



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF THE UNITED STATES

President
Elisabeth MacNamara
Atlanta, Georgia

December 2015

Vice President
Toni Larson
Denver, Colorado

Dear League Leader:

Secretary
Karen Nicholson
Midland Texas

In the coming months the boards of state and local Leagues and ILOs (Inter-League Organizations) across the nation will have the opportunity to offer input for the League's program for the 2016-2018 biennium. The program planning process is one of the important ways through which the League focuses its grassroots work to align each part of the organization with the others and with the League's mission. See [LWVUS Bylaws Article XII, Principles and Program](#), for requirements for the program planning and adoption process.

Treasurer
Patricia Donath

Directors

Peggy Appler
Charleston, South Carolina

Program planning will culminate with adoption of a program of education and action at LWVUS Convention 2016 in Washington, DC. The input of League boards will help shape the proposed program of study and action that will be submitted to convention delegates for debate and adoption.

Chris Carson
Burbank, California

Connie Ferguson
Kalamazoo, Michigan

The LWVUS Program Outreach Committee will coordinate program planning for this biennium. Board members on the committee are: Barbara Zia (Chair), Chris Carson, Pat Donath, Connie Ferguson, and Rosalee Keech. LWVUS Vice President Toni Larson and Senior Lobbyist Betsy Lawson are providing support. Should you have questions about program planning and the process, you may email Barbara at progplan@lww.org or Betsy at blawson@lww.org.

Rosalee Keech
Montville, New Jersey

Anita Loch
Whitewater, Wisconsin

Program planning is a valuable League tool for identifying issues for focus and for insuring that League resources, human and financial, from our grassroots volunteers to our professional staff, are engaged where they have the most impact. This process is appropriate for all three levels of League. State Leagues undertake program planning before state conventions where a program of education and advocacy for the state League is adopted for the following biennium. Local Leagues do program planning before their annual meetings where local program is adopted for the following year.

Anne B. Schink
South Portland, Maine

Linda P. Wassenich
Dallas, Texas

Barbara Zia
Mount Pleasant, South Carolina

The deadline for submitting LWVUS Program Planning response forms is March 1, 2016. All forms must be submitted electronically.

Executive Director
Wylecia Wiggs Harris

For the upcoming biennium the LWVUS Board suggests taking a close look at our current positions as found in [Impact on Issues](#) and, in some cases, in state and local program books. We have a large number of positions in many areas.

Over the years, we have studied and come to consensus on topics within Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources, and Social Policy. We need to more fully utilize the positions we have. We suggest Leagues apply our current positions while also basing action on League Principles.

When looking at our positions as a whole, it is clear that a main goal for which we are striving is to *make democracy work*. Voting rights, voter protection and service, and election reform are crucial elements in achieving the goal, and the League is particularly noted for action in these areas. Currently, as part of the three-part Key Structures of Democracy program adopted at the 2014 Convention, Leagues nationwide are: engaging in the [Money in Politics Review](#) and Update of LWV's campaign finance position, studying [the process of amending the U.S. Constitution](#); and [reviewing the redistricting process](#) for U.S. Congress, through the existing Redistricting Task Force, for the purpose of developing action steps.

We are ready to more fully engage in these issues to further our efforts in a campaign: *Making Democracy Work*. The LWVUS Board asks you to consider seizing the opportunity for Leagues nationwide to meet this critical challenge.

To free up resources and unite Leagues across the country, we must focus. We suggest that, during your program planning efforts, you strongly consider the need to act versus adding new studies or reviews to the agenda for the 2016-2018 biennium. Let's focus on taking action.

I invite you to review the *Planning LWVUS Program for 2016-2018* and the *Guide to Program Planning* that follow. These materials provide information about the program planning process, report on our activity in 2014-2016, and present our proposal for education and action in the next biennium.

Thank you for participating in this very important planning process.

In League,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisabeth MacNamara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elisabeth MacNamara
President

PLANNING LWVUS PROGRAM FOR 2016-2018

Our Accomplishments Since 2014

Key Structures of Democracy was the focus of the program adopted at the 2014 Convention for the 2014-2016 biennium. In addition to ongoing work to protect the vote and reform elections, this comprehensive program consists of

1. [A study of the process of amending the United States Constitution](#);
2. [A review and update of the League position on campaign finance](#) in light of forty years of change since the Watergate reforms; and
3. [A review of the redistricting process](#) for the United States Congress for the purpose of developing action steps.

As Convention 2016 looms ever larger on the horizon, how have we done on this program? And, while we may complete these tasks we set in 2014, what does this mean in terms of our overarching campaign to protect and expand voting rights in the 21st Century?

