

Policy Guidance Memorandum

TO: State and Local League Officers/Board Members

FROM: LWVUS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee (2020-22)

DATE: August 16, 2022

SUBJECT: Understanding LWVUS' Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Policy

PURPOSE

LWVUS understands that honoring our organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in “principle and practice” is not simple or easy, but it is essential. LWVUS is committed to supporting Leagues as they implement the DEI Policy and sharing resources to help League leaders succeed. The 2020-22 DEI Committee, which was comprised of national board members as well as state and local leaders, has prepared this memorandum to share guidance more broadly on some of the most common questions and requests for help that we received in our time on the committee.

The committee recommends that this memorandum be reviewed by officers of state and local Leagues (who are charged with governing their organizations) as soon as possible, and subsequently be included as part of the onboarding process for new board members. This practice is designed to provide clarity to state and local League leaders—many of whom have reached out to the DEI Committee with questions—and ensure a consistent understanding of LWVUS's DEI Policy (<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/diversity-equity-inclusion/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-policy>) throughout all Leagues.

LWV'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN OUR BYLAWS

At the 2020 Convention, delegates voted to amend the [LWVUS bylaws](#) to include the League's commitment to its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Policy in Article II as one of the foundational policies of the organization alongside the Political Policy (also referred to as the Nonpartisan Policy).

The addition of the DEI Policy to Article II, Section 2, elevated the DEI Policy to the same organizational importance as the Nonpartisan Policy, which has defined the League and contributed to its success for over 100 years. These two analogous policies together now define how the League carries out its purposes (Art. II, Sec. 1)—in a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and nonpartisan way.

All Leagues are required to have a DEI policy that does not conflict with LWVUS' DEI Policy. Unlike with state and local League nonpartisan policies, Leagues do not need to create their own DEI policy and are free to use LWVUS' DEI Policy as their own. However, League board members should review and affirm their League's DEI policy annually, as they do with their League's nonpartisan policy.

As an addition to one of the first three articles of the LWVUS bylaws, per League policy, all state and local Leagues were required after the 2020 Convention to incorporate this declaration of commitment to the DEI Policy into their bylaws as well. This update to state and local League bylaws did not require

any vote by the state and local Leagues and did not require the amendment process prescribed in state and local League bylaws. By going through the amendment process at the national level for one of the first three articles of the LWVUS bylaws, state and local Leagues simply needed to update their bylaws to remain consistent with the first three articles of the LWVUS bylaws. (A [sample bylaws template](#) is available on the League Management site. For questions about updating bylaws, you can reach out to governance@lww.org.)

DEFINING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Now that LWV has “fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice,” it is crucial that all Leagues understand what the policy means by “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion.” The following descriptions can also be found on the League Management site: <https://www.lww.org/league-management/diversity-equity-inclusion/defining-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are mutually reinforcing.

Diversity

Diversity includes all of the similarities and differences among people, not limited to: gender/gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, socioeconomic status, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital/partnership status, parental status, appearance, language, accent, ability status, mental health, education, geography, nationality, professional experience, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, and political perspective or affiliation.

Diversity refers to population groups that have been historically underserved in socially, politically, or economically powerful institutions and organizations. These groups include but are not restricted to populations of color, such as Black Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. These groups may also include people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty, LGBTQIA+ people (which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus other queer identities), and women.

Diversity is about a collective or a group and can only exist in relationship to others. A team can be diverse and so can an organization. **A person is not diverse.** They may bring diversity to a team, but they in themselves are not diverse.

Equity

Equity refers to systems, processes, and approaches based in fairness that ensure everyone is given equal opportunity and treated with dignity and respect. **This means that resources may be divided and shared differently to make sure that each person has a fair chance to succeed.** Therefore, equity does not mean “sameness.” Equity takes into account that people have different access to resources because of systems of oppression and privilege. Equity seeks to balance that disparity.

Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources, including opportunities. Equity also means there is transparency regarding what actions or conditions lead to what outcomes and everyone

knows what to expect in terms of consequences and rewards. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Equity prioritizes efforts to ensure the most underserved and marginalized among us have as much of an opportunity to succeed as the most well-served and advantaged. By taking into account the various advantages and disadvantages that people face, we work to ensure every person has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the act of ensuring representation of people and perspectives into a group or structure. Inclusion is an ongoing process, not a static state of being. It is a dynamic state of operating that leverages diversity to create a healthy, high-performing organization and community.

Inclusion refers to the degree to which a diverse set of individuals are able to participate fully in collaboration, strategizing, and decision-making within an organization or group.

An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. **It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational and societal goals.**

While an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive. Being aware of unconscious or implicit bias can help organizations better address issues of inclusivity. (The Anti-Defamation League defines implicit bias as, “the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) toward members of a group merely because of their membership in that group.”)

THE DEI POLICY IN PRACTICE

The work of creating a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive League is much more difficult than simply committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Fostering a League that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive requires organizational—and often personal—self-reflection. Leagues should actively work toward diversity, equity, and inclusion in membership, culture, mission, and action, and remember that the policy prohibits both intentional and unintentional discrimination. A successful League is representative of its community.

Given the cultural context of our place and time, it is unlikely that any of us has been untouched by the societal conditioning that upholds a complicated web of advantages and disadvantages according to different identities and characteristics. While the work of becoming aware of and responsible for our specific conditioning looks different for each individual, everyone is responsible for understanding their role in achieving a diverse, equitable, and inclusive League. When education is necessary to understand that role, this education must be concurrent with action, not in place of it.

DEI work is strongest when it is collaborative. Fortunately, the “League way” is already collaborative. Leagues are encouraged to continue this collaborative approach in their DEI work and to explore new avenues for collaboration.

The League Management site has an abundance of training and resources for understanding the concepts and work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While many of these resources are offered to Leagues for them to use at their discretion, there is also guidance that LWVUS expects all Leagues to follow as they carry out their work:

- **DEI Self-Assessment** - https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/DEI_Assessment.pdf
- **DEI Event Checklist** - https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/deichecklist_module2.pdf
- **DEI Lens** - <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/dei-resources/dei-lens>
- **What is DEI?** - <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/diversity-equity-inclusion/defining-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>
- **DEI Policy FAQs** - <https://www.lwv.org/league-management/diversity-equity-inclusion/dei-policy-webinar>

SUPPORTING DEI WORK

There is no shortcut on the path to diversity, equity, and inclusion in a nation with a history of structural oppression. To support Leagues in this work, LWVUS—which is on its own DEI journey—has offered many resources that are available on the League Management site (<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/league-growth/diversity-equity-inclusion>). Additionally, when situations arise that Leagues or individuals feel unequipped to address, they can reach out to LWVUS for guidance or support by emailing governance@lwv.org. (Local Leagues should first connect with their state Leagues.)

CONCLUSION

While the transformation of the League into a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization is an ongoing process, and much good work has been accomplished already, LWVUS expects all Leagues to make a good-faith effort to comply fully with the DEI Policy. This is only the start of our journey. The organization will deepen our commitment to *racial equity and inclusion* in the next biennium.