

League of Women Voters

Best Practices November 2, 2001

Best Practices: Suggested Guidelines to Supplement the Requirements for Leagues
In a discussion of the requirements for Leagues in the spring of 1993, the LWVUS Membership Committee recognized that fulfilling the requirements alone does not assure a smooth-running and viable league. The committee also recognized that leagues employing certain practices that both enhance and supplement the requirements are usually the more successful leagues.

The following is a listing of "best practices" as demonstrated by leagues of different sizes and geographic location. This is by no means a comprehensive list, nor is it meant to be a "do this" list or a guilt trip; rather, it is meant to be a way of sharing techniques of running a league successfully, born of leagues' actual experiences.

Best practices can be used in a variety of ways. You may want to read the list over yourself, mentally checking where your league is already successfully practicing some of these techniques or where your league might want to consider trying a new method of operation. A league board could use the list as a basis for discussion as it gets organized for the year ahead. In fact, a local Best Practices list could be developed as a guide for present and future boards.

In this listing of Best Practices, items 1 through 7 are the official requirements for leagues as voted by the 1994 LWVUS Convention. Following each item is suggested implementation - the optimal level of operation.

1. The League must have bylaws, the first three articles of which must be consistent with those of the LWVUS. The remaining articles must provide for democratic procedures.

Best practices: The bylaws are reviewed annually by a committee to check actual practice for conformity and to consider possible amendments prior to the annual meeting.

2. The League must establish and maintain a nonpartisan policy.

Best practices: The league board reviews and discusses its nonpartisan policy yearly after the annual meeting or at its first organizational meeting. At a minimum, "visible" chairs are not involved in partisan activities. Each league considers its own community and its political environment when stating specific allowed and prohibited activities. The board's policy is printed in the local league bulletin each year.

3. The League must hold an annual business meeting of the membership.

Best practices: The league holds an annual business meeting of the membership to vote on budget, bylaw changes, and local program and to elect officers and directors. In order to encourage member attendance and participation, there is a "special" aspect to this meeting - a speaker, an award to a member or community leader, a time for attendees to socialize prior to the business.

4. The League must hold regular board meetings.

Best practices: The league holds regular monthly board meetings with written agenda and minutes distributed ahead of time. For better and more efficient meetings, a timed agenda is used, which provides opportunities for developing plans, acting on committee recommendations and evaluating progress and results.

5. The League must meet its financial obligations to the state and national levels of the League.

Best practices: The league has sound fiscal management; promptly pays per member obligations to state and national levels of league; budgets are set to provide adequately for the implementation of league program and activities.

The league has an annual treasurer's report and review of financial records.

The league's dues are set realistically to cover annual state and national per member payments, plus some income for the league itself. In addition, the league aggressively pursues outside income through a finance drive or fundraiser in order to achieve the mission of the league.

6. The League must have a plan for membership growth and retention that encourages a membership as diverse as the community.

Best practices: The league develops and implements a written plan, with attainable goals and specific strategies, to increase its membership. The league provides a variety of opportunities for members to participate in deciding and carrying out league activities and goals. Board members always carry membership information with them, ask others to join and "talk up" the league in general.

The league adopts a board policy that affirms a commitment to diversity. It develops and implements a written plan, with attainable goals and specific strategies, to enable the league to achieve diversity in members, leadership and program. The league plans outreach to a variety of groups in its community through networking, coalitions, joint projects, and other collaborative efforts. (The national board will periodically provide materials to assist local and state leagues.)

Nationally recruited members receive a letter of welcome and are included on the bulletin mailing list. Well in advance of notice from the LWVUS that their membership is due to expire, they are invited to join the local league.

Annual renewal notices are sent out several months in advance; personal phone calls and other methods of contact are used to follow up non responses several weeks before the due date.

7. Any advocacy pursued by the League must be consistent with League principles, positions and policies.

Best practices: The league first sets priorities for timely action on positions and then takes action.

The league responds to action alerts from other levels of league and encourages grassroots member involvement in action where appropriate.

The league has developed an understanding of the appropriate level of government at which action may be taken; when in doubt, the state or national office is consulted. When appropriate, the League coordinates action with other affected leagues.

The league informs its members and the community of action taken through a variety of means (e.g., electronic media, newspaper articles, fact sheets).

Items 8 through 20 describe characteristics of healthy Leagues, followed by suggested guidelines for optimum practices that League boards may decide to adopt.