Through the *League Update* and other communication means, we strive to communicate to Leagues data showing League impact on priority issues. But we have not previously pulled all that together in one place for the purposes of assisting local, state and ILO boards as they plan their programmatic work for the upcoming year and provide program input to the LWVUS Board in advance of a national convention.

Key Structures of Democracy

What have we achieved since Convention 2014 approved a position update and a study and continued work by the Redistricting Task Force? These three committees have met regularly by phone and email. Study and update materials have been published online, consensus questions developed and posted, and guides for discussion leaders created and posted. Responses from League consensus meetings are expected by early 2016.

The LWVUS Redistricting Task Force has researched the League's history regarding redistricting and has compiled the 40 existing state League redistricting positions. Based on these positions, the LWVUS Board is recommending a concurrence with a broad, general statement at Convention 2016. The goal is to enable states without positions to take action and states with positions to continue to work for the reforms that their study process demonstrated works best for their voters.

Voter Protection and Service

Since Convention 2014, in the area of voter protection and across the organization, we have

1. Delayed or defeated over 40 state laws aimed at suppressing the vote;
2. Supported at least 20 state laws intended to reform our elections;
3. Participated in 10 lawsuits involving voting rights;
4. Sent 60,457 messages to Congress regarding the Voting Rights Act Amendment;
5. Sent 27,705 messages to the FEC/IRS regarding regulations restricting money in politics;
6. Compiled a list of 40 state positions on redistricting to inform a possible national position.

While direct advocacy is critical to these core democracy issues, the work the League does every year in the area of voter service constitutes the front line of voter protection especially since the Supreme Court of the United States decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*. Nationwide, since 2014 the League has

1. Registered well over 75,000 new voters in hundreds of communities;
2. Successfully focused registration activities at high-yield venues such as naturalization ceremonies and high schools;
3. Participated every year in National Voter Registration Day increasing the number of League partners to 260 in 2015 and registering more than 18,000 voters in 2014 and 2015 combined;
4. Held over 650 candidate forums;
5. Distributed over 500 different voters' guides through VOTE411.org and other methods, providing nearly 2 million people with comprehensive election information, including candidate statements via VOTE411.

Looking Ahead to 2016 and Beyond

Overview of a Possible Program Focus: Making Democracy Work

As Convention 2016 and Election 2016 and their outcomes draw near, it is abundantly clear that our work is far from finished in *making democracy work* for every voter and every voice in our communities. From our interactions with League leaders and members, from the results of a recent member survey, and based on the political outlook for the next two years, we believe that every League will likely continue to focus resources on the core democracy issues that are part of the 2014-2016 program. The LWVUS Board believes that our 2016-2018 program should recognize this reality and do the same. The opportunities that we see over the next biennium are as follows:

- ***Voting Rights and Voter Protection***

In Congress, we must continue to push for restoration of the Voting Rights Act by supporting the bipartisan Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA). We must continue to support positive reforms such as online voter registration for all, portable voter registration within

each state, and reforms to provisional voting, areas for which there are already pending bills. We must continue pushing this administration and the next to comply with the National Voter Registration Act by allowing voters to register through the federally-facilitated health care exchanges.

- ***Money in Politics***

Congress can take action to reform money in politics. Including the Stop Super PAC-Candidate Coordination Act in the House, there is legislation on each of the three pillars of our work on campaign finance: disclosure, stopping Super PACs, and public financing of congressional and presidential elections. There is also an anti-bundling bill. In addition, Congress can and must ensure meaningful enforcement of existing and future laws. The Federal Election Commission can't fix itself, but Congress surely can. These reforms can be made despite recent decisions of the Supreme Court.

- ***Supporting Voting Rights and Voter Protection in the States***

In the states the fight continues in statehouses and courthouses to prevent legislation that suppresses the vote. Support also continues for reforms like on-line voter registration and expansion of early voting. These efforts are most successful when state Leagues can rely on LWVUS for resources in the form of shared expertise and coordination of strategies and messaging. State Leagues play a critical role, too, in developing partnerships and coalitions to protect the vote, not only in state legislatures but also in local communities. Collaborating with LWVUS, state Leagues take the leading role in advocacy for voter protection but also in coordinating statewide campaigns around voting issues.

