

Discussion Guide for Setting Local League Nonpartisan Policy

"To ensure the credibility of the League as a nonpartisan organization, each League's board of directors is responsible for drafting and carrying out its own nonpartisan policy and for seeing that both its members and the public understand the League's nonpartisan role." *League Basics*, LWVUS.

It is the feeling of the state and national boards that two factors have changed in recent years -- understanding of the League in many areas and the position of women in the community. In view of these changes, the state board believes that local boards can best take upon themselves the basic decisions concerning a league's nonpartisanship.

The ideal time to review your League's implementation of the nonpartisan policy is at the orientation meeting for your new board, when you clarify the policy-making role of the board as a whole, as well as individual responsibilities. It is important to review the nonpartisan policy before specific cases come up and again shortly before election time.

Once the review is complete, you may wish to publish the policy in your bulletin. It is important, however, that the general membership understand that members are encouraged to be politically active. The code of behavior that the board sets for itself applies only to board members and, possibly, to certain off-board chairs. *Note:* While a League's written policy may not go into such detail, the board should discuss each item. The secretary should include a record of the discussion in the minutes. The nonpartisan policy that is agreed upon should be distributed to the board members.

Basic elements that should be included in your board's nonpartisan political activity policy:

- A statement of the nonpartisan nature of the organization.
- Guidelines on permissible activities for board members.
- Restrictions on certain board positions.
- A policy on how to handle resignations when board members resign to engage in political activity.
- A procedure for an annual review of the policy by the board.
- The date the policy was last reviewed/revised.

President(s) and voter service chair: In general, these officers must refrain from any political activity beyond registering, voting and making minimal contributions to their parties (not to a candidate). It is not advisable to put signs in your yard or bumper stickers on your car supporting candidates or ballot issues on which the League has not taken a position. Each board must decide for itself what other board positions are of particular sensitivity in the community.

Board members: Determine if *other* board members should:

- Run for elective office?
- Hold appointive office if that office is not in conflict with League positions (e.g., study committees)?
- Run for or hold an official position in a local political party?

- Circulate/sign nominating petitions? At a League meeting?
- Attend or sponsor candidate fundraisers, coffees, rallies or press conferences?
- Work in a political campaign?
- Make contributions to political campaigns?
- Be restricted in any way if a family member is a candidate for office?

Off-board members: Should off-board members with known political affiliations:

- Register voters?
- Be involved in candidate meetings by moderating? screening questions? making arrangements?
- Testify for the League before government panels?
- Lobby in the name of the League?

(With thanks to the Leagues of Massachusetts, New Jersey, & Pennsylvania)