8. The League develops plans and evaluates activities.

Best practices: The board holds an organization meeting after the annual meeting to plan the league calendar for the year ahead. Plans are developed that include an outline of specific activities for each month and the board member/committee responsible for each. The board's responsibility includes an evaluation of each activity. Plans and evaluations are included in written reports submitted to the board for future planning.

9. The League has a membership sufficient to maintain League viability.

Best practices: The League has a Membership Chair and Committee that develop a plan each year to attract new members and to encourage their participation. League leaders are assigned specific new members to make contact with them and encourage their involvement. The president makes a welcoming phone call to each new member.

New members are invited to a special program to orient them to the League's basic organizational structure, history, present activities and opportunities for member participation. See The League In Profile. (Pub. #1009) for meeting-ready materials.

A card file or computer data file of the membership is updated regularly with information on members' special interests, achievements and League involvement; this file is shared with the Nominating Committee as positions need to be filled.

10. The League holds regular membership meetings.

Best practices: Monthly meetings are held on issues of League concern or understudy. These meetings are both informative and participatory for members. The League provides opportunities for members to interact socially also.

11. The League has compiled a study of its community and uses and updates it periodically.

Best practices: The League reviews its "Know Your Community" material at least every ten years to help identify community needs and areas for possible study or action. Necessary revisions are made to update the information. The League uses this material as part of its new-member orientation each year.

The League undertakes formal publication of its community guide if publication provides community visibility or serves as a fund raising tool.

12. The League carries out citizen education/voters service activities.

Best practices: The League works to increase citizen participation in the election process on all levels by undertaking election-related voters service (i.e., registration drives, get-out-the-vote campaigns, election guides, candidates forums).

The League undertakes citizen education efforts on issues of importance to the community, not necessarily ones on which the League has positions. This can take the form of holding public forums, distributing fact sheets or publications, running a media campaign, or organizing discussion groups. Such activities are often done in cooperation with another organization.

13. The League establishes positions on public policy through member participation and agreement.

Best practices: The League selects at least one program item at each level of the League for study and/or action. The League has study and consensus meetings on at least one state and national item per year when appropriate. When possible, Leagues share responsibility for study committee activity and consensus meetings with neighboring Leagues in order to lessen the workload on individual Leagues. The League has a plan for periodic review of its local program positions and updates its membership on these positions through meetings or bulletin articles.

14. The League publishes a Bulletin or Voter.

Best practices: The League has a method of regular communication with members. It distributes its bulletin to appropriate community leaders and to prospective members.

The League bulletin includes schedules of meetings, information on league positions, action alerts, and any other items necessary for a member to be informed and to act effectively; it avoids reprinting information from every-member League publications (e.g., state and national Voters). The bulletin contains a welcome to new members with a brief write-up on each one.

15. The League adopts a budget.

Best practices: The League's Budget Committee recommends the adoption of a budget that reflects the League's priorities for the year and basic support for operating the League, including attendance at state and national conventions.

16. The League sends representatives to regional, state and national League meetings and to training opportunities.

Best practices: The League encourages all members, especially current and potential board members, to attend workshops, conferences, councils and conventions to increase skills and broaden knowledge to enhance the work of the League.

17. The league encourages flexibility of its administrative structure.

Best practices: The League modifies its board structure; if necessary, it reduces the size of the board and eliminates nonessential portfolios. The League makes an effort to reduce time demands on board members, emphasizing the policy-making role of the board. The League schedules meetings to accommodate both the board and members' work schedules.

18. The League submits reports to state and national as requested.

Best practices: The League president takes responsibility for completing report forms on time or requests the appropriate board member to do so, checking on the follow-through.

19. The League has an active Nominating Committee.

Best practices: The committee is active throughout the year, working to ensure the vitality of the League by identifying the leadership potential of new members. The committee has an up-to-date file on all members, noting present and past League positions of leadership, special community and personal interests. The committee encourages "assistant" chairs of committees in order to build a leadership bank.

20. The League has high visibility in the community.

Best practices: The Public Relations Chair is chosen for writing ability, energy and enthusiasm for the League. Persistence and creativity are shown in seeking coverage in all forms of print and electronic communications (e.g., cable, local access, college TV and radio stations and trade association publications). Photographs of League events accompany news articles and appear in the local papers whenever possible. Regular members, in addition to board members, are shown in these photographs. Letters to the Editor are frequently used to inform the public of local, state or national League issues.

All League news articles close with information on how to join the local League and whom to contact for further information on the subject of the article.

The League is listed in the local phone book.

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