- ***Supporting Voting Rights and Voter Protection in Local Communities***

In recent years local League voter service has joined the front lines of voter protection. The 2016 election will be the first presidential election in 50 years in which voters cannot rely on the protections of the Voting Rights Act to ensure free and fair access to the polls. Never has a local presence--real people in real communities--been a greater asset for the League. Registering voters in underserved communities, high schools, community colleges, and at naturalization ceremonies has become the primary focus of our voter service work. Long-standing relationships with elections officials have already produced good results in preventing careless or not so careless decisions regarding precinct locations and distribution of polling place resources in the wake of the Shelby decision. More is required. It is critical that, in this upcoming election, we promote and support a local presence in our most vulnerable communities by working together with community partners and using our 95 years of election experience to protect voters in the next election.

- ***Voting Rights and Voter Protection Following Election 2016***

The past five years have shown that elections have important consequences for both candidates and voters. Long lines at the polls in 2012 prompted the president to appoint the Presidential Commission on Election Administration to examine best election practices from

the perspective of voter experience. The resulting recommendations provide an excellent road map for election reform at state and local levels. The League and our partners will be on the ground next November, but our election observations are meaningless unless we take them back to the appropriate decision makers.

Election 2016 will be the most expensive in our history. The issue of money in politics does not end the day after an election, nor is it confined to federal elections or the federal government. Leagues are working hard to update our campaign finance reform position, and it is incumbent on all of us to work at every level of government to ensure that power is in the hands of the many and not the few.

Redistricting reform continues to be a goal for the League. Armed with a position every state League can use, we look forward to more robust efforts to accomplish this goal. LWVUS will provide both venues for coordination and expert assistance. Progress has been made already, but League-wide support can strengthen the effort.

In addition, given the current political climate, there will likely be continued calls to amend the U.S. Constitution through a convention. The lessons learned through our study of the amendment process will inform LWV's education and advocacy in this area.

Impact on League Resources

League program—local, state and national--derives from our overall mission and reflects League leaders' and members' best assessment of how to allocate resources to advance the mission in a particular period of time. Volunteer time as well as staff and financial resources are limited. Using those resources to have the greatest impact is a key decision at every League annual meeting and convention. National League bylaws define program as "Action to implement the Principles and those governmental issues chosen by the convention for concerted study or concurrence and action..." The League Principles are concepts of government supported by the League and "are the authorization for adoption of national, state and local program." Action to implement those principles guides every League activity. All our work is program and, in planning for the next year or two, all our work is relevant to the decisions that delegates to a convention must make.

Proposing LWVUS Program for 2016-2018

Input from grassroots leaders is key to developing LWVUS program in every biennium. Given the challenges facing our democracy at every level of government and in every corner of the country, the LWVUS Board believes that, in order for our leaders in local and state Leagues and ILO's to give thoughtful input, it is important to provide our recommendations and the data on which those recommendations are based at the outset of the program planning process. In doing so, the LWVUS Board is in no way suggesting that these recommendations are set in stone or that input from Leagues will not be a key component in shaping the final recommendations. We are also keenly aware of the many other important issues facing state and local Leagues and that

Leagues are actively engaged in *making democracy work* at every level of government. It is vital that we focus our national programmatic work such that it complements and does not compete with work at other levels.

Support for a League-wide focus comes from a recent member survey. In November 2015 the LWFUS conducted an online survey of individual League members in order to understand how members are involved in the organization and their interest in specific public policy issues. Responses came from individuals representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands and Hong Kong. The survey findings told us members engage with the League primarily at the local level. Respondents identified money in politics, voting rights, redistricting and climate change as the main areas for League focus. These are the issues where Leagues at every level are knowledgeable and play a leadership role in their communities.

A program recommendation to Convention 2016 is not to be confused with the legislative priorities adopted by the LWFUS Board every year. While the board is asking League leaders to support a program recommendation that focuses on core democracy action and education, LWFUS legislative priorities will continue to cover a range of important issues beyond just those in the program focus. Legislative priorities for the past several years have included, in addition to election protection, climate change and health care.

GUIDE TO LWVUS PROGRAM PLANNING 2016-18

Timeline for 2016-2018 LWVUS Program Planning

- **December 2015** – Program Planning materials will be available online.
- **January 2016** – Program planning webinar
- **March 1, 2016** – Deadline for submission of online response forms.
- **April 2016** – LWVUS Board will develop a Proposed Program for 2016-2018 that reflects input from Leagues.
- **June 2016** – Convention delegates will adopt 2016-2018 LWVUS program after debate and discussion, including any not-recommended items granted consideration by convention and adopted by a majority vote of the delegates.

What Do We Mean by League Program?

League program means the strategies we adopt to achieve desired outcomes that are contained in League Principles (<http://lww.org/content/principles>) and positions on public policy issues (<http://lww.org/content/impact-issues>).

