

LEAGUE ACTION ON REFERENDA

As Leagues move into their local program planning cycle, many may be faced with the prospect of local governmental referenda - school funding, libraries, municipalities, and park districts. If your League has not previously adopted criteria for evaluating a funding proposal, now is the time! This memo outlines the recommended procedures for adopting criteria on which to base your League's position. Leagues with criteria in place will be able to respond quickly to proposals.

Referenda Involving Only Your League

If the governmental entity's boundaries only affect your League, the procedures for developing evaluation criteria are similar to a study's procedures.

- First, the membership or the board recommends that criteria be developed. If the recommendation is part of local League program planning, the membership approves the proposal. If a League is not in their local program planning cycle, the board may establish a committee to develop criteria. The membership should be notified.
- Second, form a study committee or task force to develop the criteria.
- Third, the board (1) holds a general membership meeting to approve the criteria or (2) utilizes an all-member mailing with background information and a mail-in response.

Leagues may want to consider the concurrence approach to member agreement (1) if the criteria appear to be straightforward - a yes/no agreement with the criteria developed by the study committee or (2) if your League wishes to concur with the criteria developed by another League.

To apply the approved criteria to a specific referendum proposal, local Leagues should:

- First, appoint a task force to apply the criteria to the referendum.
- Second, the task force reports to the board their recommendations and subsequent action plan.
- Third, the board approves the recommended action plan and communicates the results to the membership.

Referenda Involving Multiple Leagues

According to the LWVIL's Action Guidelines for Local Leagues, "action that would affect the jurisdiction of more than one League requires consultation with the boards of the other Leagues in the area involved. The procedure to be followed will depend on the complexity of the issue and the number of Leagues involved. If only two or three Leagues are affected, all should agree (or have no objection) to the plan of action. If more than three Leagues are involved, there should be consensus on the contemplated action."

The simplest way to comply with the guidelines would be for the local Leagues involved to take the following steps.

- First, form a task force with members from each local League within the boundaries of the governmental body.
- Second, the members of the task force develop together a set of criteria by which to judge a referendum.

- Third, the criteria are submitted to each affected local League board for their consensus.

Reference to adoption of the criteria by your Leagues' boards did not mean to imply bypassing member input: local Leagues should adopt the criteria with member input, as with any other position. Member agreement can be obtained by the concurrence method - either at a general meeting, such as the annual meeting, or by mail-in through your bulletins.

- Fourth, the criteria are applied to the referendum.

Although local Leagues should consider evaluating and applying the criteria as a group, individual Leagues are free to arrive at separate conclusions.

- Fifth, once the criteria have been applied, the task force develops a regional action plan based on the areas of common agreement among the affected Leagues.
- Finally, the task force submits the plan to each League for approval.

The proposed action is based on the group's consensus and should include outreach to all League members in the boundaries of the governmental body, as well as the general public and appropriate League partners.

When multiple Leagues are involved, there can only be one set of criteria. If the Leagues cannot agree to the criteria, no League can move forward with their own position or an action plan. It is possible that a League may choose not to participate. In this case, consensus may be reached by the participating Leagues and action is limited to the jurisdiction of the participating Leagues.

Additional Resources

The state office has a variety of local League school funding criteria on file; please call for copies.

The LWVUS Clearing House offers study and research documents completed by state and local Leagues around the country. The Clearing House was developed so that Leagues can save time by not reinventing study materials and by seeing how other Leagues have approached a tough issue. Leagues are also encouraged to submit their own documents for the site: clearinghouse@leagueofwomenvoters.org

In Conclusion

The strength and integrity of all League action is based on the decisions of informed members. When a position is reached, the League speaks with one voice, the voice of a substantial majority, and the minority abides by that decision. Leagues may, of course, decline to take action at any governmental level and maintain a public silence. But a League may not take action in opposition to official League positions. Members may act as individuals in support of or opposition to League positions, but they must make it clear that they are acting on their own behalf and not on behalf of the League unless authorized by the appropriate board to represent the League.

As with all studies, it is reasonable to expect task force members to come with opinions; those with strong views or biases should be encouraged to put aside preconceived perceptions and make the effort to see all sides of the issue. A balanced committee should be recruited.