership Dues and Per Member Payments.** When a person joins the League, they pay membership dues. Your local League sets the dues rate. Out of those local League dues, your Leagues pays a Per Member Payment (PMP), which is a fee that helps fund state and national League activities. The dues you set locally should take into consideration the Per Member Payments that are due to the state and national Leagues with enough left over for your local work.

## **FUNDRAISING**

Each League needs to keep their financial status in balance. In addition to dues revenue, Leagues and League members need to raise additional funds to accomplish their goals. Raising money is an important skill, and is effective when “making your case” for why the League makes a difference in your community. The League is highly respected, and when we are visible on issues of importance within our communities, often it’s just a matter of asking people, organizations, or business to contribute. Speak to what the benefits are to them, as well, and you’ll be successful in raising the money and in-kind contributions you need to accomplish your League goals. Some suggestions for “**Easy Ways to Raise Money for your League**” are included in **Appendix L**.

# **LEADERSHIP TEAMS**

## **Developing the Next Generation of Leaders**

### **LEADERSHIP TEAM STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS**

You can run your League with a streamlined management structure. You do not need to hold to the traditional model of a League board. The streamlined Leadership Team structure makes it possible for as few as four League leaders to simply manage the work of the League. The basic Leadership Team positions include:

- Spokesperson/Convener
- Money Person/Treasurer
- Webmaster
- Member Coordinator

An Advocacy Person can be added if desired. “**Leadership Team Job Descriptions**” are in **Appendix M**.

Of course, it is permissible and even desirable to welcome additional participants on your Leadership Team – it’s a great way of growing future leaders and building the capacity of your League. As you build momentum, you might add a fundraising specialist or a program coordinator or others. (See Leadership Team Building and Succession Planning, below.) But you can get started with as few as four.

**Leadership Team Meetings.** The Leadership Team will want to meet at least quarterly. These team meetings are the time to discuss and coordinate the events and activities that you have planned in your calendar. Each team member reports on their area of responsibility (see Job Descriptions) and any other responsibility they have agreed to take on. Some basic tips for running effective team meetings are included in “**Leadership Team Meeting Basics**” **Appendix N**.

Traditional Leagues usually an Annual Meeting of members in the spring. Streamlined Leagues can hold an annual business meeting whenever it is best. This meeting is to allow the membership to approve a new Leadership Team, budget and any program recommendations. It can be a short concise meeting or you can use it as a membership meeting and provide a speaker or other item of interest to draw them to attend.

Members are welcome at their Leadership Team meetings. Make sure members know when and where the meetings are held, and give members an opportunity to participate at the meetings, if they desire. The state League should have a liaison or coach that stays connected with and supports streamlined Leagues.

It’s good to have an agenda for Leadership Team meetings. An agenda allots time logically and helps Leadership Team members prepare for team meetings. It is sent out prior to the meeting, along with previous meeting minutes, a financial report, any other material that members are expected to review and discuss at the meeting. Typically, the Convener creates the

agenda, but some teams take turns sharing responsibilities of writing the agenda and conducting the meeting. A “**Sample Streamlined Agenda**” is included as **Appendix O**.

It’s also important to keep basic minutes of the Leadership Team meetings. Leagues need an official record of League business. The minutes are the record of League decision-making, and minutes let absent members know what happened at the meeting. Good minutes are short and contain:

- The name of the League, date, time and place
- The names of those present, those absent
- A record of all corrections to the minutes
- A money person/treasurer’s report (previous balance, income and expenditures, current balance)
- A report from other team members which are attached to minutes
- A record of decisions made and by whom
- 

See **Appendix O** for a “**Sample Streamlined Minutes**”.

**Leadership Team Building.** When a new leadership team is getting started or when new members join the team, it’s a good idea to spend a little time on team building. Again, here’s a place where the state League may be helpful. A good team building orientation informs Leadership Team members about the League, acquaints them with one another, and builds a sense of total team responsibility. New members gain confidence in carrying out their responsibilities and learn how the League and the team work. The exchange of ideas and experiences with League peers can build comradery and confidence among team members. Local Leagues may conduct their own orientation sessions, call on seasoned local League leaders, request state League assistance, or in some states, participate in statewide sessions planned on a regular schedule.

This is the time to review job responsibilities, budgets, operating rules, membership status, etc., and to revisit the basic principles of the League and nonpartisanship. It is a good time to check that outgoing team members have passed on files and materials needed for continuity of responsibilities. **Appendix P** has a “**Leadership Team Orientation**” outline.