Art. XII, Sec. 1 and 2 of the [LWVUS Bylaws](#) defines program as follows:

Sec 1. Principles: The Principles are concepts of government supported by the League and are the authorization for adoption of national, state and local program....

Sec. 2 Program. The program shall consist of action to implement the Principles and those governmental issues chosen by the convention for concerted study or concurrence and action...

The positions that, along with the Principles, form the basis of all League action derive from member study and agreement. Through study members have the opportunity to become informed before making decisions about the governmental issue under consideration. Agreement can be reached either by consensus, that is by determining the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas or by concurrence, a vote on a position statement. Concurrence can be used at convention. For instance, at the 2014 LWVUS Convention, delegates concurred with a position of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey on human trafficking.

How to Participate in LWVUS Program Planning for 2016-2018

With this Program Planning Guide, the LWVUS Board is asking local, state, and ILO Boards to submit their input for our national program of League education and advocacy for the 2016-2018 biennium.

Over the past decade or so, despite efforts to increase engagement in LWVUS program planning, participation has held steady at approximately 250 Leagues (out of a total 750-plus local and state Leagues); of these 250 Leagues, most participate regularly. We understand the reasons why

Leagues may opt out of program planning. Besides limits on time and other resources faced by Leagues, a new wave of leaders is filling our ranks, some of whom lack experience with League basics, such as program and its power to increase League impact, advance our mission, and make positive community, state, and national change. In addition, Leagues today are working in new communication and engagement environments in which some members prefer to engage online. State and local Leagues face similar challenges in engaging members in planning their programs.

There is no restriction in the methods used by the LWVUS Board to elicit program recommendations from state and local Leagues and ILOs. In the past, many Leagues have engaged their members in face-to-face program planning meetings. **While it is fine to continue that practice, program planning meetings are optional.** Leagues may also choose to incorporate program planning in a regularly scheduled board meeting, with board members providing input.

In providing input, we ask that your central focus be on where the League should put its energies and resources in the coming biennium. Consider

- In what way can the League best empower citizens to shape a better nation and communities during the next two years?
- What do our communities and nation need from the League right now?
- Where can the League's strengths have the greatest impact?
- What program work would best help enhance the League's influence, credibility, visibility, and membership?
- Should the focus be that proposed by LWVUS: a nationwide League campaign: *Making Democracy Work*, taking the power from the few and returning it to the many, as the single focus for LWVUS education and advocacy work in the 2016-2018 biennium? If the answer is "yes," what specific activities should be included in the campaign? What kinds of training and assistance would enhance your League's participation in the campaign?
- If your League would rather recommend another issue for education or advocacy as an alternative to the proposed focus, provide the details of your proposal, including a statement of the problem that needs to be addressed, an analysis of the unique role the LWV can play in helping resolve the issue, and a description of some of the specific activities the League could undertake on the issue.

Resource Considerations

In recommending a program item for 2016-2018, please be mindful of the resource commitments required for your own League, as well as for LWVUS. A recommendation is a request to make that item a high priority for the biennium at all the levels of League. If a recommendation is adopted, Leagues with limited resources—financial and volunteer—may find it necessary to drop other activities in order to participate.

Suggested Sources of Help

- Current LWVUS positions in [*Impact on Issues, 2014-2016*](#) available for free viewing and download at and the [Clearinghouse](#) that lists many state and local League studies and positions:
- Webinar on LWVUS Program Planning, 7 pm EST, January 7, 2016. Register at https://events-na4.adobeconnect.com/content/connect/c1/831402129/en/events/event/shared/default_template_simple/event_landing.html?sco-id=1278215367
- If your League wants to promote a proposal to other Leagues for their consideration, you can obtain email addresses for state and local Leagues by contacting database@lwv.org. This contact information may be used to communicate by email on program planning as well as on other convention related matters. Every League is entitled to receive one free copy in each biennium.
- If you have questions about the response form or program planning process, please email progplan@lwv.org

The deadline for submitting response forms electronically is March 1, 2016. No response forms will be accepted by other means. The Survey Gizmo response form will be posted on the [League Management site](#) in late December 2015. The questions are listed below.

Response Form

- 1. Do you support the proposed program focus, *Making Democracy Work*, for the 2016-2018 biennium? (Yes/No)**
- 2. Would you like to recommend another program item, in addition to or instead of *Making Democracy Work*? (Yes/No)**
Please provide a statement (300 words or less) describing the scope of your proposal, including a description of the issue area, its importance in advancing the League's mission and resources that would be required.
- 3. What LWVUS positions does your League use to take action at the state and local level?**
- 4. Comment Section—***Optional comments (300 words or less) may be added here.*