

LWVAL Consensus Policy

In order to act on any issue the League has studied, it is essential that the League has a clear consensus among its members.

Consensus, as explained in the 1989 edition of In League, “is the technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The „consensus“ reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall „sense of the group“ as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions...” (p10-7).

Since statewide consensus is determined by State Board, State Board must decide what constitutes consensus. It is important that the State Board consider the following questions: Does a local League report complete member agreement? Fairly general agreement? Divergent points of view? All these factors must be considered by the entire

State Board for it is responsible for determining whether consensus exists on a state item.

Local Leagues must know in advance when consensus is due so that they can adjust their calendars accordingly. Any kind of consensus requires that members of local Leagues be provided with a timetable for the study, background materials, and a deadline for reaching consensus. This is part of the job of the state program chairperson, or person designated by the State Board to chair the consensus item.

Consensus questions should be drafted by representatives of the consensus resource committee, and key Board portfolio areas relevant to the consensus, such as key portfolio chairpersons for government affairs, action, budget, etc. who can pinpoint areas for consideration and action. All consensus questions must be approved by the State Board.

The questions should be clear to the membership, phrased for usable answers, a yardstick for judgment, and a framework for action. Questions must be objective and reasonably brief. The questions should be based on the resource material that was used in the study and they should cover areas that can lead to action. Do not aim consensus questions toward action on specific bills, instead make them general enough to apply over a period of time and changing circumstances.

Sometimes consensus on one or more questions is impossible to reach. This may happen because an insufficient number of members are concerned with the issue, or because, even with the best kind of study, discussion and participation, there is too much basic disagreement among members. In any case, a statement of alternative points of view should be included in the report. If no consensus is reached, report that no consensus was reached.

Reporting Consensus

A consensus report prepared by a local board for the State Board should include the following:

1. The response sheet provided with the consensus questions, completed to show how opinions were distributed (if such a sheet has been provided).
2. A brief statement of the consensus position, if one has been reached, and
3. A brief statement of alternative points of view expressed by members who did not agree with the consensus position.

OR

4. A brief statement explaining that no consensus could be reached.

In order for a local consensus report to be considered, it must be received by the deadline set by the State Board.

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