

Guidance on Opportunities: Encourage Local League Volunteers to Take Action October 2017

Why take action?

The League has a long history of effective citizen advocacy. League members have successfully influenced policy at the local, state, and national levels by sharing our positions on important issues that affect our democracy. Additionally, advocacy efforts are a great way to engage new members who are eager to become active and make a difference in their communities. New members are coming to the League because of our mission-focused work; they want ways to amplify their voice.

On which issues should you take action?

While there may be issues of local or state importance, the [Campaign to Make Democracy Work™](#), such as voting rights, voter protection and money in politics, are an important focus of our advocacy at the local, state, or national level.

How do you get started?

It's important to understand how an issue affects your community. In order to gain sufficient background, members should talk to community members with a background in the issue to hear about common concerns and learn about the challenges and successes that previous efforts have faced.

They should research the local, state, and national League's position on the issue and what talking points have been promoted by the League on the issue. Action alerts issued by LWVUS or the state League are vitally important resources.

Because there is strength in numbers, League members should reach out to others in order to increase their impact. Here are some ideas:

- Get published in a local newspaper via a letter to the editor or op-ed in order to reach more people in your community.
- Ask your friends or neighbors to join you in your efforts of reaching out to those in government who represent you.
- Join forces with a group that is already working on this issue.
- Hold a candidate forum or exchange views with a candidate in a more informal way.
- Attend or organize an educational forum.
- Attend lobby days and rallies.

What are the most effective ways to take action on those issues?

Here are some very practical and concrete strategies to employ when taking action:

- Know which level of government to contact
- Focus on one issue at a time when reaching out to your elected official
- Use official titles and address all letters formally and with a succinct subject line
- Include your contact information, including phone number, address, and email, so that your representative can confirm that they represent you



- If commenting on a bill, refer to it and describe it
- Be clear in your position and state your reasons for the stance
- Counter opposing arguments, if possible and if time permits
- Humanize the issue; use personal stories if possible
- Thank the legislator for his or her attention, and ask for a reply
- Be polite in order to cultivate a relationship with your officials
- Leave behind a one-pager with the League's position clearly stated; action alerts are important resources

How can you increase your impact?

Employing social media use around the issues that the League is focusing on and advocating for can have a big impact. For example, a local League could:

- Create a pre-written letter about a certain policy issue and post it on their Facebook page so that other community members could send the letter to their elected representatives.
- Share photos or stories of League members who have reached out and taken action on the relevant social media channels.
- Create a social media post outlining the policy priorities of the League and ways to get involved with advocacy.
- Post national and state action alerts on your pages
- Use social media channels in other creative ways to educate the public about what issue advocacy is already underway and encourage people to join those efforts.

Action is not limited to lobbying!

There are action kits on core League issues available online:

Redistricting: The League of Women Voters believes responsibility for redistricting preferably should be vested in an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups. This Action Kit provides tools for League members to take action in your community or state related to redistricting:

<http://forum.lwv.org/document/redistricting-action-kit>

Money In Politics: The League is deeply committed to reforming our nation's campaign finance system to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process. This Action Kit provides tools for League members to take action in your community or state related to reforming money in politics: <http://forum.lwv.org/document/money-politics-action-kit>

Some aspects of this guidance are adopted from the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts' ["The Citizen Lobbyist"](#) publication. We thank them for sharing this incredible resource!

Who speaks for the League?

The League "speaks" with one voice based on member-adopted public policy positions set at the local, state and national levels, as appropriate. We have one position on a given issue to which all subscribe and to which we do not take action to the contrary.

Action alerts are issued by LWVUS (and by state and local Leagues) when a rapid response is needed. The president or some other board member (designated by the board) should respond on behalf of the League. League members and activists, as a result of receiving the action alert (with talking points) are encouraged to take action.

Advocacy should be done in concert with the local, state or national level of the League as appropriate.

Impact on Issues is available online at <http://www.lwv.org> or in hard copy through Amazon.com. This publication not only contains our national public policy positions, but also includes our history on how they have been used, which may give insight on advocacy strategy.