**Budget.** A budget is a planning instrument that reflects the goals, priorities and activities planned for the year. In the Streamlined League, the Leadership Team develops the budget and provides an opportunity for membership input. **Appendix Q** has a “**Sample League Budget** “ for you to use. A well-conceived, realistic budget accomplishes the following:

- Reflects all anticipated income and expenses for a fiscal year
- Shows planned growth in members, dues, contributions, and League activities
- Realistically plans for expenses, e.g. events, activities, funds to help pay for sending delegates to state and national conventions (an important investment in the League’s future)
- Reflects each League’s obligation to support the League at all levels

The Budget is approved by the membership at the Annual business meeting.

## **POLICIES**

Each new Leadership Team must adopt a Nonpartisan Policy. Since the Leadership Team is a small group of League leaders and they are working together on all aspects of the League, the Nonpartisan Policy should cover all members of the Leadership Team. A **“Sample Streamlined League Nonpartisan Policy”** is included as **Appendix R**.

The policy should include specific guidelines to govern the political activities of Leadership Team members:

- A statement of the nonpartisan nature of the organization
- Guidelines on permissible activities for Leadership Team members
- How to handle situations when a board member decides to engage in political activity.

Your Leadership Team can adopt other policies as needed before a problem arises. Some of these policies are "Conflict of Interest", "Candidate Debates", "Making Decisions between Board meetings", and "Coalitions". There are sample policies available on the LWVUS website, [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org), under “For Members”, “Training and Resources” “Bylaws and Policies”.

## **BYLAWS**

Streamlined local Leagues function like other Leagues under a standard set of operating rules or bylaws that tell the League’s Leadership Team what is expected, required, and allowed. There is a **“Sample Bylaws for a Streamlined League”** in **Appendix S**.

It is not necessary to change your League’s Bylaws immediately if you are trying the Streamlined League model. Your League can conduct a trial period operating with the streamlined format and change the Bylaws when ready at your Annual business meeting.

It is also an option for your League to return to operating with a more traditional model of a board and bylaws if so desired.

## **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The Leadership Team is the organization’s administrative and policy-making team and plays an essential and primary role for a successful League. The Leadership Team is collectively responsible for all team decisions, plans, and activities for development, membership, voter services, visibility, financial welfare, and program.

In addition to all this, the process for recruiting and training new members to do this important teamwork also falls to the Leadership Team. (A more traditional League would have a Nominating Committee, but in the streamlined League, the Leadership Team is self-sustaining.) One of the Leadership Team’s primary roles is to have a deliberate, structured, and proactive plan in place for developing a constant pool of qualified, trained and willing volunteers. See **Appendix T, “Leadership Development”**.

## **LWVUS RESOURCES**

***League Basics*** – this publication covers the basics of managing a League. It also offers extensive resources in its appendices and through links on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

***Leaders Update*** (weekly email) – this is a weekly email communication from LWVUS. It offers the current information on LWVUS Advocacy, Membership, Election Services, Education Fund opportunities, etc. Anyone can receive this email and it is also available on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).

**LWVUS Board Liaisons** – each national board member acts as a liaison to several states and local Leagues. The liaison for your state is happy to assist you in any way, answer questions and is a great resource for information.

**Membership Recruitment Initiative** – this initiative has been developed by LWVUS to help Leagues focus on outreach and membership recruitment. The Membership Recruitment Initiative is currently expanding across the nation and will in the not too distant future be in each state.

**Shur Fellows (National Coaching Team)** – this is the outgrowth of the Membership Recruitment Initiative. A national coaching team has been established to coach the state coaches in the Membership Recruitment Initiative states. The plan is have a coaching system established within every state across the country supported by a national coaching team.

**LWVUS website**, [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) - The LWVUS website not only has a public exposure but a Members Section that offers leaders' materials, e.g. *League Basics*, *Presidents Packet*, toolkits, templates, etc. Much of the information you might need is located there.

**LWVUS Discussion Lists** – there are email discussion lists offered by LWVUS on a variety of topics. These lists offer an opportunity to share with other League members' ideas, suggestions and questions. You can sign up for a discussion list on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) in the "Get Involved" section of the "For Members" section.

**LWV Education Fund Pass Through Grants** – LWVEF often gets grant funding for a specific project that local Leagues can participate in. These pass through grant possibilities are announced in the *Leaders Update*.